

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Lives Select Commission – 17 March 2026

Report Title

Annual Report of the Rotherham Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) 2024–2025

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report presents the Annual Report of the Rotherham Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) for the academic year 2024–2025. It summarises advice to statutory bodies, the standards and quality of Religious Education (RE) and collective worship in Rotherham schools, the work of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC), and SACRE's contribution to wider council priorities.

The report highlights strengthened membership (notably secondary RE specialists), successful CPD and interfaith engagement, progress towards reviewing the local Agreed Syllabus, and one determination (Thornhill Primary School). Members of the Improving Lives Select Commission are asked to note the Annual Report and endorse the forward actions for 2025–2026, including enhanced subject leader support, the South Yorkshire RE Conference, and development of school visits/visitors' guidance.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members of ILSC:

- Note the Rotherham SACRE Annual Report for 2024–2025 and its key findings; and
- Endorse SACRE's forward plan priorities for 2025–2026, including continued CPD, annual RE conference, RE awards, and development of educational visits/visitors guidance.

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Annual Report of the Rotherham Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) 2024–2025

1. Background

- 1.1 Rotherham's SACRE is a statutory body that advises the Local Authority (LA) on matters related to RE and collective worship. This Annual Report covers activity carried out by SACRE from September 2024 to July 2025, including advice to the LA and schools, CPD delivery, interfaith engagement, and determinations.
- 1.2 SACRE's work supports council objectives around inclusion, cohesion and educational outcomes, and aligns with national expectations set out in legislation governing RE and collective worship.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 In England, RE is a compulsory, non-national curriculum subject for all pupils in state-funded schools, including academies and free schools, from reception to age 19. While mandatory, parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from all or part of RE lessons, a right that transfers to students at age 16. State-funded schools are also legally required to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, as mandated by the Education Act 1996 and School Standards and Framework Act 1998. This act must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.
- 2.2 The key roles and responsibilities of a SACRE include:
 - Advising the LA: Providing advice on matters related to RE and collective worship, particularly in community and foundation schools.
 - Agreed Syllabus Conference: Monitoring and reviewing the locally agreed syllabus for RE to ensure that it remains relevant to the demographic of the area. A full review of the locally agreed syllabus must be carried out at least every five years
 - Collective Worship Determinations: Considering applications from schools to alter the requirement for collective worship to be broadly Christian in nature.
 - Supporting Schools: Offering guidance and support to teachers and schools on improving the quality of RE teaching and supporting community cohesion.
 - Monitoring Standards: Reviewing the quality and provision of RE in schools and publishing an annual report on its work.
- 2.3 Rotherham's SACRE is composed of representatives from local faith communities, teachers' associations, and the LA.

2.4 SACRE had identified issues in relation both to SACRE’s statutory responsibilities and to the wider needs of schools, pupils, and communities in Rotherham, which are set out below.

2.4.1 **1. The need to strengthen SACRE’s membership and improve governance**

SACRE identified that its membership lacked sufficient breadth of expertise, particularly in relation to secondary religious education and representation from local faith communities. This limited the group’s ability to give well-rounded advice to the LA and meant that some meetings struggled to be quorate. Stronger governance arrangements and wider participation were needed to ensure SACRE could fulfil its statutory duties effectively.

2.4.2 **2. Schools required more support to deliver high-quality RE and improve teachers’ subject knowledge.**

Nationally, RE is a compulsory subject, but it is not part of the national curriculum. This means local guidance and professional development are especially important. Feedback from schools showed that teachers needed greater confidence, access to reliable resources, and opportunities to deepen their understanding of different faiths and world views. Without this support, the quality of RE across the borough risked becoming inconsistent and less engaging for pupils.

2.4.3 **3. The locally agreed syllabus required review to remain up to date and fit for purpose**

Every LA must have an agreed syllabus for RE, reviewed at least every five years. Rotherham’s syllabus had reached the point where an update was needed to reflect current national guidance, local priorities, and the increasingly diverse religious landscape. Without initiating this review, the borough risked having a syllabus that no longer fully supported teachers or met statutory expectations.

2.4.4 **4. SACRE needed to meet its statutory responsibilities in relation to collective worship**

All state-funded schools are legally required to provide daily collective worship that is “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character,” unless they apply for a determination to lift or vary this requirement. SACRE must consider these applications and also respond to any complaints about collective worship. The issue identified was ensuring that determinations were managed appropriately and that SACRE remained vigilant in monitoring compliance and concerns, even though complaints are rare.

2.4.5 **5. There was a need for stronger community cohesion work, especially following the 2024 unrest.**

Events in 2024 highlighted the importance of strengthening relationships between communities and improving understanding between people of

different backgrounds. SACRE recognised that RE, inter-faith activity, and collaboration with schools could play a significant role in supporting cohesion. However, the scale of need meant that SACRE had to expand its involvement in wider initiatives and ensure its work aligned with local priorities for inclusion and harmony.

2.5 Actions being taken:

2.5.1 1. Strengthening SACRE's membership and improving governance.

To address the need for a broader and more knowledgeable membership, SACRE successfully recruited three new members, including specialists with experience in secondary-phase Religious Education. This wider representation has ensured that discussions and decisions are informed by a richer range of professional and faith perspectives. In addition, SACRE introduced hybrid meeting arrangements, allowing members to attend either in person or online. This has made participation easier, improved attendance from across the membership groups, and ensured that meetings are now consistently quorate, strengthening governance and decision-making.

2.5.2 2. Enhancing support to schools and improving teachers' subject knowledge in RE.

In response to the clear need for stronger support for teachers and RE subject leaders, SACRE established regular subject leader network meetings to enable professional dialogue, sharing of good practice, and peer support. To deepen teachers' understanding of different faiths, SACRE organised question-and-answer panels with representatives from Buddhist, Bahá'í, Muslim, and Jewish communities, giving teachers direct access to lived-faith perspectives. SACRE also maintained and promoted the local RE artefact resource, which provides schools with hands-on materials to enrich classroom learning. Feedback from teachers indicates that these initiatives have significantly increased their confidence and improved the quality of RE teaching across the borough.

2.5.3 3. Reviewing and updating the locally agreed syllabus for Religious Education

Recognising the need to bring the agreed syllabus up to date, SACRE formally convened the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) in September 2025. This marked the beginning of a structured review process involving consultation, drafting, and evaluation. The work is progressing towards a clear target of launching the revised syllabus in September 2026. This timeline enables schools to prepare for implementation and ensures the syllabus reflects both national guidance and local priorities, including promoting inclusion and community cohesion.

2.5.4 4. Fulfilling statutory duties relating to collective worship

To ensure it met its legal responsibilities under the Education Act 1996 and School Standards and Framework Act 1998, SACRE processed and approved

the renewal of a determination for Thornhill Primary School. This determination allows the school to modify the requirement for broadly Christian collective worship so that it better reflects the needs of its community. SACRE continued to monitor statutory requirements and remained prepared to respond to concerns, but no complaints about collective worship were received during the period, indicating that schools were managing their duties appropriately.

2.5.5 **5. Supporting wider cohesion and inter-faith initiatives across Rotherham**

In response to the need for stronger community cohesion, particularly following the unrest in 2024, SACRE played an active role in several major initiatives. SACRE contributed to the South Yorkshire RE Conference held on 29 January 2024, led by nationally recognised RE adviser Lat Blaylock, helping to raise regional standards and visibility for RE. SACRE also led the implementation of the *Together for Tomorrow* project, designed to strengthen relationships and understanding between communities. The principles of this project have been built into the draft of the new Agreed Syllabus to ensure cohesion is embedded in curriculum expectations. Additionally, SACRE coordinated activities for Inter-Faith Week, which received strong positive feedback and demonstrated the value of bringing communities together through dialogue and shared learning.

3. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 3.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from noting the Annual Report. Any costs associated with ASC meetings, CPD/events, or syllabus materials will be contained within existing approved CYPs budgets or subject to separate approval where required. No procurement activity is proposed in this decision; any future procurement will follow the Council's rules.

4. Legal Advice and Implications

- 4.1 SACRE operates under statutory provisions within the Education Acts and related guidance. The decision to note the Annual Report and endorse SACRE's forward plan raises no direct legal implications. Determinations are undertaken in line with statutory requirements, and the ASC will be convened in accordance with regulations.

5. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct HR implications in this report.

6. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 6.1 The work of SACRE supports inclusive, high-quality RE and Collective Worship, contributing to pupils' knowledge, cultural understanding and preparedness for life in modern Britain. SACRE's projects (e.g., *Together for Tomorrow*) promote cohesion and understanding across communities

7. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

7.1 SACRE's activity promotes equality, diversity and inclusion through representation of multiple faiths and worldviews and interfaith engagement in schools. No adverse equalities impacts are identified. An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for noting the Annual Report; equalities will be considered for any future policy decisions.

8. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

8.1 There are no direct implications.

9. Implications for Partners

9.1 Positive implications for partners including schools, faith groups, and local community organisations through continued collaboration and shared resources.

10. Risks and Mitigation

10.1 Key Risks:

- Limited capacity in schools to engage
- Potential delays to ASC timetable
- Funding constraints.

10.2 Mitigation Measures:

- Clear timetable and ownership will mitigate the risk of delays in the ASC
- Use of hybrid meetings will ensure that meeting are quorate
- Improved financial management and oversight will ensure that funding constraints are well managed.

11. Accountable Officer(s)

Niall Devlin – Service Director, Education & Inclusion

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	Name	Date
Name of Strategic Director	Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services	19/02/26

Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Councillor Cusworth	05/03/26
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