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STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Monday 9 March 2015
1.30 pm
Council House, Plymouth (Next to Civic Centre)

Members are asked to note that a training session and lunch will be held at the above venue, prior to the meeting, from 10 am.

Members are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business overleaf.

Tracey Lee
Chief Executive

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

AGENDA

PART I – PUBLIC MEETING

1. APOLOGIES

To receive apologies for non-attendance submitted by SACRE Members.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members will be asked to make any declarations of interest in respect of items on this agenda.

3. MINUTES

(Pages 1 - 8)

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2014.

4. CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS

To receive reports on business which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be brought forward for urgent consideration.

5. MEMBERSHIP

The RE Adviser will provide Members with an update on membership.

6. SACRE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The RE Adviser will provide Members with details of the SACRE Development Plan and advise Members of the priorities for this year.

7. LEARNTEACHLEAD RE PROJECT

Linda Rudge, Project Director, will provide Members with an update and future plans for the LearnTeachLead RE Project.

8. FEEDBACK/ACTION FROM AWARENESS/TRAINING SESSION

The RE Adviser and Members will discuss feedback/action points from the morning's awareness/training session.

9. PARENTAL RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL FROM RE (Pages 9 - 12)

The RE Adviser will update Members of the rights of parents to withdraw students/children from Religious Education (RE) and its wider implications.

10. LETTER FROM LORD NASH, PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCHOOLS (Pages 13 - 14)

Members will discuss the letter from Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools and decide if a response from SACRE is appropriate.

11. UPDATE/FEEDBACK ON LOCAL AND NATIONAL RE ISSUES

Members will be provided with updates on national and local SACRE issues.

I 1a Holocaust Memorial Day 2015

I 1b NATRE Conference

I 1c Plymouth SACRE website

I 1d Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity

12. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting will be confirmed following approval of the programme of Council meetings at the Full Council meeting on 23 March 2015.

13. EXEMPT BUSINESS

To consider passing a resolution under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it (they) involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph(s) of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

PART II - PRIVATE MEETING

AGENDA

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO NOTE

that under the law, the Panel is entitled to consider certain items in private. Members of the public will be asked to leave the meeting when such items are discussed.

NIL.

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Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Monday 1 December 2014

PRESENT:

MarkAndrew Dearden Chair.

Councillors Mrs Aspinall, Dr Salter and Singh.

Cathy Bowness, Penny Burnside, Shelley Catchpole, Katie Freeman, Liz Hill, Helena Mitchell, Jatindra Saha and Pam Shelmerdine.

Co-opted Representatives: Dr Clare Hamon, Ben Kerr, Christoforos Mamas and Caroline McVicker.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Drean, Martin Edmonds, Pete Grainger, Gwen Hughes, Ann Kelly and Alison Sturgeon.

Also in attendance: Jonathan Marshall (RE Adviser) and Lynn Young (Democratic Support Officer).

The meeting started at 1.36 pm and finished at 4.08 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

13. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Councillors in accordance with the code of conduct.

14. **MINUTES**

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2014 are confirmed as a correct record.

15. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

16. **WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

The Chair advised members that Pam Shelmerdine was standing down as the Baptist Church rep in Group A after seven years, and welcomed Shelley Catchpole who was her replacement. He also expressed his thanks to Helena Mitchell for arranging the venue and refreshments.

Jonathan Marshall, RE Adviser, advised that -

- (a) Barry Good, Buddhist Community rep in Group A, had decided to stand down from SACRE;
- (b) there was a vacancy for a UCU rep in Group C; Christoforos Mamas, the Greek Orthodox Community rep, was eligible to take this vacancy. This proposal was put to the vote and agreed unanimously. Mr Mamas will now seek approval from his Union.

It was suggested that Pete Grainger, the PASH rep in Group C, be contacted to determine if he wished to remain a member of SACRE.

Agreed that a letter is sent to Pete Grainger to determine if he wished to remain a member of SACRE.

17. **SACRE ANNUAL REPORT 2013 - 2014**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Adviser, discussed the SACRE annual report.

Members were advised that –

- (a) the production of the report was a statutory requirement and summarised the work of SACRE, giving an overview of what SACRE had achieved over the year, in addition to summarising the meetings that had been held;
- (b) the report detailed how Religious Education was taught in schools, along with the challenges that teachers faced;
- (c) one of the roles of SACRE was to promote the teaching of Religious Education and ensure teachers had the necessary resources available;
- (d) Liz Hill, along with her teaching staff, had carried out a lot of successful work promoting the teaching of Religious Education;
- (e) the SACRE development plan had been very successful – it was very ambitious and had guided the work of SACRE over the past three years;
- (f) there had been a great deal of work around the Agreed Syllabus Conference and the promotion of this needed to be taken forward.

Members were asked to identify any errors or omissions, and several were highlighted. Following a discussion regarding some slight amendments, Jonathan Marshall proposed that he would make the suggested amendments and agreed to send it to the four house reps to check.

Jonathan Marshall, RE Adviser, discussed the Religious Studies Examination Statistics 2001 – 2014. Members were advised that the results fluctuated from year to year, and this year's results were very commendable as a result of the high calibre of teachers.

Proposed changes in the format of A Level and GCSE exams could impact on future results. The Adviser reminded members that two large cohorts of students from the Plymouth

Roman Catholic schools had to sit GCSE Religious Studies in Year 11. This year had been a successful year for A Level results, with 100 per cent of candidates achieving A*-E. Religious Studies was a matter of concern for Ofsted; however the value of the subject was now recognised, especially in light of recent reports on some schools in the Midlands.

It was noted that there was an overwhelming number of girls who studied the subject, opposed to boys. Following a discussion, it was suggested that one of the reasons for this was due to pupils being encouraged towards STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects, as opposed to Humanities subjects.

18. **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2015 - 2018**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Adviser, explained that a development plan was a way to highlight the key priorities and work of SACRE over the next three years. This could change and be amended to take account of changes in national or local RE issues. An annual budget of approximately £5000 was available for this work.

A small group of SACRE members met at the beginning of October to review the current plan and to identify key areas/priorities which were felt would support the future development of RE across the city.

It was important to be realistic about what was possible as SACRE met only three times a year and there was reduced support available from the RE Adviser.

The development plan highlighted three areas of importance –

- support for teachers to develop some new, creative and interactive schemes of work to support the new syllabus and the new emphases of heritage, diversity and spirituality, to include a review of the syllabus across Plymouth schools during the summer term;
- SACRE to make available some curriculum project funds for schools to support innovative RE projects with links to and in collaboration with local faith communities, highlighting the importance of local understanding and good quality RE;
- SACRE to support promotional events and celebrations of RE, including Holocaust Memorial Day.

Members were advised that there was money remaining in the SACRE budget, some of which was allocated to Holocaust Memorial Day.

Suggestions for the remainder of the budget included –

- funding for Hyde Park School to achieve the RE Quality Mark at gold level;
- production of a level book for pupils to track their progress from primary school through to secondary school;
- production of a directory which listed all religious groups in the city.

Agreed that a meeting between Jonathan Marshall, Mark Andrew Dearden and, if required, Liz Hill is arranged in order to discuss the remaining SACRE budget.

19. **LEARNTEACHLEAD RE PROJECT AND POSSIBLE SACRE SUPPORT**

Katie Freeman gave members an update on the LearnTeachLead RE Project. Members were advised that –

- (a) she had attended the 3rd Annual Conference in October, the main highlight of which was ‘The Learning Journey in RE: leading the way through religious understanding’;
- (b) two new hub leaders had been appointed;
- (c) the next training session was planned for January 2015;
- (d) six hub meetings were held each year;
- (e) schools were now working together and helping each other;
- (f) the hubs were very popular and offered invaluable support for teachers; teachers were now becoming more confident in their work;
- (g) long term funding of the programme was uncertain;
- (h) a conference, funded by the Plymouth Teaching School Alliance was planned for 16 April 2015; Lat Blaylock, editor of REtoday magazine was booked to speak at this conference.

Agreed to invite Linda Rudge, Project Director of LearnTeachLead RE to the next SACRE meeting in March 2015, to provide more details of the current funding levels and partnership arrangements and to explore the possibility of SACRE funding the Plymouth hub in future as this offered unique support and innovative approaches for RE teachers.

(Alison Bradley left the meeting after this item)

20. **HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY 2015**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Adviser, advised members that –

- (a) Holocaust Memorial Day has been an annual event in the city since 2001 and is organised by SACRE, Plymouth City Council, the Plymouth Jewish community and the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural diversity (PCFCD);
- (b) City Council passed a Motion on 27 January 2014 whereby it was agreed Plymouth City Council would promote the importance of Holocaust Memorial Day and support annual commemorative events in the city;
- (c) Holocaust Memorial Day 2015 is 27 January 2015; the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The theme for the event is ‘Keep the

Memory Alive’;

- (d) a Civic event on 27 January 2015 would be held at the memorial tree in the English Garden at Mount Edgcumbe House and Country Park. Various events to commemorate the day would also be held at Plymouth University;
- (e) Solly Irving, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, would once again visit the city in January 2015, and would visit local schools and Plymouth University. This would be his 15th annual visit and it is estimated that he has now shared his and experiences and testimony to approximately 25,000 young people;
- (f) information regarding events for Holocaust Memorial Day would be circulated to SACRE members when available. Booklets were also available from the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust;

Following a discussion, members raised the following points –

- (g) an activity pack was available from the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (e-mail enquiries@hmd.org.uk);
- (h) schools needed to be encouraged to contact the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust for resources;
- (i) it was important that the Holocaust was kept in the forefront of people’s minds, as genocide was still happened today;
- (j) there was a suggestion about an alternative location to be considered for events taking place on Holocaust Memorial Day as Plymouth University was not in a central location or easily accessible to all;;
- (k) it was possible that a candle could be lit in Plymouth University next for Holocaust Memorial Day 2015 as part of the national commemoration;
- (l) schools in Devon and South East Cornwall should be contacted regarding the Civic centre at Mount Edgcumbe House and Country Park.

21. **UPDATES ON RE DEVELOPMENTS**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Adviser, advised members that –

- (a) in the past year, the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity had arranged approximately 200 visits to meet faith speakers or to visit faith centres;
- (b) Bev Smerdon was currently in the process of putting together a business plan for the Centre;
- (c) Sarah Hall had recently been appointed as the Centre’s new Education Officer;
- (d) a successful Interfaith Week Leaders’ lunch, attended by the Lord and Lady

Mayoress, had been held as part of Interfaith Week (16 – 22 November 2014);

- (e) every Plymouth school had received three copies of the new Agreed Syllabus document;
- (f) the 2015 South West Conference for SACREs would take place on 16 March 2015 at Dillington House, Ilminster, Somerset. This would be a very inspiring and challenging day, and funding was available for a couple of members to attend;
- (g) the annual NASACRE Conference would take place in Birmingham in May 2015 and funding was available for a member of SACRE to attend;
- (h) NASACRE, the RE Council and NATRE all had useful websites which SACRE members were encouraged to view;
- (i) Counter Terrorism Week (24 – 30 November 2014) had raised some important issues in relation to religion;
- (j) following on from the 'Trojan Horse' incident in Birmingham, Ofsted had been very critical of the teaching of RE in these schools, some schools were too focussed on their own religion and did not promote others;
- (k) RE could make a contribution to a broad and balanced curriculum, which in turn could prepare children for living in a modern society;

Following a discussion, members raised the following points –

- (l) it was important to look at ways that SACRE could support schools in delivering their syllabus;
- (m) some schools had re-branded RE as Philosophy and Ethics which made it more inclusive to children who did not consider themselves to be religious.

(Pam Shelmerdine and Shelley Catchpole left the meeting after this item)

22. **SOUTH WEST SACRE CONFERENCE**

Members were advised that the 2015 South West SACRE conference (details of which had already been circulated) would once again be held at Dillington House. Jonathan Marshall, RE Adviser, advised members that funding was available for several members to attend, and anyone interested in attending was to advise Lynn Young, Democratic Support Officer.

23. **DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING**

Following a discussion amongst members, it was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Monday 9 March 2014, 10 am – 4 pm in the Council House, Plymouth. The full day meeting would allow extra time in the morning for SACRE to consider the very important and related issues, now coming to the fore and with considerable implications for Religious

Education; 'Promoting British Values' and 'preventing young people from being drawn into radicalisation and violent extremism'.

Linda Rudge, Project Director of LearnTeachLead RE, will also be invited to join SACRE for the usual meeting in the afternoon.

24. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.

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Briefing Paper for Headteachers and those with responsibility for Religious Education in maintained schools who follow the locally Agreed Syllabus -

“Engaging with Religion and Worldviews”

Aide Memoire and Accompanying Letter Template/Suggestion for Senior Leaders on the parental right of withdrawal of students/children from Religious Education (RE) and its wider implications

The following guidance is issued in the light of national and local reports of a small number of parents requesting that their child is withdrawn from those parts of Religious Education which address Islam.

Parents have had the right, since 1944, to withdraw their child from Religious Education, Collective Worship or aspects thereof.

Parents are not required to provide reasons or justifications for these requests.

However, in order to clarify and maintain the educational value of RE and good relationships with parents, Headteachers/RE Co-ordinators are encouraged to seek opportunities to speak/meet with parents in order to listen to their concerns and questions. (These may sometimes be based on misunderstandings about the aims and objectives of RE)

It is clear from Parliamentary records that the right to withdraw was, and remains, intended as a conscience clause and not as a general opt out clause.

In addressing a request it must be made clear to parents that their child will need to be supervised in another classroom/Library (or same classroom); that neither the school nor (where applicable) the Local Authority must incur any additional costs as a result of this and that parents have a responsibility to provide alternative RE material/resources during the RE lesson time, according to their own wishes around religion/belief. This should be at a similar level with activities and assessment, as appropriate. The RE time cannot be used for other subjects or as a catch up time for a National Curriculum subject. This would not be legal.

In 2000 the DfES restated its advice from Circular 1/94 on its website:

Parents of a pupil at a community, foundation or voluntary school have a right to withdraw their children from religious education (RE). If a parent asks for their child to be wholly or partly excused from attending any RE at the school the school must comply unless the request is withdrawn. A school remains responsible for the supervision of any child withdrawn from RE, unless the child is lawfully receiving religious education elsewhere. Parents do not need to explain their reasons for seeking withdrawal. The Department

recommends that to avoid misunderstanding, a head teacher may wish to clarify with any parent wanting to withdraw:

- the religious issues about which the parent would object their child being taught
- the practical implications of withdrawal
- the circumstances in which it would be reasonable to accommodate parents' wishes
- if a parent will require any advanced notice of such RE and if so, how much.

SACRE would wish to endorse this advice in that if parents are going to understand their right in full they should have this explained to them by the school.

RE is a legal and statutory requirement, although RE is not part of the National Curriculum. (This is why withdrawal from RE is possible)

There are sound educational reasons for the inclusion of RE within the school curriculum and it should be demonstrated that RE makes a significant contribution to the main aims of the National Curriculum that are:

“Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based, and which:

- Promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils
- Prepares them, at school, for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life

From The National Curriculum in England: Framework document September 2013

Michael Gove, the previous Secretary of State for Education, wrote, in his Foreword to the *National Curriculum Framework for RE – 2013*:

“...All children need to acquire knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of the religions and worldviews which not only shape their history and culture, but which guide their own development. The modern world needs young people who are sufficiently confident in their own beliefs and values that they can respect the religious and cultural differences of others and contribute to a cohesive and compassionate society.”

The new Plymouth syllabus, “Engaging with Religion and Worldviews”, that builds on the solid foundation of our previous syllabus, “Every Child Matters in RE”, ensures that this approach is at the heart of the teaching and learning of Religious Education in Plymouth.

It is, therefore, of concern that parents would be requesting to withdraw their children from these educational aims and opportunities.

Parents may need to see a policy on RE that outlines what is taught in the school.

It will be helpful to be able to say that the school can also provide details about the curriculum followed and that this is locally determined.

Plymouth state maintained schools follow national guidelines and a framework that emphasises the importance of RE as a subject which allows for full and open enquiry of Christianity and the other main religions and belief systems. (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Other belief systems will also be explored as the children grow and mature, e.g. Humanism.)

Through the RE syllabus, schools also seek to emphasise a local 'Plymouth' theme to their approach, encouraging children to explore the religious and cultural heritage and diversity of our city. This will help to prepare them for life in 21st century Britain and enable them to develop the values of acceptance and compassion based on understanding the equality of all and corresponding respect for all people, especially those with different faiths and beliefs.

Jonathan Marshall:

RE Adviser to Plymouth SACRE

Karl Sweeney:

Leadership Adviser, Health Wellbeing and Citizenship

Plymouth City Council

Withdrawal From RE – Template /Suggested Letter

Dear

Thank you for your letter of.....

I am fully aware of your legal right to withdraw..... from elements of the locally agreed RE syllabus under Section 71 of the Schools and Standards Framework Act 1998.

However I would ask you to carefully consider the following points before proceeding with your decision.

- The modern workplace and wider society, for which we are helping to prepare....., includes a diversity of cultures and faiths, all of which should be respected under the terms of the Equalities Act of 2010. The best way forto be fully prepared, in this sense, is to understand and have knowledge of the basic features, of all religions and cultures, including those with which some may disagree. (I attach a copy of our programme of study for your information)
- In order to fully reach his/her full potential,should be prepared and informed about modern British society which is, and always has been, made up of a wide variety of cultures and ethnicities.
- Religions may, at times, develop extremist and violent elements which claim to act in their name, and Islam is no different in this respect. Despite recent acts of terror carried out in its name, we know that Islam, as a faith, has no more place for such actions than do the other faiths that are part of British society.

Should you decide to proceed with your original decision however, you should be aware that:

1. The school is required by law only to provide adequate supervision and that it is expected that parents will provide an equivalent and alternative RE programme of study forto follow during the time that he/she is withdrawn from lessons. He/she cannot use this time to 'catch up' with other subjects.
2. In accepting your request the school is in no way endorsing your reasons for making it.

I hope you will reconsider your decision in the light of some of these points and allow.....the full, broad and balanced curriculum to which she/he is entitled and which he/she deserves.

Yours.....



Lord Nash

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

7 January, 2015

Dear colleague

I am writing to you as Minister responsible for faith schools. I have recently had many conversations about the important role SACREs and local authorities have in supporting this area, which have encouraged me to write.

I would like to emphasise the importance of good teaching of religious education and the central role of SACREs and local authorities. All pupils benefit from good quality religious education teaching. RE makes a significant contribution to pupils' academic and personal development. It also plays a key role in promoting social cohesion and the virtues of respect and empathy, which are vitally important in our diverse society. The recent events in some schools in Birmingham have highlighted the importance of promoting the crucial values of respect and tolerance in our schools.

The role of a SACRE is to support the religious education curriculum and collective worship within schools. Local authorities have a duty to enable SACREs to fulfil their statutory responsibilities in these areas. They should assure themselves that the SACRE is functioning well and holding regular meetings. It may also be appropriate for the local authority to support the SACRE's work to provide teacher training in RE and collective worship training.

It is vital to continue to improve the academic rigour of RE in schools so that pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of this subject. The last Ofsted review of the subject found that the potential of RE was not being realised in many schools. The introduction of the new and more demanding national curriculum makes the importance of improving religious education even clearer.

The recent events in Birmingham schools have also highlighted the importance of all schools promoting the fundamental British values of the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. In some schools in Birmingham, inappropriate religious education teaching and a distorted school ethos served to undermine those fundamental British values. We have recently publishing guidance for all schools to make clear their responsibilities in this area, and have introduced new legislation for independent schools, academies and free schools to actively promote fundamental British values. The guidance is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-sm-sc-development-of-pupils-in-independent-schools>.

Good progress has been made recently to improve religious education. All students studying a GCSE in religious studies will now be expected to study two religions along

with textual analysis, or philosophy and ethics, which will broaden their knowledge and understanding. We have also taken measures to ensure we have sufficient high-quality religious education teachers, who have detailed subject knowledge and expertise. We have introduced a new bursary scheme for the recruitment of high-quality RE teachers in 2015/16. Trainees who hold a 1st class degree qualify for a £9,000 bursary, and those with a 2:1 £4,000.

SACREs are well placed to contribute to this important work through their development of appropriate and demanding RE syllabuses, and their support to schools on the effective teaching of RE, including continuing professional development for RE teachers.

It is inappropriate for any school, whether they are a faith school or not, to offer their pupils a narrow interpretation of religious education. All schools should ensure their pupils are aware of the tenets of all the major faiths represented in Great Britain. SACREs can support this through their development of locally agreed RE syllabuses, and their advice to schools on collective worship and on effective RE teaching. I would encourage SACREs to consider the ways in which their locally agreed syllabus helps pupils to develop an understanding of Christianity, whilst also learning about the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

As part of their responsibilities, SACREs must provide an agreed syllabus to support the religious education curriculum in schools, which must be reviewed every five years. A report must also be produced annually outlining the activities of the SACRE. All SACREs are encouraged to submit their annual reports to NASACRE for inclusion on their website to enable members to showcase the important work that is going on around the country, share knowledge and learn from best practice. The Department intends to commission a review of SACRE annual reports to identify good practice, and ensure that all SACREs are fulfilling their statutory duties.

SACREs would not be able to exist without the advice, help and support of the many dedicated individuals and communities, who work together to fulfil their many and varied roles. I understand that many members offer their time and expertise voluntarily, and they continue to offer professional and personal support to schools and communities in an increasingly complex and demanding environment. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to everyone who serves the pupils in their area in such a way.

Yours sincerely



JOHN NASH