

Swindon SACRE 27th June 2017

Commission on Religious Education Call for Evidence

Purpose of Paper: To ask SACRE to consider what evidence Swindon SACRE wishes to offer to the Commission on Religious Education

SACRE being asked to: Read a proposal from the Adviser and decide whether this evidence should be submitted on behalf of SACRE and what amendments might be needed

“We hope that you will illustrate your responses with reference to your own work, observations and experiences over the years”

The terms of reference for the commission are:

- To consider the nature, purposes, and scope of religious education.
- To identify the enabling factors that currently promote high quality RE, and the barriers that currently limit it.
- To identify what changes are needed to ensure the highest quality provision of RE.
- To ensure that recommendations focus on realistic and specific proposals aimed at both immediate and long-term implementation in the context of continuing educational reform.

The Commission on Religious Education has suggested that people submitting evidence consider the following questions

1. What should be included in the scope and content of RE?
2. What changes (if any) should there be to the current legal framework for RE?
3. Should there be a common baseline entitlement for RE which applies to all types of school?
4. How should the development of RE standards, curricula, or syllabuses be best organised?
5. Are there changes to primary and secondary teacher education that could improve the delivery of high quality RE?
6. What factors lead to high quality learning and teaching in RE, and what are the main obstacles to this?

You are at complete liberty to address only those issues above which most concern you or in which you have expertise.

The adviser suggests that we submit evidence about the issue that most concerns us as a SACRE which at this time is to do with:

3) Common baseline entitlement to RE

Currently the as the legal framework stands there is a legal requirement for all schools to teach RE to all pupils registered in maintained schools in England from KS1 - 5.

For sometime this has been flouted in 6th forms and the legal requirement for RE at post 16 in non religious foundation schools is probably a necessity that should be dropped from any legal expectations.

However with the introduction of the EBacc and the pressure on schools to help students achieve high standards in English and Maths and to have high achievements in the “bucket of 8” subjects as a published indicator of school success, Religious Education has suffered.

The Academic content of the new GCSE curriculum is weighty and cannot be successfully be taught in the limited time that has in the past been afforded RE when short course RE still counted as a performance indicator. Therefore RE for all at GCSE has suffered and schools have cut curriculum time and in some instances have dropped RE totally except for occasional “drop down days”.

RE teachers in Secondary Schools in Swindon have reported that their curriculum has been cut and staff have lost jobs and find themselves isolated and teaching RE to the whole school with less resources.

One member of staff from Nova Hreod Academy has been asked to teach the whole year at a time : “I have been given the role of planning fortnightly drop down time (non examination) for year 10 (current year 9) next academic year. The idea is that it will be delivered to the whole of the year group for one lesson (75 minutes) a fortnight (a total of 15 across the year).

At Lydiard Park Academy the only RE specialist teacher has resigned “I am no longer head of RS. I handed in my notice as they have got rid of RE at KS4. They are going to do a unit of it in year 10 PSHE: 6, one hour lessons,(which is taught in tutor time by non-specialists). I didn’t want to be part of that so I handed in my notice as a non- violent protest!”

At Isambard Academy the school to be renamed in September 2017, as “Abbey Park School.” In partnership with the Park Academies (who also run Lydiard Park Academy) both RE teachers are actively looking for new jobs as “....in a nutshell; RE isn't going to exist in its current format from September onwards.”

In 2015 and 2016 Swindon had the lowest levels of public examination entries for RE nationally.

Therefore as Swindon SACRE, we are hugely concerned about the entitlement to RE for KS4 pupils. Evidence is showing that several Academies or Academy chains in their struggle to deliver measurable outcomes are not meeting their legal requirement for RE or are complying in such a cursory manner that no depth of religious literacy can possibly be achieved.

We would like there to be an enforced curriculum entitlement to RE that is part of a limiting judgement in the Ofsted framework in order to pupils to be able to properly understand the religions and beliefs of modern Britain.

Katy Staples Adviser to SACRE