

Update on the Face to Faith project

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Date: 9th March 2009

Author: Director of Community / Community Support Manager

Parish / Wards Affected: All

Purpose

- To update the SACRE on the implementation of the NASACRE *Face to Faith* project.

Recommendation

SACRE is requested -

- To note the content of this report.
- To authorise the Director of Community to submit an end of year report on behalf of the SACRE to NASACRE based on the content of this report.

1. Reasons

- 1.1 To enable SACRE to receive an update on progress with the Face to Faith project and approve the content of this update to form the basis of a monitoring report to NASACRE.
- 1.2 The project called Face to Faith proposed to create 'faith clubs' in four secondary schools in Swindon as a trial for one school year, 2008/09. The aim of the project is to initiate and support interfaith dialogue between young people from different schools, different neighbourhoods and different faith positions through a school-based club.

2. Detail

Project Progress To Date

- 2.1 Three secondary schools have projects up and running:

- Kingsdown - Year 8 (Wednesday: after school) self selected attendance
- Commonweal – Year 10 (Thursday: lunch-time) staff selected attendance
- Nova Hreod – Year 9 (Monday: lunch–time) self selected attendance

Each of these groups have engaged in a series of after-school/lunch clubs which have involved activities to promote discussion on faith and thinking, research about faith, and wider school input.

Fourth school planned to start March 2009:

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Ridgeway - Year 8/9 selected according to involvement in an existing project (*Foundation for Peace*). This group has already undertaken a range of activities relating to conflict resolution and promoting peace and positive relationship building. It will work slightly differently with an initial workshop followed by their arts project.

- 2.2 Each of the three schools is at the stage of beginning their involvement with Mobile Media, the local arts organisation that will be working closely with them to create their final project. The final project ideas emerging are as follows:

Kingsdown:

Singing/Music/Drama performance

Three short stories, possibly based on a ceremony or practice such as marriage or prayer, highlighting different Religious viewpoints and common ground. The participants did a small survey amongst peers and identified that religious festivals, celebrations and events can be and are often accessed and enjoyed by people outside of that specific Faith.

Commonweal:

Short Film: Drama/Documentary

These participants (the oldest group) have focused on conflict and discrimination in a wider global context but have considered local examples. They may highlight the role of the Media in promoting specific and provocative perceptions of Religion and Religious people.

Nova Hreod:

Animation

Participants have focused on bullying, attitudes and behaviour. The students are currently undertaking a school-based survey and hope to engage further participants in face to face interviews. They want their work explore the common ground and overlaps between different religions and capture the negative impact of Faith discrimination through a “creature comforts” style sound-bite animation.

- 2.3 The intention is to showcase the projects in a single event in early July 09 with additional support for schools who want to showcase their school project within school. All SACRE members will be invited to the showcase event.

3. Emerging points to note

3.1 *Setting up in schools*

Setting up a new project in a school has taken more time than we originally envisaged. This does not impact on sustainability but may need to be considered for any further club or project development.

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3.2 *Feedback about existing Religious Education provision*

The majority of participants have demonstrated a broad knowledge about different main world Religions and feel their RE learning experiences at School have been positive on the whole. There have been expressions of interest in:

- More experiential learning and less teacher-led learning
- Learning about more obscure Religions and world views
- Opportunities to learn and link into other subjects such as Art/Drama

3.3 *Language*

All pupil participants have been offered a safe space to share views, perceptions and experiences. A common and recurring theme in all Schools has been the use of language e.g. by pupils, the media, slang, nicknames etc.

3.4 *Recurring topics/themes*

The following have been core topics for discussion and seem to be at the heart of pupil's interests in faith and school issues:

- Bullying
- Conflict
- Celebration
- Overlaps between Religions

3.5 *Case Study:*

This case study is outlined to enable SACRE to gain an insight into some of the discussions undertaken.

Case study 1:

A series of activities were planned to provoke discussion and challenge perceptions. One group of participants were shown a series of photographs and were asked to discuss what thoughts or feelings the images provoked. The images included:

- Images of Gods
- Religious Symbols
- Religious artefacts
- People wearing clothing associated with different religions
- Celebrities well known for their Faiths or Beliefs
- Images of acts of terrorism

The participants discussed their perceptions based on the images they saw and identified potential phobias and prejudices.

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The following week, the same group were given a collection of newspaper articles including headlines such as :

- “Sikh girl wins right to wear bracelet to School”
- “Catholic Girl banned from wearing Crucifix”
- “Muslim family thrown off flight for discussing where its safe to sit”
- “Should Burkas be banned?”

The two sets of activities were interesting because the pupils responded positively and respectfully to the photographs in the first activity. They discussed their concerns that life for Muslim people had become harder because of 9/11. However, the same participants presented with media spin and interpretation found it hard to express/repeat their previously tolerant and accepting views. This highlighted to the group the power of language in influencing peoples’ beliefs and perceptions.

Key issue to note:

Pupils are very responsive to ‘real-life’ stories. Pupils seem to enjoy talking about something that feels controversial and provocative. With appropriate support and direction, pupils can move quite quickly towards peer moderation (pupils challenging and asking questions of each to reach consensus and resolution).

4 Key learning and areas for development

- 4.1 Keeping religion and faith at the centre of these discussions and activities is not always easy. This led to some activity work around the connection between: Religion/Faith/Belief → Identity → Community → Behaviour
- 4.2 There is an opportunity to develop tailored training and awareness-raising around language and identity for adults and schools. Sensitising staff to be able to hear and pick up on challenging stereotypes, language or misperceptions. Staff are role models and should be confident and equipped to support students develop sensitive, respectful and tolerant attitudes.
- 4.3 Workshop style delivery may be more effective than regular after school/lunch clubs to improve participation levels and address difficulties with retention and, to make maintaining a consistent theme. Workshop sessions also have the potential to deliver across a whole year group and be more integrated within other school activity.
- 4.4 Seeking to engage local young people through their school has not proven to be particularly easy or successful. Future engagement could be targeted

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outside of school through recreation opportunities and local youth clubs, groups and societies.

5 Reporting to NASACRE

- 5.1 It is proposed that the monitoring report to NASACRE includes a summary based on the content of this report.
- 5.2 NASACRE will be interested to hear how the resources of this project will be shared with other schools. It is envisaged that at least two of the showcase activities will result in material that can be used as a teaching resource or discussion prompt and this will be detailed to NASACRE. Additionally, the report to NASACRE is planned to include sample lesson plans and an indication of the key steps forward that Swindon will be considering as learning outcomes from the project

Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- The costs of this project are part funded by the application to NASACRE and part funded by project funding made available for community cohesion from Government Office South West.

Legal / Human Rights Implications

- This report has no specific legal or human rights implications.

Links to Corporate Plans and Policies (in particular to Swindon 2010 Promises)

- The work of the SACRE contributes to the Corporate Plan aims to improve the opportunities for children and young people, it also contributes to Local Area Agreement (LAA2), National Indicator 2 – promoting a sense of belonging.

Consultees

- The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted on all reports.
- Director of Schools and Learning.
- Gill Ilic, Primary Adviser
- Katy Staples, SACRE Adviser

Background Papers and Appendices

- None