

Servicing Officers Report: Suffolk SACRE: 19th January 2018

Suffolk SACRE moving forward: Raising standards and quality of provision of RE: Local News

1. **NASACRE/ Westhill Award:** Suffolk SACRE was successful in obtaining funding from NASACRE/ Westhill to support a project to promote the Teaching Controversial Issues Toolkit. SACRE agreed to focus on four rural mono-cultural schools and at least two urban diverse schools. The project began in September 2017 with the launch of website pages. Stage two of the project is commencing January 2018- July 2018 focusing on engagement sessions with schools. Further funding is being sought locally, to open the project to more schools.

<http://www.westhillendowment.org/suffolk-sacre-bridging-diversity/Home>

2. **AREIAC EXEC Suffolk Pilot:** Suffolk SACRE will be embarking on an AREIAC EXEC pilot project in January 2018: supporting future leaders of RE. Suffolk SACRE members will work with teachers of Religious Education that have been identified as 'emerging leaders' of RE. This project hopes to capture and nurture the skills of emerging RE leaders that have already demonstrated ability and commitment, through REQM Gold, Farmington Fellowships and local contributions to RE.
3. **Agreed Syllabus Conference 2017/18:** the review has commenced, and the conference members are now editing the 5th draft of the document. The SACRE secondary teacher members will be reviewing and writing amendments to the draft during the SACRE meeting on the 19th January 2018.
4. **Monitoring the standards and provision of RE in Suffolk:** Suffolk SACRE will be piloting a new practical approach to monitoring the standards and provision of RE in Suffolk schools as from January 2018. The proposed innovative approach is for SACRE members to access the published websites of schools in Suffolk to monitor the published RE curriculum/SMSC/scheme of work or topics stated. This will allow Suffolk SACRE to better understand the provision of RE in the county, recognise areas of strength to celebrate and areas of development that SACRE may need to address with LA support. The SACRE meetings have already moved to a two-part meeting 1) Governance 2) solution focused element, and the monitoring process will take place, when time permits, during the three annual meetings. In addition, the LA representative is seeking to provide SACRE with RE examination data, and Ofsted comments linked to RE/SMSC, when published, to support the annual reporting process and the ongoing monitoring of RE provision. (Please also see the Deborah Weston request for data and letter to Headteacher suggestion: point 7).
5. **Suffolk RE Groups:** NATRE Primary Vice Chair and Local Groups Officer Juliet Lyal, met with Helen Matter (SACRE Chair) and Jan McGuire (Suffolk Servicing Officer for SACRE) on 11th January 2018 to discuss the future and sustainability of the Suffolk RE hubs, currently supported by the Diocese. The discussion focused on the possible affiliation of the hubs to NATRE going forward, as a way of protecting them, and making them self-leading and sustainable, under the umbrella of NATRE and Juliet Lyal. Secondly, SACRE voiced the importance of having continued intelligence and updates of the hubs going forward, with a report on progress of the hubs shared annually in September for the SACRE annual reporting process.

National RE Update: January 2018

6. **The REC Commission Interim Report** on, "Religious Education for All". In pursuit of Quality RE: A few observations at this early stage of the process:

- that the work of SACREs is seen an essential way forward in supporting RE. There is a recommendation in the report for an 'enhanced role' for SACREs. What does that mean in practice?

NASACRE has been reminding policymakers that:

- *All SACREs would like to do more to support, guide and advise schools.*
- *SACREs need fair and proper funding, and reasonable provision of specialist help and advice to enable this to happen.*
- *The creation of a Locally Agreed Syllabus is enabling for teachers and others involved and leads to high quality RE.*
- *There should be consequences for schools that are not providing good RE; either SACREs need to be given power to hold schools to account or Ofsted need to rigorously inspect and report on RE provision in all schools.*

NASACRE has also been arguing that we need more specialist RE teachers, and that Primary ITT should have a minimum number of hours to focus on RE.

7. **Holding schools to account: monitoring provision of RE**

REC/NATRE 'State of the Nation' RE Report (September 2017) , New analysis of the Government's School Workforce Census reveals that more than one in four (28%) state secondary schools are struggling to meet their legal obligation to teach pupils about major religions and systems of belief, depriving teenagers of vital knowledge about different faiths and beliefs in community, public and world affairs. All state-funded schools, including academies and free schools, are legally required by the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act to provide Religious Education as part of a balanced curriculum.

Suffolk SACRE's Servicing Officer has made a formal request to Deborah Weston (NATRE) to send the data, from the School Workforce Census, specifically related to Suffolk schools (January 2018) to allow for a considered review of the provision of RE in schools in Suffolk.

Holding schools to account: NASACRE is continuing to meet with officials from the DfE to discuss how we can best hold schools, academies and LAs to account. One very interesting discussion has been around the need for each Agreed Syllabus (funded by public money) to be publicly accessible under the terms of the 1996 Act.

NASACRE has also been working with Deborah Weston (SACRE/ NATRE) to put together a really useful guide about why and how a SACRE, in fulfilling its monitoring role, can complain when a school is not fulfilling its statutory duties with regard to RE. (see NASACRE website)

Deborah Weston explains how SACREs can use a complaints procedure to encourage schools to meet their statutory obligations.

Exemplar letter:

Dear Headteacher,

I wrote to you on [date of letter] on behalf of Standing Advisory Council of RE, to ask you about the provision for Religious Education at [name of school/academy].

I do not appear to have received a reply.

As I mentioned in my letter, SACRE meet again on [date of the next meeting] so I would be grateful if you could respond by [insert date] so that I can prepare papers for the meeting in good time. Alternatively, you may wish to attend the SACRE meeting to explain the current circumstances in relation to the provision for RE at your school in order that a way forward can be agreed.

As you will appreciate, if I do not receive a reply to my letter at all, SACRE members will be likely to assume that their concerns about the provision at your school are justified and instruct me to write to you again but this time in the form of a formal complaint.

I would like to avoid this step if possible.

I hope to hear from you very soon [name] Chair XXX SACRE

8. **EBacc (July 2017):** The DfE published its response to the consultation over the EBacc in July. Many had hoped that RE might be included in an expanded list of EBacc subjects. This did not happen, but in paragraph 72, there was a re-affirmation of the statutory nature of RE in all maintained schools:

72. We have considered suggestions to include additional subjects or pillars within the EBacc but have decided that this could reduce pupil choice at GCSE to the point where no other subjects can be studied. Religious education must be taught to all pupils until the end of key stage 5, a qualification (such as GCSE religious studies) should be offered at the end of key stage 4 to accredit pupils' knowledge and understanding. The proportion of pupils in state funded mainstream schools entering a GCSE in religious studies remains high at 47% in 2015/16.

SACREs may wish to examine their Agreed Syllabus and ensure that it has sufficient provision for pupils at the latter key stages. One option might be for the AS to state "all pupils must" follow an accredited course. If your AS suggests that all pupils should follow such a course, does it adequately outline a syllabus for those who do not? Would it help to communicate the message from the DfE to your schools to help start a new dialogue about KS4 provision and compliance?

9. **The statutory duty for LAs** to 'establish' and 'support' a SACRE, was reaffirmed by Nick Gibb in a written answer to Parliament in July 2017:

Local authorities have a statutory duty to support the activities of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) and publish an agreed syllabus for maintained schools without a religious designation in their local area. Maintained schools with a religious designation and academies are not required to follow the agreed syllabus, although it can act as a useful benchmark for their curriculum planning.

SACRE membership must include representatives of the area's principal faith groups, teachers and from the local authority. This contributes to securing the confidence of local communities and enables the SACRE to take account of the circumstances of each area in creating an agreed syllabus that has regard to local context. The Government does not have any current plans to remove the duty on local authorities to establish SACREs and include RE in the National Curriculum.

Nick Gibb also stated: *Local authorities currently receive funding through the Education Services Grant to support Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) to develop an agreed syllabus*

for religious education (RE). Local authorities will continue to receive funding to develop an agreed syllabus for RE, once the Education Services Grant has been removed.

10. **2018 marks the** 25th anniversary of NASACRE and Helen Matter (Chair) and Jan McGuire (Servicing Officer) will be attending the Silver Jubilee Conference in London. May 24th 2018.
11. NASACRE has been operating without a Vice Chair this year. Please consider nominating someone from your SACRE who may be able to fill this role for a year before becoming Chair in May 2019. Contact Paul on his email chair@nasacre.org to arrange an informal discussion if you wish, and be ready when the nomination forms come out for our AGM in May. There will also be some Executive Committee vacancies to fill.
12. SACREs were advised in the last Briefing that the following motion will be included in the Agenda for NASACRE's AGM in May 2018:

"That the Annual Subscription to NASACRE be increased to £105 per SACRE for the Academic Year 2018-19 and thereafter." SACREs should vote on whether to support this motion or not (some may already have done so) and should record their vote EITHER at the AGM through their representative(s) in person, OR by submitting their vote in advance of the AGM on the electronic form. In the absence of a recorded vote, it will be assumed that a paid-up member SACRE is in favour of the motion.

13. RE in Pupil Referral Units:

You will clearly all know the statutory status of RE is that it should be provided for all pupils in all maintained schools. However, you may be surprised to discover that there is no statutory duty for a PRU to deliver RE. Local authorities maintain PRUs but Section 20 of the School Standards & Framework Act 1998 says that: subsection of section 20: *In this section "school" means a primary, secondary or special school, including a nursery school which is a special school but excluding—*
(a) a nursery school which is not a special school; and
(b) a pupil referral unit.

14. 20:20 RE: Practice, Policy and Powerful Knowledge Conference

NASACRE is working with AREIAC, AULRE and NATRE to organise a two-day conference in Crewe (13-14 October 2018). The conference organisers invite proposals for a practical workshop, academic seminar, or talk from Members of SACREs from the faith communities: could you offer a workshop/seminar/talk at this conference, of 20, 30 or 60 minutes where you help others from the world of RE to better understand your faith and how to present it to pupils? Please send in your proposal, by February 18th to chair@nasacre.org.uk