

Consultation Process for New Religious Education Syllabus for Southend on Sea Local Authority

Section 1: The Background

Every local authority's Religious Education Agreed Syllabus has to be **reviewed every five years**. The Agreed Syllabus can be, as their local SACRE decides. either:

- given an extended life
- it can be reviewed and updated and rewritten
- replaced entirely

Southend on Sea's current syllabus was published and launched in the January of 2018 so within five years a review should be finalised and the results implemented, that being 2023, and the resulting updated or replacement syllabus available to schools preferably in the following autumn term.

The local authority's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education must make its decision as to this process in time for the results of the review to be agreed and implemented and as reviewing the syllabus is a lengthy task. This process began in 2022 with an extension to the current syllabus agreed by SACRE to allow for the Adviser to investigate options and recommend actions to SACRE and for the decisions to take place.

Representation at SACRE includes different faith groups, members of groups representing those with world-views and teaching Unions and elected Councillors. The Local Authority's Education Officers are non-voting observers as is their independent RE Adviser to SACRE.

Schools welcomed and were very supportive of the 2018-2023 syllabus when it was first published and all of Southend's maintained schools and many of the City's academies followed it from school years one to year 6 and for some secondaries from yr. 7 to yr. nine.

Religious Education has grown in significance within schools' curriculum provision in the immediate past, especially given RE's links within schools to PSHE as this are now subject to more rigorous scrutiny and inspection. It is considered essential to foster a sense of understanding, celebration of diversity and community within schools through the teaching of good Religious Education. To support this the LAs Agreed Syllabus has to be fit for the 21st Century and welcomed by the LA, schools and their teachers.

Five years on from the publication of Southend's RE Today's 2018-2023 Syllabus provided to schools the questions are:

- whether the current Agreed Syllabus, excellent though it has been since its publication in 2018 has now having reached the end of its lifespan?
- now provides enough depth or guidance for teachers, especially non-specialists, to teach religious and non-religious worldviews?
- Or is more support needed for teachers for their classroom use, as they request, especially when providing for a coherent programme of study, assessment of pupils and students and support for colleagues who are not subject specialists?

The following process sets out how and when these questions have been addressed.

Section 2: The Process

A survey of all schools

The review process began with an evaluation of RE provision of schools within the local authority in when a survey organised and written by the LA's Advisor for RE was presented to SACRE. The survey was then made available to all Southend schools, primary, infant, junior, special and secondary schools through its

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publication on the Southend's Schools' Learning Network (SLN) provided by Southend on Sea Local Authority. Amongst other questions, this requested feedback upon the current Locally Agreed Syllabus which showed it is still highly regarded within the city's schools.

Familiar themes emerged, however, with concerns expressed by Lead RE Teachers and the senior leadership, especially of primary schools, that the guidance and support for teachers within the current Agreed RE Syllabus in the areas of both long term and medium-term classroom planning and pupil assessment were warmly welcomed and continuation of these is necessary.

Current Position:

Southend currently has RE Today's LAS 'Model A', so schools will be familiar with its layout and how the LAS is used in school, which they like.

Model A+ from RE Today is proposed as its successor, which includes more Worldviews and the 4 new units, below.

When asked in my survey, teachers' feedback was that they wanted units along these lines in a new LAS, but liked our current LAS too, so the Model A+ seems the best fit. Essex LA have just introduced Model A+ and it has been well-received.

The syllabus Model A+ is excellent and the document can be provided, either:

- 1) online only (downloaded PDFs for schools to have on their IT systems)
- 2) online + a folder for each school with paper-based enclosures
 - both online and hard copy versions are the same syllabus and both have licenses and updates will be included.

Syllabus Model A + The new units

Green religion? How and why should religious communities do more to care for the Earth?

This investigation enables pupils to learn in depth about the challenges of climate justice issues and about how different religious and spiritual ways of life can contribute to the urgent human need to stop spoiling the environment and the Earth. Pupils will develop a rich knowledge of examples, concepts, sources of wisdom and authority and practice in different religions and worldviews with regard to climate change, environmental care and building a sustainable future.

What can be done to reduce racism? Can religion help?

This investigation enables pupils to learn in depth from different religious and spiritual ways of life through exploring ideas and examples of what religions do to reduce racism, including for example the work of different religious leaders in promoting respect and the teaching of different sacred texts about human unity.

How do family life and festivals show what matters to Jewish people?

The unit implements the principal aim of RE, which is to engage pupils in systematic enquiry into significant human questions which religion and worldviews address, so that they can develop the understanding and skills needed to appreciate and appraise varied responses to these questions, as well as develop responses of their own.

How do people from religious and non-religious communities celebrate key festivals?

This unit offers a multidisciplinary focus using the lens of a sociologist and of a religious studies expert.

The proposal and options:

That RE Today provide the Model A+ RE Syllabus to Southend. RE Today provide a syllabus to a large number of other Local Authorities throughout England.

Option A) continuing with the current syllabus and extending its life for another 5-year period

This is not going to fulfil the need of schools to be supported in the additional areas of study outlined.

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Option B: sourcing a new syllabus

The RE Today Syllabus currently is Model A. RE Today have now published **Model A+** which is very similar to the current syllabus and also includes the provision of both a PDF version available for downloading and a hard copy of the syllabus (in the form of a folder with contents).

In Model A+ with the addition of these new units, which bring additional study areas to pupils, students and teachers to share in the exploration, and thus broadens the understanding of, the major faiths, beliefs, and religious and non-religious world-views, present within Southend, the United Kingdom and the world of today.

The following are in Model A and which are continued in Model A+

- adheres to the statutory legislation and local directives that pertain to RE
- it is a more detailed and thorough syllabus that progresses through the school years
- it helps to build pupils' knowledge and support their growth in understanding
- it encompasses Early Years, through primary years and to the end of Key Stage 3, Year 9 in secondary and special schools with secondary pupils
- which included classroom, year group, medium and long term school planning
- that included suggestions as to appropriate resources, visits and activities
- has additional units in depth that schools can purchase if required but are optional and not necessary to cover the syllabus itself
- it has linked assessment and reporting to current National Standards
- it fosters interest and questioning by pupils and students
- prepares and encourages students them to make RE a choice at GCSE and beyond

All teachers liked the provision of both a PDF version available for downloading and a hard copy of the syllabus (in the form of a folder with contents which they say is vital in case of IT and copying difficulties) with updates as produced.

Conclusion

On **23rd November** the SACRE minutes to record that the statutory requirement to review the Southend RE Agreed Syllabus be noted and that the Southend Agreed Syllabus Conference be set-up to undertake the review.

At the review SACRE will be in a position to consider the recommendation that, following the professional advice of the RE Adviser, the RE Today Syllabus Model A+ become its Agreed Syllabus for Southend on Sea Local Authority for the period from September 2024 to July 2029.

The Agreed Syllabus Conference to be convened by SACRE at their next meeting or a special meeting for a discussion and decision and the Local Authority funding be made available.

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