

## STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

TUESDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2017

PRESENT:-

**Group A:**  
Christian Denominations and  
Other Religions or Religious  
Denominations

Jo Backus (Buddhist Community), Mr David  
Burbidge (Baptist Church), Reverend David  
Howell (Swindon Evangelical Alliance), Mr M S  
Khan (Muslim Community) and Mr Dinesh Patel  
(Hindu Community)

**Group B:**  
Church of England

Reverend Norma McKemey

**Group C:**  
Teacher Organisations

Mrs Tracy Mason and Mrs Emma McCarthy

**Group D:**  
Councillors

Councillors Fay Howard (Chair),  
Matthew Courtliff and Gary Sumner

Also in attendance:

Katy Staples (SACRE Advisor) Jo Garton and  
Fidelma Meehan (Baha'i Community)

Apologies for absence were received from Peter Nathan, Reverend Clive Deverell, Mr Gurchoran Singh Lyal, Miss Janet French, Ms Steph Mundin, Mrs Lottie O'Brien, Mrs Mandy Sandleton, Mr Tony McAteer, Sarah Foulkes, Councillor Fionuala Foley, Councillor Barbara Parry and Michelle Howard

### 12. **Appointment of Chair**

Resolved: That Councillor Fay Howard be appointed Chair for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2017/18.

### 13. **Appointment of Vice-Chair**

Resolved: That Jo Garton be appointed Vice-Chair for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2017/18.

(Following the meeting and after consulting the SACRE Constitution, it was noted that a Vice-Chair would need to be appointed from one of the four Representative Groups. As Jo Garton was a co-opted member and not from one of the four Representative Groups, she was not eligible to be Vice-Chair. A new appointment would be made at the next SACRE meeting)

### 14. **Declarations of Interest**

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

### 15. **Public Question Time**

No public questions were received during the meeting.

## **16. Chair's Announcements**

The SACRE were reminded that the annual South West Conference for SACREs is being held on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2018 at Dillington House, Ilminster. The theme for the conference is 'Religious Education: What are we doing? Where are we going?'. Fidelma Meehan and Jo Backus expressed interest in attending the event.

## **17. Minutes and Matters Arising**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017, be confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- To amend the spelling of Jo Garton's name in Minute 7, Resolved (2) and (6);
- To remove the word 'secondary' in Minute 7, Resolved (2).

### Matters Arising:

#### 1. Commission on Religious Education – Draft Response – Minute 8/17

The SACRE Advisor confirmed that a copy of the draft letter to the Commission on Religious Education had been forwarded to the local MP's for comment, as requested at the last SACRE meeting.

The SACRE noted that the local MP's had not responded to the letter within the timescales given, and therefore the SACRE Advisor had forwarded the letters to the Commission on behalf of the SACRE.

The Chair explained that she would contact the local MP's asking for comments on the original letter.

#### 2. Guidance on Responses to National and/or Local Crises

The SACRE Advisor reminded members that she had been asked at the previous SACRE meeting, to prepare guidance for RE Teachers about how they could respond to national and/or local crises. She advised that suitable material was currently available on this matter and she was proposing to signpost schools to this guidance.

## **18. Interim CoRE Report and SACRE's Response**

The SACRE considered an interim report from the Commission on Religious Education about Religious Education for All.

The SACRE Advisor informed the SACRE that the Commission on Religious Education had asked for responses to a number of questions raised within the interim report. The SACRE then made the following comments on the specific

questions within the interim report:

1. The National Entitlement for RE:

- Members were concerned that there was an absence of explicit reference to Spirituality and Spiritual Development in the description of Religious Education.
- The explicit expectation of the inclusion of Dharmic religions as well as Abrahamic ones was omitted. A phrase like “young people should be enabled to understand a variety of world views in order to make meaning. These should include Dharmic religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism as well as Abrahamic faiths such as Judaism , Christianity and Islam and non- religious world views” was suggested.
- The possible omission of the epistemological approach to the study of religions which would include an exploration of truth and truth claims.
- The relationship and contribution of Religious Education to the greater educational endeavour of exploring “What makes a good human being?” and “What can religions and beliefs offer in terms of what it means to be a human and how we can we all get along together” could be strengthened.
- Support for the proposal that there would be a new KS4 entitlement for RE in the form of a nationally expected accredited qualification that was achievable by most schools in less curriculum time than the current GCSE. This course would need to include sufficient RE content and pedagogical rigour that it could not be squeezed into a few token “drop down days” shared with PSHE.

2. Name for the subject:

- a. SACRE was keen not to lose the word Religion from the title of the subject. It felt that any title should be sufficiently simple that a Year 1 class had a hope of understanding the content of this curriculum area. Therefore terms such as “Religion Beliefs and Spirituality” were all discussed - but no conclusion was reached.

3. Agreed Syllabus Conference:

- a. Swindon has adopted an “RE Today” Syllabus within the last Academic year.
- b. It is acknowledged that the Syllabus has seen an improvement in the teaching of RE and schools are reporting a higher level of engagement from pupils.
- c. At the time of the last Agreed Syllabus Conference it was decided that there was not enough capacity within Swindon Council to write and devise a local syllabus and that adopting a syllabus written by “RE Today” Services was the best and most affordable option available.
- d. There is insufficient local funding, capacity or talent to realistically write a locally agreed syllabus and therefore either the Government needs to ensure sufficient earmarked funding for SACREs or to accept that SACREs may need a Nationally Agreed syllabus for RE.

- e. It is felt that, in real terms, what is occurring is “market led” RE curriculums. This may offer greater subject expertise and be preferable to successive Secretaries of State deciding what Religious Education should be, and what service it should provide to the prevailing political agenda.
  - f. If the Government has no will to change the National Settlement for Religious Education and it seeks that RE should remain locally determined by SACREs and Agreed Syllabus Conferences, then it needs to support this current legislative framework by funding these bodies adequately.
4. A renewed and expanded role for SACREs:
- a. Swindon is a small Unitary Authority with very few schools that are not Academies (all Secondary Schools are now Academies). It has to make further quite radical cuts to its services in the next year.
  - b. Swindon SACRE has a current budget of £5000 a year.
  - c. Swindon SACRE is supported by a team of committed volunteers who work hard but it is barely functional as it currently exists and fulfills its duties to schools with the help of charitable giving through the Jerusalem Trust and St Matthias Trust “Learn Teach Lead” project whose funding is finite and will finish in the next year.
  - d. The possibility of a renewed and expanded role for Swindon SACRE would be impossible without considerable ring-fenced National funding.

The SACRE Advisor explained that she would prepare a written response based on the discussions and issues raised at this meeting. A copy of the draft letter would be circulated to SACRE members for comment prior to a final version being sent to the Commission on Religious Education.

Resolved – That the SACRE Advisor prepares a draft response to the Commission on Religious Education interim report, based on the discussions and issues raised at this meeting. A copy of the draft letter would be circulated to SACRE members prior to a final version being sent to the Commission on Religious Education.

## **19. Development Plan 2016-2018**

The SACRE received the updated Swindon SACRE Development Plan 2016-18, which was simplified at the last meeting to ensure the Plans deliverability.

The SACRE Advisor set out how the goals included in the Development Plan had been delivered during 2017 and how the remainder would be delivered during 2018, as follows:

- Goal 1 – Improving Standards of pupil engagement and attainment.
  - Hub meetings taking place to offer more effective support to schools and improve the quality of Religious Education.
  - Example of work undertaken by Wanborough Primary School during Inter Faith Week.
  - Annual RE Conference 2018 being held in Bristol on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2018, with a focus on “Clearing the Fog” – Demystifying Key Beliefs of World Faiths.
- Goal 2 – Assess the impact of the new locally agreed syllabus launched in 2016.

- Interviews with school children undertaken by Jo Garton. It was noted that children enjoyed RE lessons if the teacher enjoyed teaching the lessons.
- An electronic survey would be sent to schools in March 2018.
- Goal 3 – To develop and enhance the possibilities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development offered through Collective Worship.
  - Meeting to undertake a review of Collective Worship planned for 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2018. Contributions from SACRE members was welcomed.
- Goal 4 – Enhance the vital role that RE must play in contributing to understanding diversity, including through offering direct opportunities for engagement for pupils.
  - Directory of key speakers and places of worship in Swindon being developed.
  - The importance of diversity amongst speakers and places of worship was highlighted.

Resolved – That the Development Plan actions taken during 2017 and to be undertaken during 2018 be noted.

## **20. Feedback from Hub Meetings**

The SACRE received an update from Emma McCarthy, Hub Leader, about the recent RE Hub meeting. The Hub Leader explained that both primary and secondary schools attended the meeting and two of the teachers spoke about their recent attendance at the Learn, Teach, Lead RE conference.

Other highlights from the meeting included:

- Support for new RE co-ordinators,
- A new Hub Facebook Group
- Visit from Fidelma Meehan – SACRE Co-opted member

The SACRE members also raised the following general issues:

- The use of Discovery RE schemes of work by some Swindon schools following the launch of the new agreed syllabus.
- Accessing the link to the new agreed syllabus.
- The need to investigate the use of the new agreed syllabus by all Swindon schools.

Resolved – (1) That the feedback from Hub meetings be noted.  
 (2) That the link to the new agreed syllabus be circulated to SACRE members.  
 (3) That details of the Swindon RE Teachers Facebook Group be circulated to SACRE members.  
 (4) That each SACRE member be allocated a number of schools to investigate their usage of the new agreed syllabus, with feedback at the next SACRE meeting in March 2018.

## **21. Date and Time of the Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the SACRE would be held on Monday,

26<sup>th</sup> March 2018, commencing at 6.00pm at the Gateway Church, Swindon.