

Minutes of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious

Education

County Hall, Worcester

Monday, 6 March 2023, 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr. Mel Allcott (Chair), Cllr. Matthew Jenkins (Vice -Chairman), Mr Graham Bounds, Ms Danielle Evans, Mr Chris Giles, Mrs Sheila Hicks, Mrs Jenny Lockwood, Mr Jatinder Loyal, Cllr. Emma Marshall, Mrs Christine Parker, Ms Aimee Parsons and Dr Yvonne Stollard

Also attended:

Stephen Pett, Lisa Bradbury, Kate Griffiths and Cllr Tracey Onslow

758 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence had been received from Ellie Hill.

759 Confirmation of the Minutes

The minutes were accepted as an accurate record and were signed by the Chairman.

760 Welcome and Introduction to new SACRE Members

SACRE welcomed three new members to their first meeting.

Sheila Hicks nominated by the Catholic Diocese, a teacher in a Catholic School and RE Lead.

Jenny Lockwood nominated as a Bahá'í representative, an experienced member of SACRE who had previously been on Gloucestershire SACRE for twelve years. Jenny had supported and represented the Bahá'í community nationally.

Aimee Parsons, also a teacher nominated by the Catholic Diocese.

761 Monitoring RE

Stephen Pett explained that a survey had been sent to Primary Schools in Worcestershire asking about what RE was taught in their school and their use of the Agreed Syllabus. 55 replies were received. It was believed that the response may not be totally representative of all primary schools in the County as the survey was sent to those schools who had already attended conferences or courses.

The responses varied from schools that taught an hour a week, to one school which stated that RE was not taught. 89% of respondents used the Worcestershire Agreed Syllabus, with some using the Dudley or Sandwell Syllabus. (perhaps sent the survey by the Church of England Diocese who have some schools in Dudley).

There was some discussion on the merits of trying to reach a more representative group of schools, but it was recognised that there were limited ways of attracting schools to fill out surveys. It was suggested that there would be more benefit in sharing information about schools achieving good results in RE and showing that it was a worthwhile subject; and that Ofsted now reported on whether RE was a well embedded subject.

It was agreed that the survey would be sent out to small schools through a curriculum training course to gather results from a different sample. It was also agreed that the results of the survey, could be sent around to schools for their information and ask for other schools to take part as further results would be welcomed.

762 Primary and Secondary Conferences

Stephen Pett explained that there would be a Primary Conference on 23 May which would be held online, and a Secondary Conference on 22 June at Puckrup Hall. Different sessions would be held throughout the day at the conferences and issues which had been raised by teachers and requests for support which had been raised in the Primary Survey would be included.

Information about the conferences would be put on the Education Bulletin and sent to any teachers who had attended previous training or conferences. It was clarified that Middle Schools could attend either conference and SACRE members were encouraged to attend.

763 Additional Support

Within the SACRE budget there was a small amount which could be used for support to schools. Last year the money had been used to run two courses - 'Help I am the RE Subject Leader' and it was queried how to use the money this year, with suggestions being further courses for teachers or subsidising small schools to attend the conferences.

Further suggestions were made by SACRE members such as creating a podcast which could benefit teachers by being available to download whenever

teachers had time available. There were apparently already some podcasts available for secondary teachers with weekly discussions on the curriculum; teachers could be directed on how and where to access those.

Another suggestion was made that rather than spend money on teacher training, whether an event could be organised for pupils, to enable them to feel empowered, which would in turn help teachers and enable them to learn as well.

It was agreed that Stephen would bring a more detailed proposal to the next SACRE meeting in the summer term.

764 Local Groups

There were various Local Groups which offered support to RE Teachers run by NATRE, the Diocese, Regional Hub Co-ordinator, Worcester University or the Three Rivers Trust.

Ellie Hill from the University had held two meetings since October covering a number of different topics.

Chris Giles explained that he was the Regional Hub Leader for the West Midlands. Each Hub area had its own space on a national website and people were able to update the website with accurate contacts which would allow groups to work together better and for teachers to be able to contact good speakers. He explained that training could be offered to those going into schools to speak to pupils, whether they were faith leaders, from the Diocese or from Local Authorities.

Recruitment and retention of RE Teachers was difficult, with only 20 RE Teachers being trained at the moment in the West Midlands, with 2 in Worcestershire. There were no bursaries for RE Teachers and as RE was not part of the Baccalaureate it was not seen as an attractive career.

It was agreed that SACRE as a group, as well as individual members should write to their MPs to highlight the lack of funding for RE. A sample letter was distributed to Members to help with this.

GCSE Results

Stephen updated the meeting about the Worcestershire GCSE entries in 2022. Almost 30% of GCSE pupils took RE, which was more than Gloucestershire and Shropshire but less than Herefordshire and Birmingham. The numbers taking RE seem to relate to the number of faith schools in an area, with more students taking RE in the more culturally diverse areas. It was difficult to encourage students to take RE and it was agreed that a link should not be made between religion and RE, as the subject should be acknowledged as a discrete academic subject.

765 National RE News

SACRE members noted the information in the national RE news produced in the agenda. The news update was now written so that it could be sent to teachers as well as SACRE members.

SACRE members commented particularly on the fact that 51% of RE Teachers mainly teach other subjects.

766 RE Report Card Follow up

A sample letter was distributed to SACRE members which could be used for individual members to send on to their MPs, highlighting the problems recruiting RE Teachers and the lack of support from Government.

767 Feedback from Members

None

768 Any Other Business

None

769 Future Meeting Dates

DATES 2023

Thursday 8 June
Monday 9 October

The meeting ended at 3.55pm

Chairman