

Report from Frances Neil for Southend on Sea, SACRE 1/10/2021

Locally Agreed Syllabus (LAS).

The feedback continues to be favourable. The teachers I consulted at Teachers' Network Meetings during 2020 and 2021 reported that they continue to enjoy planning and teaching from the LAS, and it is benefitting pupils and supporting the teachers they lead, as a direct result. Progress through the Locally Agreed Syllabus (LAS) continued at a slower pace than usual during lockdown as might be understood. I was very pleased at the professionalism shown by teachers as they adapted lessons to teach RE online/remotely. I was pleased to be able to share many of NATRE's and other free online resources with teachers.

During 2022, however, the LA will need to consider its next steps as the current LAS is due to be reviewed, replaced, or updated by end of 2023. There are changes in focus within RE now that are explained within the report by the Commission on RE "**Religion and Worldviews: the way forward. A national plan for RE**" (CoRE) a copy of which can be found at:
<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/final-report-religion-and-worldviews-the-way-forward-a-national-plan-for-re/>

This page has a brief introductory and explanatory video narrated by Professor Francesca Stavrakopoulou, Exeter University, as follows:

"Over the last 50 Britain's religious and cultural landscape has changed at an unprecedented pace. Today we live in a diverse and plural country and a globalised world. To succeed in life, we need to understand people from multiple backgrounds and outlooks. Religious education in schools has always aimed to help young people to make sense of those worldviews and to reflect on their own. It equips them with the knowledge they need to interact with others who have different perspectives both in the workplace and in everyday life but like our society, RE has to evolve. Broadening the traditional RE remit to embrace religion and worldviews will make the subject more relevant to our society and to every pupil. A national entitlement will ensure that every school in England shares the same vision for RE whilst having the freedom to develop their own approaches that reflect its pupils' experiences and its own character and context. Understanding different worldviews in society is more important than ever and by making religion and worldviews a core component of learning this will remain a valuable and important part of all pupil's education." (CoRE, 2021)

I am currently investigating how SACRE can advise the LA as to embracing this change in emphasis in its next LAS. **If SACRE is agreeable** I would advise that I (continue to) research how this can be achieved and report back at the next meeting/s. I have found sources and information from other LAs who are in the same position and national advisors with whom I can work to report back.

Teachers' Network Meetings

Throughout lockdown I continued to lead the Teachers' Network Meetings from September 2019 and then using Zoom as lockdown came into being. One Zoom meeting was held each term from January 2020 right through to the present, with one planned for next Wednesday 13th October 2021. The agendas for the meetings ranged from a review of the Locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (LAS) as reported above, to sharing resources and ideas and Ofsted updates. Ofsted announced that it was carrying out a review of RE in schools with the proposed restart of School Inspections in September 2021 view to publishing a report into the teaching of RE in 2022. We discussed how teachers could prepare for an in-depth inspection, referred to as "*a deep dive*" into RE in their schools within an Inspection. Attendance

at the Zooms has been good, mainly from primary teachers, all of whom teach RE and most both teach and lead RE in their schools.

Additional Zooms have been held with individual / pairs of teachers if they have been unable to attend a group Zoom. This helped teachers and I to keep in touch and I also replied swiftly to emails to be responsive to their requests for support. For some teachers, this Teachers' Network provides their ONLY available CPD (especially in primary) through which they can access support and receive up to date information to share information with School Leadership Teams, governors and colleagues.

Example of a Zoom Agenda / Invite to Teachers:

AGENDA ITEMS for Teachers' Network meeting

These items are subject to change. Do get in touch to specify your areas of interest ahead of the meeting.

1. Ofsted Deep Dives:
 - a. perhaps this is time to prepare for your next inspection?

2. **FREE: Unit of Work (Primary - attached to email)**

Why do some people think that life is a journey? (Suitable for Ages 7–11).

This investigation enables pupils to learn in depth from different religious and spiritual ways of life relating to milestones on the journey of life. Through exploring baptism, Bar and Bat Mitzvah or Hindu Samskaras and pupils explore how and why people chose to mark significant moments in life.

3. **FREE: Unit of Work (Secondary – attached to email)**

Should happiness be the purpose of life? (Suitable for Ages 11-14).

This investigation enables pupils to learn in depth from Christianity, Buddhism and non-religious worldviews about the significance of happiness. Through a study of the idea of happiness in the bible, the concept of dukkha and comparing the religious idea of 'the good life' to a non-religious view of 'the good life'.

4. Any other business:

How is syllabus working out for online learning? Any help I can give/ feedback for Southend LEA? RE Today /SACRE?
5. Next meeting date: Wednesday 9th June 2021 **Meeting dates are subject to change and will be updated on the Courses Booking Page. Groups times are generally 4pm - 5.30pm*

I will be continuing to use Zoom for meetings for the foreseeable future as the traffic and time constraints of travel across the crowded Borough roads, at just the time schools come out in the afternoon, do cause

teachers stresses in an already stressful job and eats into the time we have to work together. We must also be aware of climate concerns and do our bit to reduce emissions within our busy Borough, with perhaps, a summer term face-to-face meeting, if teachers so choose.

I circulated many resources to teachers throughout the lockdown such as access to online museum visits and online speakers, supplied links to teaching resources that could be employed online to help give teachers and their pupils / students a varied diet of lessons and subjects with which to engage. These were well received and an example of such a resource entitled “Natre: Home Learning-Ramadan” is circulated with this report.

Our schools are reporting successes in RE, and I have permission to quote the following from Edwards Hall Primary School’s RE Lead, Lyn Campbell, following a visit from the Religions Education Quality Mark Assessors in June 2021.

“Dear Frances

Just to let you know I had the REQM Virtual Assessment today and it went really well.

She [the assessor] is recommending that we are at Silver standard with elements of Gold!

Thank you for your support over the years as that has been a major contributing factor to this subject now being so successful in our school.”

Another school is embarking upon the assessment process. I have also liaised with an Independent Church of England School within the Borough and, with agreement and support from the LA’s Schools support team led by Amanda Champ, introduced them to the Borough’s LAS. The school then purchased the LAS as it was highly recommended to them by the Diocese of Chelmsford.

During lockdown, when the subject matter was relevant, I attended the online meetings of the Faith and Belief Network working with Kelly Marks, as the LA’s RE Advisor. The Network led an online “Faith and Belief Festival”. I was able to encourage teachers to engage and encourage their pupils to take part in this successful pilot event.

Continuing Professional Development:

Through links with National Advisors, I have been successful in securing the offer of a second cohort of teachers in Southend schools to attend the training course “Excellent RE” provided by RE Today and NATRE. The three and half training days will be spread out over a 10-month period, and we will conduct most of the training online.

Over the weekend of January 25/26th 2021, over Zoom, I attended “Strictly RE” National Conference hosted by the National Association of Teachers of Religions Education (NATRE). This is a great event and an opportunity to update and enhance my own CPD and professional knowledge, and to engage with Inspectors, prominent writers, decision makers, fellow advisors and policy makers in RE so to advise SACRE and the LA well.

I will also attend the forthcoming “Strictly RE” event in 2022 which is again online and to which I’m looking forward immensely.

Frances Neil, RE Adviser 1/10/2021