

**STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)
COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL, DARLINGTON. DL1 5QT
MONDAY, 10 JULY 2023**

PRESENT – Martin Stand (Group B Church of England), Helen Ellis (Group A The Roman Catholic Church), Dean Lythgoe (Group C The Association of School and College Leaders), Councillor Allen (Group D Darlington Borough Council), Councillor Donoghue (Group D Darlington Borough Council) and Councillor Toms (Group D Darlington Borough Council).

Co-opted Members – M Fryer (Co-opted Member of SACRE) and Jan Mole (Co-opted Member of SACRE).

Officers – Anne Davison (SEND and Inclusion Advisory Lead) (SENCO Partnership Link Officer) and Paul Dalton (Elections Officer).

APOLOGIES – Jenny Uzzell (Group A Paganism), Dr M Al-Dimashki (Group A Islamic Society), Bess Robertson (Group A Darlington Hebrew Congregation (Judaism)), Dr Kumari (Group A Hinduism), Emma Walden (Group A Methodist Circuit), Lindsay Henderson (Group C National Education Union) and Councillor Wallis (Group D Darlington Borough Council).

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

2 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SACRE HELD ON 14 NOVEMBER 2022

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the Meeting of this SACRE held on 14 November 2022.

IT WAS AGREED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

3 INCLUSIVE ASSEMBLIES AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Submitted – For further discussion, Section 70 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and the Proposed Guidelines on Inclusive Assemblies and Collective Worship for West Sussex Community Schools.

The submitted paper advised that the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 required that each pupil in attendance at a community, foundation or voluntary school shall on each school day take part in an act of collective worship, wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, however it also states that the circumstances relating to the family backgrounds of the pupils are relevant for determining the character of the collective worship. The submitted paper stated that all community schools, and most other schools, would be attended by pupils from non-religious families, and that many pupils in all schools would identify as non-religious and/or non-Christian, and suggested that in order to accommodate these children and their parents, assemblies should not include religious worship. It was further suggested that to comply with the law, schools should arrange collective worship for those pupils and teachers who wish to opt in, e.g. during break time, extra-curricular visits to places of worship, prayer rooms, before or after school hours.

The submitted paper stated that assemblies were valued by teachers, parents and pupils, however that assemblies should be non-religious and inclusive, and incorporate values shared by religious and non-religious people alike. It was stated that non-religious, inclusive assemblies would free teachers of any obligation to conduct religious worship or force pupils to participate.

It was suggested in the submitted paper that forcing someone to participate in religious worship contravened the European Convention on Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights, and that current guidelines promoting collective worship were incompatible with the content of our agreed syllabus, e.g. mutual respect, diversity, equality, social cohesion, morality, justice, as well as our intended worldviews approach.

It was reported that non-religious inclusive assemblies are supported by numerous organisations, including religious organisations, teachers, head teachers, local government, RE inspectors, parents and others.

Members were invited to make comment on the proposals, however it was noted by the SEND and Inclusion Advisory Lead that she had never received a request from a school not to undertake collective worship and that the law around collective worship was not always enforced or enacted. It was highlighted that collective worship was in conflict with the law, and that it should be suggested to non-religious schools that inclusive assemblies should be explored.

It was noted that there was plenty of choice in Darlington, however it was suggested that headteachers would welcome support, though SACRE should remain mindful of the setting. Members of the SACRE stated that they felt that inclusive assemblies should include recognition of all faiths and their celebrations, rather than instruction based on any one religion.

Members of SACRE recounted their personal experience of attending assemblies in non-faith schools, and it was noted that most non-faith schools are not delivering religious worship, and therefore not many pupils are withdrawn from assemblies. There was a feeling that the issue was too big for a local SACRE to resolve. It was also postulated that pupils singing and praying was not necessarily active worship, as many would just go through the motions without any meaningful thought given to the religious context. It was suggested that this going through the motions could cause conflict with some parents.

Members of the SACRE were reminded that they had a duty to monitor collective worship in maintained schools, though it was acknowledged that from September 2023, there would only be two maintained schools in Darlington, and that academies were under no obligation to engage with the SACRE.

RESOLVED – (a) That a one page reminder on collective worship be submitted to the next meeting of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) for consideration for circulation to schools.

(b) That the Darlington SACRE write to the MP highlighting the need for inclusive assemblies.

4 INTRODUCTION TO RE HUBS FOR NORTH EAST SACRE'S

Submitted – Members received information from Karenza Passmore, North East Regional Hubs Lead, which advised that The RE Hubs project is designed to equip, link and grow the breadth of support and resource for the Religious Education community in each Region throughout England and in the nation of Wales.

It was stated that the purpose of the RE Hubs project was to improve communication, connections and interactions between teachers, SACREs, professional development and resource providers, and research communities.

RESOLVED – That Karenza Passmore be invited to address a future meeting of this SACRE to provide more information on The RE Hubs project.

5 MEMBERSHIP OF SACRE - APPOINTMENTS/RE-APPOINTMENT AND NOTIFICATION OF RESIGNATION

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) to advise Members of the notification of retirement of Dr M Quader, the representative for the Islamic Society (Group A); and the nomination to the vacancies in (Group C) representing Teaching Unions and (Group A) representing Other Religious Faiths (Islamic Society).

It was also reported that Margaret Thomson was appointed to this SACRE as the representative for the United Reformed Church (Group A) on 19 March 2019 for four years, and was re-appointment on 20 March 2023 for a further four years.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That Members note the appointment of the named representatives for the National Education Union and the Islamic Society and that membership be for a period of four years.

(b) That Members note the re-appointment of the named representative for the United Reformed Church and that membership be for a period of four years.

(c) That Members note the resignation of Dr Quader from this SACRE and to extend the thanks of this SACRE for his contribution over the years and to wish him well in his retirement.

6 SACRE ANNUAL REPORT ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-22

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to enable Members to consider the proposed Annual Report for the academic year 2021-2022, and to make any agreed amendments prior to its submission to the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE) and the Department for Education.

IT WAS AGREED – That the submitted Annual Report for 2021-22 be approved and be submitted to NASACRE and the Department for Education.

7 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

IT WAS AGREED – That the next meeting be held on Monday, 13th November 2023, commencing at 4.15 p.m.