

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE THURROCK STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) FOR 2023 – 2024



Thurrock Spirited Arts Prize Winner by Jessie in lower key stage 2 at Woodside Academy

Theme: Where is God today?

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Introduction

Since 1988, it has been a requirement that every local authority (LA) has a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

Though legislation sets out both the structure and the remit of a local SACRE - principally, overseeing religious education (RE) and collective worship - in practice every SACRE has developed its own particular style and character.

It is a legislative requirement that each SACRE produces an annual report of its work and that this is published, sent to the local authority, to local schools and to other interested parties. One important element of the report is performance data and an analysis of the extent to which schools are meeting their legal duties in relation to RE. Validated GCSE data was not available until this month, hence the delay in the publication of the report. More recently, other datasets have been made available by the DfE, most significantly the school workforce data that supports the monitoring of the level of provision in secondary schools.

Foreword by the Chair of SACRE – Mr Phil Anderson

In 2024, the rapid emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming every aspect of society, including how we interact with technology and make decisions. As AI becomes more integrated into our daily lives, it raises profound ethical questions that students must grapple with—questions that religious education (RE) is uniquely equipped to address. RE encourages students to explore foundational ideas about morality, ethics, and the human condition, offering a crucial framework for understanding the challenges AI presents. Through RE, students are encouraged to think critically about whether AI can understand concepts like good and evil. They also explore how technology can be used ethically, ensuring that it benefits humanity while respecting dignity and justice. Additionally, RE helps students reflect on what it truly means to be human, fostering empathy, compassion, and responsibility—qualities that remain vital in a world where AI is increasingly making decisions on behalf of individuals and societies.

As AI reshapes our world, RE provides students with a moral compass to navigate its complexities. By considering religious and philosophical perspectives, students are better prepared to approach technology thoughtfully and ethically. Yet, despite its clear relevance, RE teaching in UK schools faces significant challenges. These include a lack of curriculum time and a shortage of qualified specialist teachers, which limit the subject's ability to fully address the pressing questions AI poses.

Now, more than ever, it is essential that we respond to these challenges. We must ensure that religious education remains a central part of the curriculum, empowering students to think critically about the ethical implications of AI. Only through strengthening RE can we equip the next generation to navigate the moral complexities of the future with wisdom, empathy, and integrity.

This foreword was written by ChatGPT. I prompted it and evaluated its response using insights and values drawn from my own faith and what I have learned from my friends and colleagues on SACRE. Other approaches are moral starting points are also available...

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chair of Thurrock SACRE

Membership of Thurrock SACRE 2023-24				
Committee	Representing	Nominating Body	No. of Reps	Names of Reps.
A	Christian Denominations & other RE Denominations		9	
A	Free Church Christian	Free Church Federal Council	2	Rev D Coaker
A		Free Church Federal Council		Vacancy Autumn 22
A	Roman Catholic	Diocese of Brentwood	1	Mrs R Saul
A	Muslim	Thurrock Islamic Education & Cultural Association	2	Mr Rofeul Kader
A		Thurrock Islamic Education & Cultural Association		Vacancy Autumn 22
A	Sikh	Local Sikh Guru Gudwara Committee.	1	Ms H Kaur Takhtar
A	Pentecostal		1	Mr T Ojetola
A	Buddhist	Buddhist Society	1	Mr A Kariyawasam
A	Jewish	Board of Deputies of British Jews	1	Mr L Trup

A	Hindu	Vacancy	1	Ms Anita Sharma
Committee	Representing	Nominating Body	No. of Reps	Names of Reps.
B	Church of England		4	
B	Church of England	Diocese of Chelmsford		Mr P Anderson
B	Church of England	Diocese of Chelmsford		Mrs L Fry (now resigned)
B	Church of England	Diocese of Chelmsford		Ms L Olajide
B	Church of England	Diocese of Chelmsford		Ruth Everett
C	Teachers' Associations (pref. Primary, Secondary & Special Schools)		6	
C	Teachers' Associations Secondary	Professional Associations Group		Ms J Culloty
C	Teachers' Associations, Secondary	Professional Associations Group		Ms A Thompson

C	Teachers' Associations, Secondary	Professional Associations Group		Mrs C Pumfrey
C	Teachers' Associations Primary	Professional Associations Group		Ms R Shina (joined Spring 2023)
C	Teachers' Associations	Professional Associations Group		Amina Shodope
C	Teachers' Associations	Professional Associations Group		Ms S Barlow
D	Local Authority		3	
D	Local Authority	Thurrock Council		Councillor Qaisar Abbas
D	Local Authority	Thurrock Council		Councillor Daniel Chukwu
D	Local Authority	Thurrock Council		Councillor James Thandi

SACRE Meetings Held

The following SACRE meetings were held during the reporting period:

1st November 2023

17th January 2024

Summer 2024 – meeting cancelled due to general election.

All meetings were held remotely on Microsoft Teams.

Membership and attendance

Attendance has been rather erratic this year even though meetings were mainly held online. We have been able to recruit some new members to fill important vacancies including new councillors, Free Church and Hindu representatives and new teachers from local schools. SACRE reviewed the process through which it advises the council on the appropriate membership of SACRE and agreed the following:

	Criterion	Indicators
1	Suitability of the religion or belief to be represented on SACRE.	• Cogency: the belief systems is compelling and persuasive in nature. • Seriousness: the belief system is earnest and sincere in character and possesses gravitas. • Cohesion: the belief system and its adherents are integrated and unified (organisationally and/or conceptually). • Importance: the belief system is of significance and standing in society. • The belief system is widely represented on other SACREs or is otherwise recognised by similar statutory bodies.
2	Reflects the principal religious traditions of Thurrock and their proportionate strength.	• 0.3% of Thurrock residents (~500) self-identify as adherents of the religion or belief system in census data and/or other demographic data. • Membership or attendance records show the presence of a local community of faith or belief of proportionate size to the other principal religious and non-religious traditions in Thurrock. • There is an active and locally engaged presence of recognised leaders, teachers, clergy, celebrants, or similar individuals present in Thurrock.

3	Availability of a suitable representative.	• The proposed individual is able to represent the religion or belief by virtue of their knowledge and experience. • The proposed individual holds a position of responsibility within the religion or belief. • A representative organisation exists which is capable of providing a nomination and vouching for the suitability of the individual. • The proposed individual understands and accepts the aims and objectives of Thurrock SACRE.
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The criteria should be considered in the order shown. So, for example, if it is determined that the religion or belief is not suitable to be represented on a SACRE (criterion 1) it is not necessary to consider the other criteria.

The indicators should be used to aid an assessment of whether the criterion is met, but none of them are to be regarded as proscriptive in and of themselves. The fact that a particular indicator is not met does not automatically mean that an appointment should not be made. Each case should be considered on overall merit when determining whether SACRE should advise the Local Authority to make an appointment.

ADVICE:

SACRE recommended the criteria above to the council to be used to determine which religions and beliefs should be represented on committee A

SACRE wishes to thank members and officers for their support in ensuring places on all four committees of SACRE are filled.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Religious Education, Collective Worship and of SACRE

Standards in Thurrock Schools.

SACRE undertakes a number of activities annually to fulfil its responsibilities including the monitoring of workforce and examination data.

School workforce data: This data is based on the school census collected in November each year and then published in June. Detailed information from this data is found in appendix B. The data shows that in seven schools the level of provision for RE has increased since last year and in one it decreased. Two schools that had previously not reported hours for RE have done so this year and in one school the hours are the same. Two schools still fail to report hours for RE even though it is clear from the website that the subject is being taught.

GCSE data: This report is based on provisional the 2024 examination results, released by the department for education. Of the thirteen schools in Thurrock for whom we have information, only six make entries for GCSE RS. However, five of these schools are reporting attainment at grades 9-4 at rates that are above the national average. Congratulations are

therefore due to the three Harris Federation Academies, Grays Convent and Ormiston Park Academy for these results. The rate of entry has increased in four schools, however, in three schools where entries have been made previously, there were none in 2024.

SACRE advises the council to investigate:

1. the reasons why so many schools are not offering GCSE RS as a qualification or failing to attract sufficient numbers for a viable group.
2. Why schools previously offering GCSE have stopped doing so
3. The reason why two schools are still not reporting RE in their census data
4. The reason why time for RE has been cut in one school

National Developments in Religious Education.

At each meeting, the council discussed national development and considered how they might impact on Religious Education in Thurrock

Religious Education Council's National Content Standard:

- Thurrock SACRE discussed the role of the National Content Standard in setting a benchmark for RE nationally, emphasizing its potential to ensure consistency and quality in RE teaching across the country.
- Discussions highlighted the importance of balancing national standards with local nuance to reflect the borough's diversity.
- It was noted that the Harris Academy has formally adopted the standard and also has consistently reported high standards at GCSE and in levels of provision.

RE Hubs:

- Culham St Gabriels had funded the RE Hubs Project. The idea was to create a central group that would bring together all the local groups of RE teachers, and put in place a regional structure, Hub Leads and a Central Director. SACRE members were invited to register places of interest that teachers felt that pupils should visit locally. These could then be given a flag mark on the Hub website. Over 500 places had already been kite-marked. In addition, speakers could be accredited by the Hub, then kite-marked on the website. Our SACRE members have been made aware of both of these initiatives and encouraged to sign up.

OFSTED Report:

- OFSTED's annual report identified gaps in RE provision across the country.
- In April 2024, Ofsted published a subject report titled "Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report," examining the state of Religious Education (RE) in England's schools.

Key Findings:

- Superficial Curriculum: Many schools offer a curriculum that is broad but lacks depth, leading to students retaining little meaningful knowledge. Covering numerous

religions superficially often results in misconceptions and a lack of substantial understanding.

- **Exam-Centric Teaching:** In secondary schools, RE instruction is frequently driven by exam requirements, with teachers focusing primarily on content needed for assessments. This approach can limit students' comprehensive understanding of the subject.
- **Non-Compliance with Statutory Requirements:** A significant number of schools fail to meet the legal obligation to teach RE across all key stages, resulting in gaps in students' religious and cultural education.

Recommendations:

- **Curriculum Development:** Schools should design and implement a distinct, rigorous, and challenging RE curriculum for all key stages. This curriculum should build progressively on students' prior knowledge, ensuring depth over breadth.
- **Beyond Exam Specifications:** Secondary school leaders should develop RE curricula that go beyond mere exam board specifications, fostering a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the subject.
- **Teacher Training:** Schools must ensure that all RE teachers possess strong subject knowledge and effective pedagogical skills to deliver high-quality instruction.
- **Timetabling Considerations:** RE should be scheduled thoughtfully to minimize gaps between lessons, allowing for continuity and reinforcement of learning.
- **Progressive Knowledge Building:** Opportunities should be provided for students to revisit and deepen their understanding over time, enabling them to connect prior learning with more complex concepts.

Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Training:

This subject was on the agenda at several meetings and SACRE were pleased to invite Yasmin Pieri from the Chafford Hundred Teaching School Hub to address the meeting and answer questions.

- **Challenges:**
 - Recruitment gaps persist, with three unfilled RE teacher positions across the borough.
 - Retention remains an issue, as many teachers leave the profession within three years, reflecting national trends.
- **Support Initiatives:**
 - Programs like Teach First and flexible scheduling are being promoted to improve teacher recruitment and retention.
 - Farmington Scholarships continue to be recommended as a valuable professional development opportunity, enabling teachers to undertake funded research on RE-related topics.

- SACRE focused on attracting new teacher representatives and enhancing professional development opportunities for existing teachers.
- Recruitment challenges were discussed at RE Network meetings.
- The reintroduction of a £10,000 bursary for secondary RE teacher training was welcomed as a step towards addressing national shortages.
- SACRE received regular updates from the leaders of teacher network groups

Appendix A Workplan 2023-2024

SACRE WORK PLAN 2023-24 To meet the statutory duties of a SACRE

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Date	Success criteria
SACRE meetings are planned and dates published annually	Agenda planning Liaison with relevant council departments Meeting preparation Report writing Meeting attendance Minute taking Publication of meeting agendas and minutes SACRE members to consider taking part in NASACRE provided online training	Clerk, Chair, Adviser LA representative, members	Termly SACRE meetings	Meetings are effective meetings with actions followed up between meetings Members have a working knowledge of - issues affecting RE in the area - the Agreed Syllabus for RE - an understanding of the responsibilities of SACRE
SACRE have the opportunity to consider national developments in relation to RE in Thurrock	Consider relevant material from National organisations (AREAIC, NATRE, NASACRE/RE Council/ Culham St Gabriel's Trust as well as the DfE, Ofsted and Thurrock Council departments	Adviser	As information is published	Items on the Agenda for each meeting, Attendance at relevant meetings e.g. NASACRE AGM Minutes record discussions and actions
Produce annual report of the work of SACRE including advice to the council.	Pilot the NASACRE template for Annual Reports Collate information, source data and draft report Ensure final report presented to LA Send copy to Department for Education and to NASACRE	Adviser to draft Chair to write introduction Clerk to circulate. Elected representative to present to council	Spring Term (to account for data publication dates)	Completed draft in time for Spring meeting Report presented to council Copies sent to all schools Copy acknowledged by DfE
Engage with local schools and Academy Trusts to understand how Religious Education and Collective Worship are provided in Thurrock	Publicise the RE Quality Mark and encourage schools to share their submissions with SACRE as a means of self-evaluation	(SACRE members at least one per year)	Up to 4 school visits - 2 per term Suggested schedule	Meaningful evaluation visits or discussion completed, and reports discussed at SACRE meetings.

	Members to hold discussions with subject leaders using prepared template			
Provide information on the RE curriculum to schools including through training	Update a mailing list for RE leads in primary and secondary schools to facilitate briefings. Update schools on current developments in RE (NATRE and other material requested by SACRE)	Adviser Adviser and RE Today	Termly Annually -Summer Term subject to funding	Schools in receipt of material Teachers respond to material received Teachers raise questions to the adviser
Monitor provision for RE and Collective Worship	Source and present national and local data as follows: GCSE validated and unvalidated results and entries (local and national) School workforce data (local and national) Surveys of provision and of issues such as withdrawal, use of agreed syllabus, who teaches RE etc (local) Review school websites Write to schools about findings Sample collective worship policies	Adviser All SACRE members LA representative	Annually	LA respond to advice offered on strengths of RE and collective worship, and areas in need of development Schools respond to feedback on their websites and policies
Evaluate SACRE work and establish priorities	Item at autumn term meeting	All SACRE members	Autumn term meeting	Evaluation identified success criteria are met

Appendix B - Provision for RE as reported in the workforce census - November 2023 – GCSE 2024

School name	School type	% year 7 hours - RE	% year 8 hours - RE	% year 9 hours - RE	% year 10 hours - RE	% year 11 hours - RE	% year 12 hours - RE	% year 13 hours - RE	KS4FCentilesPerC	Percentages9-4FC	Sponsor			
Grays Convent High School	Local authority	11.23	9.37	9.44	10.37	10.68			94.7	92.3		Hours up	Rate of entry up	GCSE results up
Harris Academy Chafford Hundred	Academies	3.83	4.48	3.55	0	0.73	3.9	3.02	9.6	100	Harris Federation	Hours up from not reported	Rate of entry up	Results above N/A
Harris Academy Ockendon	Academies	3.64	4.08	3.47	3.92	4.58	6.76	6.78	10.4	88	Harris Federation	Hours up from zero in Y11	Entries stable	Results above N/A
Harris Academy Riverside	Free Schools	3.39	3.4	3.02	2.36	1.08	0	0	9.8	77.8	Harris Federation	Hours up from zero	Entries up	Results above N/A
Orsett Heath Academy	Free Schools		4.68	5.26	7.41				0		South West Essex Community Education Trust (SWECET)	Hours up overall Nothing reported in 7 or 11	No entries	N/A
Ortu Gable Hall School	Academies	2.56	2.93	3.94	4.43	2.81	0	0	0		ORTU Federation Ltd	Hours down in 10/11	Rate of entry down to zero	No grades 9-4
Ortu Hassenbrook Academy	Academies	1.77	1.94	1.94	1.78	1.97			0		ORTU Federation Ltd	Hours up in Y11	No entries	N/A
St Clere's School	Academies	4.28	4.48	4.26	1.14	1.1	0		0		Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust	Hours now reported	Rate of entry down to zero	N/A
Thames Park Secondary School	Free Schools								0		Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust	No hours reported	No entries	N/A
The Gateway Academy	Academies								0		The Gateway Learning Community	Not reported	No GCSE offered	N/A course cut 2 yrs ago
The Hathaway Academy	Academies	2.98	3.31	3.21	4.28	1.32			15.6	50	Academy Transformation Trust	Hours stable	Entries stable	GCSE results below N/A
William Edwards School and Sports College	Academies	4.87	4.68	3.47	2.48	2.43			0		South West Essex Community Education Trust (SWECET)	Hours up in Y11	Rate of entry down to zero	N/A course cut
Ormiston Park Academy									16.7	79.2		Not reported but website evidence of provisio	Entries up	Results above N/A