



Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Annual Report 2024/2025

This report covers the work of the Cumbrian SACRE
serving the schools in Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness
for the period September 2024 to August 2025



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Working for **Cumberland Council** and
Westmorland & Furness Council

Contents

1. Words from the Chair

In the past year Cumbrian SACRE has regularly reflected on the strategic goals set out in its Development Plan to ensure that we focus on key priorities. Two areas that we have been determined to strengthen are Community Cohesion and Collective Worship. It is a pleasure to report that we have made some significant headway in both these endeavours during the last year.

An important aspect of our plan, and one that many SACRE members are passionate about is to contribute to community cohesion. To this end we have developed and strengthened links to various groups including those working in interfaith. This is raising the profile of SACRE in the wider community and creating collaborative opportunities for schools.

Work in this area over a long period provided the highlight of the year. Students from two Cumbria schools being invited to Westminster for a roundtable discussion on the matter of Religious Education and Freedom of Religion and Belief. MP Tim Farron showed the pupils around the Houses of Parliament and Lord Indarjit Singh chaired the meeting. You may have seen this reported in the local newspaper or heard a report on BBC Cumbria. The students were a credit to their schools and to our county.

To support teachers with responsibility for Collective Worship there has been several lots of CPD training. The material for this was developed in response to the survey we previously carried out which highlighted the areas of need. The high quality training has been well attended and provided useful information and resources.

We held another successful annual RE conference in June 2025. It was the thought provoking, interactive, ideas and resources filled day that attendees have come to expect. There is always a buzz of energy and renewed enthusiasm as teachers leave at the end of the day which is extremely gratifying.

It is important to close with well-deserved thanks to those who work so hard to support SACRE: our LA Officers, Rachel Laverack (Cumberland Council), and David Hodgkiss (Westmorland and Furness Council), our super-efficient and dependable Clerk, Sue McGaw and of course Jane Yates, RE advisor, RE Hubs representative and NASCRE Executive member etc, etc how does she do it? Their dedication, along with all our SACRE members is what ensures we are able to understand the needs of teachers and support them in their quest to provide good quality RE.

Karen O'Donoghue, Chair
Cumbrian SACRE

Background to Cumbrian SACRE

Cumbria, now functioning as a **ceremonial** county, following the 2023 local government organisation, continues to provide an important geographic and cultural context for the work of the Cumbrian SACRE. While Cumbria County Council and the six former district councils were replaced in April 2023 by the **Cumberland** and **Westmorland & Furness** unitary authorities, the term “Cumbria” remains widely used to describe the area as a whole, including for educational and community-focussed work.

The 2021 Census recorded a population of just under **500,000** across the area now comprising these two new authorities. Cumbria’s demographic profile reflects its predominantly rural character, with distinct patterns of religious identification, ethnicity, and language that shape local approaches to Religious Education.

Religious Diversity

Christianity remains the largest religious affiliation, with around **57 %** of residents identifying as Christian in 2021. The proportion of people identifying with non-Christian religions is small (around **1.3 %**), notably below the national average. At the same time, a substantial **35.8 %** of the population reported having **no religion**, reflecting national trends towards increasing secular identification.

District-level variation is evident: for example, in the area now covered by Cumberland, the percentage reporting no religion is higher than in some southern parts of the former county. These differences highlight the need for an RE curriculum that both reflects Cumbria’s Christian heritage and acknowledges the growing number of pupils from non-religious backgrounds.

Ethnic Diversity

Cumbria continues to be less ethnically diverse than many other parts of England. In 2021, **97.6 %** of residents identified as White. Nonetheless, the last decade saw a **44.8 % increase** in residents from Black, Asian, Mixed, and other minority ethnic groups — a notable demographic shift for a largely rural region.

The Asian population (around 4,900 people) and the Black population (around 1,200 people) remain small in absolute terms but have grown steadily. Migration, including EU migration and refugee resettlement, has contributed to this change. These developments mean schools may be increasingly likely to encounter greater cultural diversity within their cohorts.

Linguistic Diversity

English remains overwhelmingly the main language for **97.9 %** of residents aged 3+. Levels of limited English proficiency are very low, with only **0.4 %** reporting that they do not speak English well or at all. However, Cumbria does host a range of community languages, including **Polish, Romanian, Hungarian, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese, Chinese, Turkish, Tagalog, and Bulgarian**. As with ethnicity, linguistic diversity has increased since 2011.

Figures from 2021 census:

| Religion | Number of People | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|------------|
| Total Residents | 499, 846 | 100% |
| Christian | 284, 987 | 57% |
| No Religion | 179,007 | 35.8% |
| Not answered | 29, 149 | 5.8% |
| Muslim | 2,186 | 0.44% |
| Buddhist | 1,564 | 0.31% |
| Other religion | 1,907 | 0.38% |
| Hindu | 703 | 0.14% |
| Jewish | 237 | 0.05% |
| Sikh | 106 | 0.02% |

When and where did SACRE meet?

SACRE usually meets once a term. In 2024-2025 the following meetings took place:

9 October 2024 – University of Cumbria, Carlisle (also via Teams)

Attendance: 18 members present (Committee A – 6; Committee B – 3; Committee C – 1; Committee D – 2; Co-opted – 4, LA Officers – 2) This meeting was quorate.

The main agenda items were:

- SACRE Website
- SACRE Development Plan
- Local and National Update
- SACRE Newsletter

11 March 2025 – Voreda House, Penrith (also via Teams)

Attendance: 15 members present (Committee A – 6; Committee B – 2; Committee C – 0; Committee D – 2; Co-opted – 3; LA Officers - 2). This meeting was not quorate.

The main agenda items were:

- SACRE Conference 2025
- Supporting the work of SACRE in Secondary Schools
- SACRE links with other organisations
- Local and National Update
- NW RE Hubs

04 June 2025 – Pennine Way Primary School, Carlisle (also via Teams)

Attendance: 17 members present (Committee A – 6; Committee B - 1; Committee C – 4; Committee D – 3; Co-opted – 2; LA Officers – 1) This meeting was quorate.

The main agenda items were:

- SACRE Conference 2025
- SACRE links with other organisations
- SACRE Development Plan
- Northwest RE Hubs

When are future meetings?

Autumn meeting – 13 November 2025 – Voreda House (Penrith) - TBC

Spring meeting – 26 March 2026 –TBC

Summer meeting – 2 July 2026 – TBC

The new [SACRE Development plan 2024-2029](#) identifies that the main areas of focus for 2025-2026 will be to:

- Continue to evaluate the new SACRE Development Plan 2024-2029, reporting progress at each termly SACRE meeting
- Continue to support and consult on the implementation of the Cumbrian Agreed Syllabus (2023) through monitoring, relevant networks and CPD
- Develop a programme of CPD to continue to improve the provision of RE and Collective Worship run by the RE Adviser to SACRE and supported by the Deputy Director of Education for Carlisle Diocese.
- Review current guidance document for Collective Worship and revise where necessary
- Review and revise current guidance for RE Visits and Visitors where necessary
- Organise the annual Cumbria SACRE RE conference in June 2026 on a relevant theme
- Continue with monitoring activities as identified in the Development Plan
- Keep up to date with the DfE Curriculum and Assessment Review reporting
- Continue to connect with local interfaith groups and be informed about the work of the LA in terms of community cohesion and promote initiatives with local interfaith groups for schools.
- Continue to encourage schools to report RE in their newsletters, websites and social media – as part of promoting high quality RE
- Continue to be informed of national guidance from NASACRE and the LA in relation to community cohesion, SMSC and British Values

- Continue to increase teacher awareness of SACRE through newsletter, social media and LA and other relevant channels such as Learning Improvement Services (LIS), Governor Services, Early Years Team, Cumbria Association for Primary Headteachers (PHA), Cumbria Association for Secondary Headteachers (CASH)

2. A section on RE

What are SACRE's Responsibilities?

To advise the Local Authority (LA) on matters connected with: RE, CW

1. Religious Education (RE) This year SACRE has:

- Reviewed the new Development Plan (2024-2029) at each working group meeting, reporting to the main committee
- New constitution developed to include a process for determinations, and this was discussed at CPD for school governors in April 2025
- Provided information to update SACRE pages on the Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness Council websites.
- Carried out a variety of monitoring activities, including an online RE survey, analysis of School Workforce Census data, Ofsted comments for both Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness, review and report of secondary school websites
- Liaised with the Research Officer from NATRE to develop processes to find out how schools provide RE to all learners in KS4 and KS5 and how well learners are doing in KS4 and KS5 examinations, including the analysis of School Workforce Census data
- Continued to increase teacher awareness of SACRE through newsletter, social media and other channels, including LIS, Governor Services, CASH and PHA, Special School Network
- Connections made with LA advisers in Cumberland, including the Early Years Strategic Lead and the new LA secondary adviser
- Developed a programme of CPD to continue to support the implementation of the Locally Agreed Syllabus (2023) and improving Collective Worship, in conjunction with the Deputy Director of Education for Carlisle Diocese.
- Reviewed current guidance for Collective Worship and introduced the NASACRE SMSC toolkit to schools as part of CPD
- Organised the annual Cumbrian SACRE RE Conference in June 2025 with themes around community cohesion and the 'local' and a focus on Collective Worship/Inclusive Assemblies, with participation by RE Today, Picture News and the Faith and Belief Forum
- Provided input at the Primary Headteacher Association (PHA) meetings about RE and Collective Worship
- Continued to run a termly RE network group, including a new network for RE Leaders in special schools
- Developed stronger relationships with local interfaith groups and individuals through different members attending events (Carlisle Faith Walk, Iftars in Carlisle and Barrow, Carlisle One World Centre presentation about Hindu Dharma, LA Community Cohesion groups, CDEC Sing Up) and circulating and including local group events for schools in the SACRE newsletter
- Continued to be informed of national guidance from NASACRE and the LA in relation to community cohesion, Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and rights respecting, SMSC and British Values. Two members of Cumbrian SACRE are now part of the NASACRE Executive Committee (Shelia Gewolb and Jane Yates)
- Continued to raise profile and involvement in national RE organisations, including the North West RE Hub and AREIAC
- Four Cumbrian SACRE members attended the RE Hubs Accredited CPD and continue to be featured on the school speaker section for the North West of the [RE Hubs website](#)
- Encouraged schools to report RE in their newsletters, websites and social media – as part of promoting and celebrating high quality RE

What Professional Development Opportunities have there been?

The following courses for RE ran:

- Understanding Humanism – (13:15-15:15) 7 October 2024 – 3 attended
Provider – Jane Yates
- Understanding Humanism – 7 October 2024 (15:45-17:45) – 9 attended
Provider – Jane Yates
- Crash Course in Philosophy – 20 Jan 2025 (16.00 – 18.00) – 9 attended
Provider – John Semmens
- Improving the Provision and Quality of Collective Worship (13:00-14:30) 16 October 2024 – 24 attended
Provider – Jane Yates and Laura Watson
- Improving the Provision and Quality of Collective Worship (16:00-17:30) 16 October 2024 – 24 attended
Provider – Jane Yates and Laura Watson
- SAPERE Philosophy for Children (Level 1) (09:00-16:00) 13 and 14th March 2025 11 attended
(4 from Cumbrian schools, the rest from outside of Cumbria) Provider – Jane Yates
- Disciplinary Approaches to RE – (09.00 – 16.00) 6 March 2025 11 attended Providers – Jane Yates and Laura Watson
- Improving the Provision and Quality of Collective Worship/Inclusive Assemblies - (18:00 – 20:00) 29 April 12 attended – Jane Yates and Laura Watson

17 June 2025 - SACRE/RE Conference – Guest Speaker Ian Nicholson, National RE Adviser (RE Today) Venue: North Lakes Hotel, Penrith – 56 delegates attended.

The conference was chaired by Karen O'Donoghue (Chair) and Jane Yates (RE Adviser to Cumbrian SACRE) and supported by Cumbrian SACRE members who facilitated table groups. A workshop about parental engagement was delivered by Laura Roper from the Faith and Belief Forum, with Natalie Fletcher from Crosthwaite C of E and Eleanor Hooson Beetham C of E School. An early years session on RE and sustainability/climate awareness in the Early Years was developed with the Early Years Team (Katie Clark), CDEC (Alison Hooper) and Gayle Fennell from Bothel C of E Primary. Pupils and headteacher (David Grimshaw) from Inglewood Juniors joined Lisa Lodge from Picture News to talk about how they are using the weekly Picture News materials as part of assemblies.

3. A section on Collective Worship

Collective Worship in community schools

A series of online CPD on Collective Worship was led by Jane Yates (RE Adviser to Cumbrian SACRE) and Laura Watson (Diocesan Deputy Director for Education) during autumn 2024. Recordings of these sessions have been made available in the SACRE newsletter. The CPD provided an opportunity to share some of the findings from the collective worship monitoring report, provide up to date information and share resources. The Cumbrian SACRE [Guidance to Schools on Collective Worship](#) (2020) was reviewed and will be updated next year as part of preparations for further training on 'using inclusive assemblies to promote SMSC in schools'.

Determinations - To allow any exception to the law that Collective Worship be broadly or mainly Christian SACRE has received no requests for a determination for exemption from the law. As part of developing the [new constitution](#) following Local Government Re-organisation, a process is outlined to respond to any requests for determinations in section 2 on the SACRE duties.

SACRE hears any complaints brought to the LA about RE and collective worship. No complaints from parents were received this year.

What is the RE and Collective Worship support for Cumbrian schools?

For secondary and primary schools please email Rachel Laverack, LA Support Officer – Cumberland, rachel.laverack@cumberland.gov.uk or David Hodgkiss LA Support Officer – Westmorland & Furness, david.hodgkiss@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

4. A section on examinations for 2025

GCSE Results

Westmorland & Furness

| Year | Number of pupils entered | % grade 4+ | % grade 5+ | % grade 7+ |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 2025 | 738 | 66% | 54% | 23% |
| 2024 | 807 | 68% | 57% | 22% |

Cumberland

| Year | Number of pupils entered | % grade 4+ | % grade 5+ | % grade 7+ |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| 2025 | 522 | 63% | 50% | Not known |
| 2024 | 580 | 66% | Not known | Not known |

National

| Year | Number of pupils entered | % grade 4+ | % grade 5+ | % grade 7+ |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 2025 | 204914 | 71% | 60% | 32% |
| 2024 | 223034 | 72.5% | 59.7% | 31.1% |

N.B. Data 'not known' is that which is not available through the DfE.

A Level results

Westmorland & Furness

| Year | Number of pupils entered | % A* to C |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------|
| 2025 | 36 | 81% |
| 2024 | 39 | 72% |

Cumberland

| Year | Number of pupils entered | % A* to C |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| 2025 | 51 | 82.4% |
| 2024 | 52 | 48.1% |

National

| Year | Number of pupils entered | % A* to C |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| 2025 | 16439 | 81.2% |
| 2024 | 16622 | 78.8% |

NB: Grades for 5 entries in one school were suppressed due to low numbers. This data was therefore removed from the above summary table

This is the second year we have included a results section in our annual report. Figures have been provided by the SACRE LA officers through their data teams. The data shows a decline in the number of GCSE RS entries in both Councils which reflects the national data. Percentage of grades awarded during 2025 are lower in both Councils, and slightly lower than in 2024. It must be noted there are some schools in both Councils that enter the whole year group in GCSE RS which may account for the wide range of results grading.

For A Level, there is a slight reduction in entries in both Councils, which reflects the national decline in A Level RS entries. It is encouraging to see that grades awarded in both Councils for 2025 are in line with national results, and slightly over in Cumberland. It

must be noted that results for one school in Cumberland Council were suppressed which may account for the big difference between 2024 and 2025. See note above.

It must be noted that we are seeing increasing numbers of schools offering A Level Philosophy and/or A Level Sociology instead of A Level Religious Studies – both of which include a section related to religion. There are varying reasons for this change by schools from lack of teacher expertise and interest to teach RS, timetabling options, and a lack of uptake by the students themselves. Therefore, a reduction of A Level RS entries in 2025 may not necessarily indicate a reduction in interest by students for studying religion. It would be interesting to investigate this further with our schools next year and find ways to support this wider study of religion at KS5.

5. A section on links with other bodies

SACRE has continued to develop strong links with the Carlisle Diocesan Education Team, Cumbria Development Education Centre (CDEC), RE Hubs and AREIAC. Jane Yates (RE Adviser to Cumbrian SACRE) continues her role as North West RE Hubs which has provided Cumbrian teachers with more regional connections and opportunities. Increasing links have been made with local inter faith organisations through SACRE members attending or speaking at events, and through circulation of the newsletter to raise awareness of the role of SACRE.

Queen Katherine School and Grayrigg C of E Primary School have completed the second year of the AREIAC Young Ambassadors for RE Project. Both schools were involved in an online parliamentary event during November 2024 and then a special parliamentary roundtable event at Westminster in July 2025, with involvement from local MP Tim Farron. RE Ambassadors from Queen Katherine School presented about their activities and took part in a special event for Y10 pupils from all over the North West, in conjunction with ITE RE students from Edge Hill University. Information and videos about the project can be found on the [project page](#) of the AREIAC website with a [specific section](#) for the activities of the two schools in the North West. There has been a continued termly virtual session for KS2 classes in Cumbria with the Redbridge [Ambassadors for Faith and Belief\(AfAB\)](#) programme. Cumbria SACRE has continued to develop links with Humanist UK. During October, the Humanist member of SACRE ran bespoke CPD for teachers in Cumbria.

6. A section on other areas of SACRE involvement locally

SACRE members continue to be involved in school speaking both in Cumbria and across the North West. During Inter Faith Week 2024, an online event was held for teachers to meet school speakers who are featured on the North West RE Hubs website. Recordings of school speaker introductions are available on a resource for teachers.

| Title and date of event | Worldview voices involved | School | Age Range |
|---|---|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Faith and Belief Panel February 2025 | Christian: Methodist; Baha'i, Buddhist, Humanist | Keswick School | Year 12 and some Year 10s |



A row of faith and belief representatives at a long table on a stage in a hall of students.

7. A section on SACRE's own arrangements (statutory responsibilities)

Who was on Cumbria SACRE in 2024-2025

Chair: *Karen O'Donoghue*

Committee A: Christian denominations (other than Church of England) & other faiths

Mohammed Dhalech (Muslim)

Wendy Ridley (Buddhist)

Sheila Gewolb (Jewish) (Vice Chair)

Jane Yates (Humanist)

Karen O'Donoghue (Baha'i)

Rev David Milner (Methodist)

Rashmi Manemi (Hindu) Substitute Shweta Marali

resigned

Micheal Watmough (Quaker)

Committee B: Church of England

Richard Cox

Sarah Harrison

Laura Watson – Substitute Charlotte Tudway

Committee C: Teacher Associations

James Douglas (NEU)

Irene Roberts-Green (NAHT)

Brian Eaton (COMMUNITY)

Bernadette Little (NASUWT)

Katherine France (NATRE)

Committee D: Local Authority

Neil Hughes (Liberal Democrat)

Janet Battye (Liberal Democrat)

resigned

John Murray (Liberal Democrat)

Elaine Lynch (Labour)

Sue Sanderson (Liberal

Democrat) resigned

Christopher Southward (Labour)

Co-opted Members

Georgia Prescott

resigned

Vicky Bunter (Dowdales School)

Carolyn Reade

LA Support Officer (W&F) David Hodgkiss

Clerk to SACRE Sue McGaw

LA Support Officer (Cumberland)

Rachel Laverack

What is the SACRE Budget?

SACRE's budget covers the cost of meetings, venue expenses, supply cover for teacher members, postage, photocopying, travel expenses, and subscription costs for membership of national organisations for RE. Additional resources are obtained from the County Council when necessary for the review, development and publication of the revised Agreed Syllabus.

In the year 2024-2025 the total amount spent was £4,011.48 (Travel expenses £761.48; Training fees £1630; Subscriptions £570; Professional RE Adviser Fees £1050).

Anyone wishing to receive the minutes of termly meetings can contact Sue McGaw by email sue.mcgaw@cumberland.gov.uk or visit Cumbria SACRE's website:

Useful Websites

<https://www.cumberland.gov.uk/schools-and-education/support-and-information-schools/standing-advisory-council-religious-education>

<https://www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/schools-and-education/information-schools/standing-advisory-council-religious-education>

<http://www.nasacre.org.uk/>

<https://www.re-hubs.uk/>

<http://www.reonline.org.uk/>

<https://natre.org.uk/>

We welcome all schools in Cumbria to share photographic evidence of RE and Collective Worship on social media using the hashtags #CumbriaSharingRE #CumbrianSACRE. Examples of RE & CW from schools is shared in our half termly newsletter.

Facebook: RE Teachers in Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness. This is a closed social media group for primary and secondary teachers to enable an information exchange for RE and CW, training, events and new resources. Cumbria SACRE members also use this as a forum to keep teachers updated. Current membership is 181.

SACRE is pleased to receive photographic, written or anecdotal evidence of good work in RE and Collective Worship in Cumbria's schools. If you have things you wish to share, please contact Sue McGaw on 01228 226805, email sue.mcgaw@cumberland.gov.uk

Non-members are welcome to attend, to observe SACRE meetings. Please contact Sue McGaw (email sue.mcgaw@cumberland.gov.uk) for confirmation of times and venues.

Do you have any comments on this SACRE Report?

Responses to this Annual Report from school governors, elected members, head teachers, teachers or members of the public are welcomed by SACRE. Please email Rachel Laverack, LA Support Officer – Cumberland rachel.laverack@cumberland.gov.uk David Hodgkiss, LA Support Officer – Westmorland & Furness, david.hodgkiss@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk