

Swindon SACRE Annual Report 2012-2013

Chair's Introduction

Swindon is well known as a railway town (if not THE Railway Town). Home of the Great Western Railway or as GWR was sometimes known, God's Wonderful Railway. But why Swindon? Supposedly it was because Swindon marked the halfway point between London and Bristol - and before geographers write in - halfway in term of power and fuel used. It became a place of innovation, invention and high technology.

We are still a town of innovation and technology, with hi-tech manufacturing and modern service industries sitting alongside the general services needed to keep towns and village running, amidst a thin curtain of agriculture.

Yet Swindon's history predates Mr. I. K. Brunel. The area around Swindon had long been a place of long journeys, the Celts using the river systems, many generations travelling the Ridgeway, both route-ways from the great spiritual centres of Stonehenge and Woodhenge as well as our more local centre of Avebury. The local countryside includes the great white horses. We also sit just above the old Great West Road (A4) and on the modern equivalent, the M4.

Though much of Swindon Borough is new in historic terms, up in Wrde Hill (Highworth) we have a parish church yard in which a Civil War skirmish took place and one of the oldest congregational churches in the area (now the United Reformed Church) and overlooking the main town we have the remains of Blunsdon Abbey. The massive growth of the late nineteen and late twentieth centuries sits within this older context.

Religious Education and Collective Worship, the parts of school life for which SACRE has responsibility, are about bringing together the old and the new. About helping each generation of children and young people, whether they have a personal religious faith or not, understand the key world faiths, other faiths and all the ethical and social issues which the whole of humanity seek to live with or challenge. What can Abraham and the Buddha say about nuclear weapons or abortion? Can we listen to the Kings Saul and David about friendship, leadership or ethnic cleansing? So how do sacred works written down hundreds or thousands of years ago speak to and influence people in (what some people call) this twenty-first century? Or how do those pupils and students with non-religious views address major ethical issues and everyday choices? It is about equipping the young of Swindon to live in a time when the growing majority of the global population are people of faith yet in our own national context it is seen as less important and valid. A time when some of the world's nations and conflicts still are drawn on religious lines, yet most religious leaders would preach a message of peace. To be able to understand the other and their neighbours, wherever they are from and whatever they believe.

Religious Education remains an entitlement of all school and academy pupils from Year R to Year 13 and an option which has to be made available to those who want it in FE colleges. Daily acts of collective worship (whatever that entails) remain a legal entitlement for all school and academy pupils. However reports to government and our own local understanding show that provision of RE and collective worship is not meeting these requirements. Government has no plans to address this, but we are keen to support our local schools and academies in this area. Indeed, we are grateful that the local authority and the local academies continue to work together with us to support all the pupils in this area.

This report contains information about: our SACRE meetings; teacher network meetings; exam results; work from local pupils and students.

As a SACRE we began the year with the meeting chaired by Councillor Doreen Dart, before her death. Her memorial service was a fitting tribute to her and all her passions, including SACRE and the children and young people of the borough. We have sought to build on her legacy of leadership and plan in the coming year to increase our size and representation. I thank my fellow SACRE members for all they did in this year and for their work in the future.

If SACRE can help you and your school in the areas of religious education and collective worship, please contact us. We have a number of very experienced and knowledgeable enthusiasts who are keen to share our time to help you. We hope you find this report helpful to you.

Mark A. Cawte, Chair, Swindon SACRE