

<b>15 January 2015</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education</b>		
<b>Inquiry Into Provision For RE In Thurrock Secondary Academies</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education		
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Ruth Brock, School Improvement Manager		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

Academies are contractually required to make provision for RE for all pupils on roll in accordance with their funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education. During 2014, SACRE has considered evidence that might suggest that some of the Academies in Thurrock may not be fulfilling these requirements and concluded that the adviser for RE should collate this information and the Chair write to the academies concerned to seek an explanation. This report presents the evidence sent to the schools pending their responses and options for SACRE in terms of further action including support that might be offered to those academies that are not making appropriate provision for RE.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

#### **That SACRE:**

- 1.1 Consider any response from the six academies listed in 2.3 below and respond as appropriate**
- 1.2 Take further action in relation to any academy that has not responded to the letter from the Chair of SACRE selecting from one of the options set out in 3.2 below**

### **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 A Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) has a statutory remit to advise the Local Authority on Religious Education to be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus and to support the effective provision**

of collective worship. A SACRE also has within its powers to discuss any matter related to its functions as it sees fit and may therefore include the provision of RE in Academies in its discussions or address such matters as may be referred to it.

2.2 Thurrock SACRE resolved to write to academies where information in the public domain gave members cause to question that the terms of the funding agreement were being met in relation to all or some of the students on the school roll.

2.3 In December 2014, the Chair wrote to the following six secondary academies (for letter template please see appendix 1):

- a. Gable Hall School
- b. Harris Academy Chafford Hundred
- c. William Edwards School
- d. Hassenbrook Academy
- e. Ormiston Park Academy
- f. The Gateway Academy

2.4 The specific concerns about each school were as follows:

In relation to Gable Hall we noted that:

1. The school workforce data (Nov 2012) includes no hours of teaching of RE in year 11;
2. only 4% of students on roll were entered for GCSE RE in 2013;
3. the data on your school website makes no mention of provision for RE in year 11 and might possibly imply that only some of year 10 are being taught RE.

In relation to Harris Academy we noted that:

1. workforce data for November 2012 indicates zero hours for RE in years 7, 8 and 10
2. only 30% of students on roll were entered for GCSE RE in 2013;
3. the data on your school website indicates that RE is an option in years 10 and 11 and does not include it as one of the core subjects, this might possibly imply that the subject is not taught to all students in years 10 and 11

In relation to William Edwards we noted that:

1. workforce data for November 2012 indicates zero hours for RE in years 7 and
2. only 19% of students on roll were entered for GCSE RE in 2013;
3. the data on your school website does not include RSE in year 7 and indicates it as being part of only one of three Pathways in year 10 and

might possibly imply that the subject is not taught in year 7 and that only some of year 10 are being taught RE.

In relation to Hassenbrook we noted that:

1. The school workforce data (Nov 2012) includes no hours of teaching of RE in years 8 and 9;
2. only 9% of students on roll were entered for GCSE RE in 2013;
3. the data on your school website makes no mention of provision for RE in years 9 through to 11 and might possibly imply that only some of years 9 through to 11 are being taught RE.

In relation to Ormiston Park we noted that:

1. only 13% of students on roll were entered for GCSE RE in 2013;
2. the data on your school website indicates that RE is one of the option choices in years 9 through to 11 and might possibly imply that only some of years 9 through to 11 are being taught RE.

In relation to the Gateway Academy we noted that:

1. We have no record of any students entered for GCSE RE in 2013;
2. the data on your school website indicates that in years 10 and 11 “students will be guided into one of four courses”, only one of these includes RE and this might imply that not all students are taught RE during these years.

At the time of writing, no response has been received from any of the academies list but a verbal update will be presented at the meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 3.1 Thurrock is not atypical in having identified a problem in relation to academies and free schools not always meeting their responsibilities in relation to RE. At the Religious Education Council’s General meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2014, the minister for schools; Nick Gibb MP, was asked several questions from the floor about this issue and responded as follows:

“In terms of RS and RE, they are required to teach RE right through to the end of their school time. With regards to the RS issue, if they are not teaching any RE in years 10 and 11 they are breaking the law, they are breaking the terms of their funding agreement.”

“In terms of who enforces, who ensures that academies and free schools are fulfilling their obligation to provide Religious Education, that is the role of the education funding agency to enforce the conditions of the contract, so if there

is evidence that you have that a particular academy isn't fulfilling any condition in their funding agreement and those funding agreements are public documents, then you should be in touch with the Education Funding Agency at the department and they will take action."

3.2 The following options are available to SACRE:

1. To write again to the principal or headteacher of the school in the form of a complaint
2. To write to the governing body of the Academy via the Chair
3. In the case of academies that are part of a multi-academy trust, such as Ormiston or Harris, to write to the Chief Executive Officer of the trust.
4. To write directly to the Education Funding Agency at the Department for Education as suggested by the minister for schools above

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 Failure to meet the terms of an academy funding agreement in relation to RE for all or some of the pupils in an academy would mean that pupils leaving school in Thurrock are at increased risk of being religiously illiterate and this is unacceptable in modern Britain.

#### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

5.1 Not applicable

#### **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

6.1 Thurrock Council has set out its five community priorities here:

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/vision/our-priorities>

Priority 3 is "build pride, responsibility and respect to create safer communities" Failure to assure provision for Religious Education in Thurrock schools places this priority at risk since students who leave school with little knowledge and understanding about the diversity of religion and belief in their local community, the UK and in the world will be less well equipped to take their place in society. SACRE should therefore advise the council of its concerns and actions.

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**  
**Finance Consultant**

There are no financial implications contained within the report.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**  
**Education Lawyer**

SACRE is being asked to note responses and then to make decide on action from a choice of several options. All of these are within its powers. Academies are bound by their funding agreement to provide RE, as mentioned in the report. It is the Funding Agency that must take action if an academy is in breach of this term.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

This report sets out a series of options for SACRE in response to the apparent failure of number of local secondary schools to make provision for Religious Education for all or some of its students. The implications of this report are that there is a risk that according to the standards applied by the Department of Education, that some children and young people leaving school in Thurrock may not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of religion and belief to be fully equipped to take their place in a diverse society.

## 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not applicable

## 8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Not applicable

## 9. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1: Letter template to schools

### Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for Religious Education

## Appendix 1

Dear Headteacher,

A Standing Advisory Council on RE is a permanent statutory body which must be established by each local authority. Local authorities must appoint representatives to each of four committees, representing respectively:

- Group A: Christian denominations and such other religions and religious denominations as, in the authority's opinion, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area
- Group B: the Church of England
- Group C: teacher associations
- Group D: the local authority

The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education has a statutory remit to advise the Local Authority on RE to be given in accordance with the agreed syllabus. A SACRE also has within its powers to discuss any matter related to its functions as it sees fit and can therefore include the provision of RE in Academies in its discussions or address such matters as may be referred to it.

At a recent meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for RE members reviewed a number of pieces of evidence about the level of provision for Religious Education in schools and academies in Thurrock. In relation to Gable Hall we noted that:

1. The school workforce data includes no hours of teaching of RE in year 11;
2. only #% of students on roll were entered for GCSE RS in 2013;
3. the data on your school website makes no mention of provision for RE in year 11 and might possibly imply that only some of year 10 are being taught RE.

We appreciate that it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about the curriculum of a school from these sources of data alone, however this information leads us to question whether or not the terms of your funding agreement are being met in relation to RE. We understand that under these terms you are under contract to the Department for Education to make provision for RE for **all** of your pupils in each school year.

We are of course keen to support you in developing your provision for RE so we would be grateful if you could reply to this letter to inform SACRE whether or not it is your understanding that you are currently meeting the terms of your funding

agreement in relation to RE and if you have plans to make changes to your curriculum in this respect.

SACRE meets again in early 2015, so I would appreciate a response to this letter before this date. I am attaching a document produced by the Department for Education about the requirements for Religious Education in Free Schools and Academies.

I look forward to hearing from you

**Rev. John Guest**  
**Chair, Thurrock SACRE**