

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

TUESDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2009

PRESENT:-

Group A: Councillors	Councillors Doreen Dart (Chair), Michael Bray, Raymond Fisher and Fay Howard.
Group B: Church of England	Ms Norma McKemey, Mr. Paul Noble and Mrs Penny Summers
Group C: Teacher Organisations	Ms Jo Garton (Vice-Chair), Mr David Easter, and Mrs Tracy Mason.
Group D: Other Faiths	Mrs Helen Hancox (United Reformed Church), Reverend David Howell (Swindon Evangelical Alliance), Mr M S Khan (Muslim Community), Mr Dinesh Patel (Hindu Community) and Mrs Wendy Tucker (Methodist Church)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: - Ms Katy Staples, Ms Gill Ilic.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mavis Childs, Ms Steph Mordin, Reverend Arthur Woo, Janet French, Mrs Helen Miller, Miss Anne Wang, Mrs Mandy Sandleton, Mr Malkit Singh Virk and Mr Arun Bedi.

19. 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.

20. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

21. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September 2009, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

22. Chair's Announcements

The Chair updated the SACRE in respect of the following matters:

- A copy of letter sent to schools with Face to Faith Resource was attached to the Agenda for information.
- The latest edition of SACRE News was circulated with the agenda and Members of the SACRE invited to advise if they wished raise any matters at a future meeting.
- The National Association of SACREs had invited the Swindon SACRE to send up to three members to a free training session on 1st February 2010 on

the role of SACREs and SACRE Members. Any members of the SACRE interested in attending were asked to contact the Clerk.

- As requested at the last meeting, selected examples of art work from Bridlewood Primary School were on display in the Civic Reception Area from the Unit of Work 'Images of Jesus'. The display also highlighted the remit of SACRE.

23. Membership Update

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services and SACRE Advisor providing an update to the vacancies on the SACRE and recommending that Mr Mark Cawte, a Community Working and Local Preacher for the Highworth United Reformed and Methodist Church, be appointed to Group D (Other Faiths) as a deputy representative to the current United Reformed Church and Methodist Church representatives on the SACRE. The report also advised that training for new SACRE members on the 'Other Faiths Group' was being provided by the NASACRE, and suggested that those attending the training from the SACRE be invited to report back to a future meeting to share their learning experiences.

Resolved - (1) That the Membership update report be noted.

(2) That the SACRE endorse the appointment of Mr Mark Cawte as a joint deputy member to Mrs Helen Hancox (United Reformed Church) and Mrs Wendy Tucker (Methodist Church) on Group D (Other Faiths).

(3) That the training being made available to new members of Group D (Other Faiths) by the NASACRE be noted, and any members attending be invited to report back to a future meeting to share their experiences and learning with other members of the SACRE.

24. SACRE Surveys Feedback

The SACRE received a report from the SACRE Advisor summarising the survey responses received from Schools in relation to the delivery of Collective Worship and Religious Education. It was noted that these surveys had been drawn up and sent out to schools to provide the SACRE with information to enable it to fulfil its formal role to monitor the delivery of religious worship and the agreed syllabus in schools.

The SACRE considered and discussed the outcomes of the surveys for secondary, primary and special schools and considered the following questions:

- What picture of collective worship in our schools do these surveys offer SACRE in Primary, Secondary and in Special Schools?
- What picture of RE do these surveys offer SACRE in Primary, Secondary and in Special Schools?
- Do the findings of these surveys indicate any actions needed to be taken in the new development plan?
- Do the findings of these surveys need to be shared? If so to whom and by what method?

In respect of the volume of responses received to both surveys, it was considered that this could reflect on the surveys not getting to the right people, but could also be a reflection of the value and status of RE in schools, and this was also reflected in some of the responses.

In relation to the delivery of Collective Worship, it was felt that the act of collective worship was less contentious for primary than for secondary schools and

was easier to achieve, and this was shown in the results. It was suggested that a question which could be included in future surveys was on the value that schools place on a corporate act of 'worship', and whether they would choose to hold one if there was no requirement to do so. It was highlighted that the term 'worship' as a title to such sessions was a barrier for many Muslim children opting in to such times, where it was recognised that the content was in fact good for all children to learn common understanding.

The SACRE expressed some concern at anecdotal accounts of teachers' reluctance to teach RE and an expression of scepticism to children of faith in the classroom, where respect for faith and belief should be a direct result of good RE. It was recognised that the surveys showed a high level of non-specialists teaching RE or co-ordinating RE in secondary schools. However, even then it was considered that good teachers and good leadership in a school should result in RE being taught well, and any lack in quality could reflect on the status and regard with which RE is held. It was recognised that many schools would value a register of appropriate representatives from local faith groups who had CRB checks who could assist with leading Collective Worship Sessions.

In relation to the teaching of RE in primary schools, it was recognised that the new primary curriculum represented two opposing challenges for RE; that of RE being isolated from other subject teaching and seen as less relevant, or RE becoming so integrated with other subjects, that key tenets of the Agreed Syllabus are not covered. It was suggested that the way forward for RE may be to limit the Agreed Syllabus to key concepts taught well, whilst providing access to more detailed information. The SACRE Advisor confirmed that this discussion reflected the direction of the national discussion of RE.

Resolved 1) That the SACRE notes the responses to the surveys issued on Religious Education and Collective Worship.

2) That the SACRE Advisor discusses the survey results with the Primary and Secondary Network Meetings to consider their recommendations for improving the delivery of RE and Collective Worship in Swindon.

3) That further to 2) the SACRE Advisor reflects any recommendations in the draft SACRE Development Plan to be submitted at the next meeting.

25. Reviewing our Vision as a SACRE

It was agreed that this item should be deferred to a future meeting. It was suggested that this might best be discussed in the context of the successor guidance to Circular 1/94 when issued, which set out the remit and purpose of SACREs.

26. Suggested Code of Conduct and Practice for Teachers of RE Consultation

The SACRE reviewed the 'Suggested Code of Conduct and Practice for Teachers of RE' which was the subject of a consultation by the RE Council of England and Wales. It was noted that the original deadline for comments as 24th October 2009, however the SACRE could still seek to submit comments and also consider how such a Code would be applied in a local context.

The SACRE considered that the Code reflected good principles, not only for the teaching of RE but for general teaching, but felt that they could have gone further in representing the elements of teaching which are unique to RE in the classroom, that of a promotion of real and active questioning and enquiry, and

encouraging an exploration and understanding of spirituality.

Gill Ilic (Principal Advisor) advised that she understood that the Director of Human Resources was also currently consulting with unions on a general code of conduct for teachers, aligned to that which Officers of the Council operate under, and she would report back to the Committee on the progress of that work.

Resolved - 1) That the SACRE Advisor seek to represent the SACRE's views on the Suggested Code to the RE Council of England and Wales.

2) Further to the publication of the final version of the voluntary Code of Conduct and Practice by the RE Council of England and Wales, the SACRE advisor discuss with the Network Meeting how they would wish to see the Code used locally and any additional paragraphs which could be included to reflect the views of the SACRE set out above, and the SACRE Advisor report back to the SACRE with recommendations.

3) The Principal Advisor report back to a future meeting of the SACRE on the progress in a general Code of Conduct for teachers.

27. Feedback from Network Meetings

The SACRE Advisor reported back on the recent network meetings held with Primary and Secondary teachers and co-ordinators of Religious Education. The SACRE Advisor confirmed that the Secondary Network meeting on 4th November 2009 had seen a good increase in attendance to five schools being represented and outlined the key points of discussion from the meeting. The Primary Network on 19th November had also been a valuable session with seven schools represented, and the Advisor highlighted the key topics. The SACRE noted that these network meetings continued to provide teachers with the opportunity to share best practice and materials to assist with the teaching of RE.

Resolved - (1) That the update on the SACRE network meetings be noted.

(2) That the SACRE Advisor continue to look for better ways to publicise the Network meetings to encourage further attendance.

28. Understanding Faith

Councillor Mick Bray gave an oral presentation to the SACRE regarding his own personal history and his Catholic faith, and brought along his medal awarded by the Pope in 2002 for 56 years altar service. Councillor Bray answered questions from the SACRE in regards to his faith.

Resolved – 1) That Councillor Mick Bray be thanked for his interesting presentation on his life and faith.

2) That Mr David Howell give a presentation on his faith at the next SACRE meeting.

29. Date and Time of the Next Meeting

The SACRE noted that the next meeting of the SACRE would be held on 16th March 2010. Mrs Tracy Mason offered to host a future SACRE meeting at Crowdy Hill School.