

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

TUESDAY, 15 MARCH 2011

PRESENT:-

Group A:
Christian Denominations and Other Religions or Religious Denominations

Mrs Helen Hancox (United Reformed Church), Reverend David Howell (Swindon Evangelical Alliance), Mr Dinesh Patel (Hindu Community), Mr Arun Bedi (Sikh Community), Mr Mark Cawte (Methodist), Mr Tony McAteer (Catholic Community) and Mr David Burbidge (Baptist Church)

Group B:
Church of England

Reverend Norma McKemey, Mrs Penny Summers, Reverend Arthur Woo and Miss Janet French

Group C:
Teacher Organisations

Ms Jo Garton (Vice-Chair in the Chair), Mrs Tracy Mason, Mrs Mandy Sandleton and Miss Lottie Rowe

Group D:
Councillors

Councillors Michael Bray and Raymond Fisher

Also in attendance:

Katy Staples (SACRE Adviser), Paddy Bradley (Director of Schools and Learning) and Sarah Lawrence (Clerk to the SACRE)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Doreen Dart, Councillor Junab Ali, Councillor Janet Heenan, Ms Steph Mundin, Ms Helen Miller and Sarah Foulkes.

30. **Declarations of Interest**

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

31. **Public Question Time**

No public questions were received during the meeting.

32. **Minutes**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th December 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to a correction to Minute 26 bullet point 2, that Penny Summers assisted with the Primary Network session on foundation materials rather than leading the session.

Matters Arising – 1) Further to Minute 26, it was agreed that actions outstanding from the 2010/11 Delivery Plan would be carried forward to the next Plan where appropriate, to be discussed later in the agenda. 2) Further to Minute 25, Mr Mark Cawte advised that Mrs Sarah Lane Cawte had been formally nominated to be the deputy representative to represent the United Reformed Church on the SACRE.

The Clerk confirmed that this would be the subject of report for formal approval at the next meeting.

33. Welcome to Gorse Hill Baptist

Mr David Burbidge welcomed the SACRE to Gorse Hill Baptist Church. He advised the SACRE on the history of the Baptist Church and the beliefs and work of Gorse Hill Baptist Church in particular, and answered questions.

Resolved – That Mr David Burbidge be thanked for his interesting presentation and for hosting the SACRE meeting.

34. Celebrating RE Month

Ms Katy Staples presented a list and the press coverage of events which had taken place in schools for Celebrating RE Month, and commended the members of the SACRE who had attended these events, and made links with local schools. Individual members of the SACRE reported back on the activities they had attended:

- a) Reverend Norma McKemey had visited the mosque with children from Liden School, and advised on the way in which the children received a presentation, and were welcomed and had their questions answered.
- b) Reverend Arthur Woo and Penny Summers reported back on a visit to the Sikh Temple and the quality of the presentation and welcome, which enabled the children to experience a sense of reference within a place of worship. Reverend Arthur Woo had also visited a local church with the same set of children.
- c) Ms Jo Garton tabled a description of her visit to South Marston C of E Primary, and the quality of a storyteller of bible stories, bringing the stories to life.
- d) Mr Dinesh Patel advised on his visits to Orchid Vale Primary and Covingham Park Primary Schools within encounter days focused on Holi and Encountering Hinduism. He was able to use a 15 foot timeline to show how Hinduism fitted within key events in history and culture which the children could identify with, and in the context of other faiths.

Ms Katy Staples advised that Swindon Academy were holding a session on 16th March, quizzing Bishop Lee about his Faith and Medical Ethics, and asked any member who would be free to attend to contact her. In addition, Miss Lottie Rowe advised that her secondary class would be holding an early morning video conference with a group of children in another country in the next few weeks, to discuss issues of difference and faith, as part of a Face to Faith Project.

Resolved – 1) That the SACRE welcomed and celebrated the range of events held locally as part of the national Celebrating RE Month.

35. Annual Report and Development Plan

The SACRE considered a report of the SACRE Advisor setting out the proposed Annual Report of the SACRE for the period September 2009 to September 2010, and a proposed Development Plan for 2010-13. Ms Katy Staples advised that the Annual Report this year was written in a shorter more accessible style, including examples of local RE, so that it could be sent to schools and governors.

Mr Paddy Bradley (Director of Schools and Learning) advised the SACRE on the context for Religious Education examination results, which were included in the Annual Report. It was recognised that the reduced amount of information available on teaching and the extent to which schools were delivering on the RE curriculum, was not unique to RE, but was true of many subjects where inspection reports no longer commented directly on individual subject teaching. It was noted that the number of A-C grades achieved in RE in local schools was generally on an upward trend in the last few years, and was above the national average. A number of schools were choosing to teach either a full or short course curriculum at GCSE or to offer RE through encounter or alternate courses. There had been a 17% reduction in RE short-courses taken, and a 15% increase in full-course, although the overall numbers of pupils taking one or other had gone down. The SACRE asked for additional information to be provided to them for the Annual Report on the number of pupils in the cohort to give a context to the number of pupils taking RE examinations. It was suggested that the report might also commend specific schools where there was an excellent offer and take-up of RE examinations.

The SACRE felt that RE made a particular curriculum contribution, enabling children to discuss and question in a way that benefitted other learning. In relation to this, it was asked if the Director of Schools and Learning could provide information to SACRE members on the extent to which schools that have RE examinations, show better overall examination results, in terms of the number achieving 5 GCSE A to C grades and 2 A levels.

The SACRE was concerned that the plans for the English Baccalaureate, which currently did not include RE, was leading to schools placing less priority on RE teaching at secondary level, which could also have implications for the recruitment of specialist RE co-ordinators and teachers. As part of the next agenda item, it was agreed the SACRE would discuss a letter to go to the Local Authority, Head Teachers and Governors, and be copied to the MPs, on the legal requirement for schools to teach RE to all children. The concern that RE teaching was being marginalised in schools should also be highlighted to all Members of the Council.

The SACRE discussed the SACRE Development Plan for 2010-13. One of the key tasks for the next year was the dissemination of the Update to the Locally Agreed Syllabus. It was agreed that the actions outstanding in the last plan in relation to Collective Worship be included in this Development Plan. However, the option for a Year 4 interfaith project be deferred for the time being.

Resolved – 1) That the SACRE Annual Report attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved, subject to updates to SACRE member titles, and the inclusion of additional information set out above.

2) Further to 1) the SACRE Advisor finalise the report and submit it to the national body, and distribute it to Schools and Governors via Schools Online and the Governors' Newsletter.

3) The Director of Schools and Learning provide additional information to SACRE members on the extent to which schools providing Religious Education examinations, are those achieving the highest levels of 5 GCSEs Grades A-C and 2 A-Levels, included Religious Education in those results.

4) The SACRE Development Plan 2010-2013, attached at Appendix 2 to the report

be approved, subject to the inclusion of the outstanding actions in relation to Collective Worship from the 2010/11 Plan.

36. Implications of National Developments in Religious Education

The SACRE considered a report of the SACRE Advisor on the national developments in relation to the provision of RE and the implications for local teaching. As had been discussed as part of the last Agenda item, it was noted that the humanities requirement in the English Baccalaureate did not currently include Religious Education. There had been public lobbying on the qualifying subjects and the Government was currently reviewing this position. However, there was concern that schools were already placing less priority on the teaching of Religious Education as a result. It was part of the SACRE's role to advise the Local Authority of such concerns and to help schools to fulfil their statutory obligation to teach Religious Education. The SACRE reviewed a draft letter to go to all schools reminding them of their legal responsibilities and a short survey to Secondary Schools asking for their current practice for teaching RE and future intentions.

Resolved – 1) That the report be noted.

2) That the letter attached as Report Appendix 2 be sent to the Local Authority, Headteachers and Governors and copied for information to the MPs, to set out the need for schools to continue to teach Religious Education in accordance with statutory requirements and the Locally Agreed Syllabus.

3) That the survey attached as Agenda Appendix 2 be sent to Secondary Schools, subject to a change for the questions to ask about the current year 2010/11, with an additional question asking if schools plan to make any significant changes for next year 2011/12.

37. Feedback from Network Meetings

Mrs Penny Summers and Ms Janet French reported back on the Primary Network meeting that had taken place on 20th January, which focused on using Solihull guidance for foundation stage teaching. They confirmed that teachers were enthusiastic about the guidance, which was easily accessible and included good resources. It was noted that the existing version was available online and a new version would be published soon, and it would be good to include a link on Schools Online, particularly for new RE co-ordinators. The next Primary network meeting would be held on 12th May, focused on the update of the locally agreed syllabus.

Ms Katy Staples and Mrs Tracy Mason reported on the Secondary Network Meeting held on 26th January 2011. This had been attended by 6 teachers and had been a good discussion on good practice for the teaching of GCSE RE and strategies for effective revision. The next session had been scheduled for 16th June, to discuss the update of the locally agreed syllabus, but would be moved as this was now the launch day for the Locally Agreed Syllabus Update.

Resolved – 1) That the Network Meeting update be noted.

2) That an online link to the Solihull Foundation Stage material be placed on

Schools Online.

3) The SACRE Advisor arrange a new date for the next Secondary Network Meeting.

38. Date and Time of the Next Meetings

The SACRE noted that the provisional dates for SACRE meetings for the next municipal year were 7th June 2011 (combined with an Agreed Syllabus Conference meeting), 27th September 2011, 6th December 2011, and 27th March 2012. These dates were subject to confirmation by Council on 14th April 2011.

The Vice-Chair closed the meeting and thanked Mr David Burbidge of Gorse Hill Baptist Church for hosting the SACRE meeting.