

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Wednesday, 2 October 2019, County Hall, Worcester - 2.00 pm

Minutes

Present:

Mr Robin C Lunn (Chairman), Mr Graham Bounds, Ms Kate Cope, Mr Chris Giles, Mr Matthew Jenkins, Mrs Tasnim Khawaja, Mr J Loyal, Mrs Christine Parker, and Dr Yvonne Stollard.

Also attended:

Mrs Mandy Smith and Mr Ade Couper from Worcestershire Quakers meeting for Item 3.
Mr S Pett, RE Today - Adviser to SACRE

668 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies had been received from Charlotte Betteridge, Ellie Hill, Tracey Lister, Ken Pollock and Lindsay Thorne.

As the Chairman had sent her apologies the Vice Chairman, Robin Lunn took the Chair for the meeting.

669 Confirmation of the Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 15 May 2019 were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

670 Militarism in schools

The Chairman welcomed Mandy Smith and Ade Couper from the Worcestershire Quakers meeting. They wished to raise their concerns about their perceived impression of increased militarism in schools.

Mandy Smith explained that she visited Tudor Grange Open evening two years ago as she was considering secondary school places for her son. She had been shocked to be greeted by Army cadets who had been passing round rifles. After writing to the Head Teacher about her concerns, she had received a response to say that the school was part of a national scheme which allowed cadets to wear army fatigues one day a week. The national scheme included millions in funding from the Department of Education to bring the military ethos into schools. Mandy explained that she didn't believe in the way military personnel were taught to obey without question or that the UK was the only place in Europe to recruit young people below the age of 18 and cadets at an even earlier age. After a second visit to Tudor Grange she acknowledged that the cadets were doing First Aid rather than showing rifles but the schools still allowed fatigues a day a week and held military skills

**671 Agreed
Syllabus**

competitions.

Ade Couper asked that SACRE support them in raising the issue of military ethos as one of concern and mentioned the documentary War School, a battle for hearts and minds. For the future he hoped that SACRE would be willing to welcome a member from Worcestershire Quakers meeting to future meetings.

The Sikh member of SACRE wished to comment that he didn't believe this was a faith issue and therefore shouldn't be taken up by SACRE. He pointed out that Sikhs wore swords as part of their dress and felt that most faiths had to fight at some point but that was not to harm but rather to protect. Other SACRE members agreed that this should not be a SACRE issue but could perhaps be raised with local Councillors.

The Agreed Syllabus included a question at Key Stage 3 about whether religion was a power for peace or a source of conflict in the world today. It was suggested that the Quakers point of view could be mentioned within that point.

The Chairman clarified that the SACRE would welcome someone from the Worcestershire Quakers meeting attending their meetings but they felt that the issue of militarism was not something that SACRE should be involved in as it was more of an education issue rather than a religious one.

The SACRE meeting was temporarily suspended and an Agreed Syllabus Conference was convened.

Stephen Pett outlined the two options which were on offer. A third option of writing a completely new syllabus just for Worcestershire had previously been ruled out as the cost was prohibitive.

Option A – Renew the current syllabus.

The current syllabus aimed to ensure that all pupils:

1. Knew and understand a range of religions and worldviews
2. Expressed ideas and insights about religions and worldviews
3. Gained and deployed the skills to engage seriously with religions and worldviews

Questions within the syllabus were split into 3 strands of

Believing, Expressing and Living.

The benefit of this option was that it would just involve a 20-30 page insert so schools could keep the syllabus copies they already had and were familiar with.

Option B – A newer syllabus which looked at what people believed and how they lived. Questions were according to religion rather than strands, which made the syllabus more systematic rather than thematic. The syllabus made use of the Understanding Christianity resources which were already in use by all Church of England school and a small proportion of community schools.

The benefits of option 2 were that many schools were already using the Understanding Christianity resource and that students learnt the basics of religions and then in a spiral learning returned to the topics to look at more advanced ideas.

Members of SACRE discussed the merits of the two options:

- They believed that by continuing with the existing syllabus then schools which were not fulfilling their obligations were unlikely to change but by choosing Option B then a syllabus launch would be seen as a fresh start and would be an opportunity to reach more schools and engage with them
- It was noted that although the law required schools to teach RE, SACREs had no powers to enforce that
- In one of the areas which used Option B more schools were now engaged in using the new syllabus

Members split into their separate groups to discuss the two options.

When the groups returned the Chairman asked each one which Option they wished to take. The groups voted unanimously for Option B.

RESOLVED that each Group which constituted the SACRE (Group A – Representatives of Christian and other faiths; Group B – Church of England Representatives; Group C – Representatives of Recognised Teachers Associations; and Group D - Elected Representatives of the Local Authority) voted to adopt Option B as the Agreed Syllabus for

Worcestershire from September 2020.

The Agreed Syllabus Conference was closed and the meeting of SACRE was re-opened.

672 Feedback from Conferences

Chris Giles gave feedback on the Sixth Form Conference which had been held at the University of Worcester. The Conference gave students a taste of University Life and had featured a market place where different activities were organised by different faiths. The conference focused on the topic of suffering and evil and the different faiths were asked to explain their position. This activity provided quotes for students to use in exams. It was hoped that the conference could be run again in future.

Stephen Pett explained that the Primary and Secondary teacher conferences had been well received. The conferences allowed teachers to gain resources and meet contacts and the evaluations showed that delegates found the conferences very useful with excellent ideas to take back to school.

673 Feedback from Hub Groups

Chris Giles updated SACRE about the hub groups. There had been 3 meetings of the secondary group and lots of planning for the Sixth Form Conference had happened at the meetings.

As well as the NATRE group at the Rivers MAT, a new NATRE local group was being set up in Stourbridge and there would be a joint Primary and Secondary RE meeting on 17 October at the University of Worcester to consider ideas for an RE Conference in the Summer of 2020.

Malvern also had a local group and Ipsley was setting up a group, led by teachers who were part of the hub leader project.

674 Plans for teacher support in 2019-2020

Future support for teachers included a conference being held at a Birmingham school in November. The School would be closed for the day to allow Governors and teachers to attend the conference. This conference was in a Birmingham school which was within the area covered by Chris Giles in his role as NATRE Regional Ambassador.

Stephen Pett explained that there would need to be a conference in 2020 to launch the new syllabus. He would work with Chris Giles to plan and advertise the conference as it would need to be done before the next

SACRE meeting.

RESOLVED that SACRE agreed that the planning and advertising of the conference should be progressed by Stephen Pett with help from Chris Giles.

**675 Responding to
workforce data
and ensuring
schools fulfil
their statutory
duties**

After looking at the school data regarding the teaching of RE, various schools had been contacted about their apparent lack of RE. Schools were becoming more receptive to idea of allowing adequate time for RE as Ofsted were looking at their provision as part of inspections. Arrowvale had been contacted and had explained that they covered RE in their Personal and Social Education but planned to introduce more.

The Chairman explained that a letter had been sent to Tenbury High School but as no response had been received he had tried to phone the school on three occasions but had not been able to speak to anyone who could help and his calls had not been returned. He would continue his efforts to speak to the school.

If schools wished for help in increasing or improving their RE teaching, Chris Giles as a NATRE Regional Ambassador would be able to help.

**676 SACRE News
Update**

Due to changes in the Ebacc schools had not been prioritising RE: points from the short course used to contribute to a school's average points score but RE had been taken out of this and only full course RE can contribute to the Progress 8 scores. A NATRE survey had shown that up to 50% of schools were not fulfilling their obligations with regard to RE; it is suggested that as Ofsted had said it was not their job to check compliance schools knew they could get away with little or no RE. However the new Ofsted inspection framework would be looking at the breadth of the curriculum rather than focusing on exam results which should mean an increased focus on the teaching of RE.

It was mentioned that the Labour party had said that they would scrap Ofsted as they thought Local Authorities could be checking the quality of schools. NATRE attended all party conferences so they were aware of the potential future policies.

Although total numbers of GCSE entries fell for the third year in a row, 100 more RE teachers were being trained in 2019 than the year before. Training opportunities were available at various conferences but it was pointed out

677 Feedback from Members

that the subsidy for Worcestershire schools for the RE Quality Mark had ended, although schools could still apply for the award.

Jatinder Loyal reported back that the celebration and exhibition to celebrate the Guru Nanak's birthday had been a huge success and the digitised exhibition would now tour around different locations. He also agreed that he would follow up with organising a visit to a Gurdwara.

It was suggested that a visit to a mosque could be organised for the same day as the Gurdwara visit.

Two events supported by Worcestershire Interfaith Forum had been organised:

- 'Climate Change – Challenges to Faith' which would be held at Holland House Cropthorne on 11 November 2019, and
- Mitzvah Day on 17 November 2019 which was asking for volunteers to help at the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch

678 Future Meeting Dates

DATES 2020

Monday 10 February 2020
Wednesday 10 June 2020
Thursday 15 October 2020

All to take place at 2pm at County Hall, Worcester

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm

Chairman