

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Tuesday 29 June 2010

PRESENT:

Councillor Stark, in the Chair.

Councillor Drean, Councillor Gordon, Councillor Tuohy, Clare Hamon, Mrs. Abubakar, Ms. Hughes, Ms. Mitchell, Dr. Saha, Rev. Chave, Mr. Lyddon, Mr. Edmonds, Ms. Hutchings and Ms. Farrow.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Foster, Mrs. Hill, Mr. Blackler, Father G Carpenter, Mrs. Briggs, Mr. Grainger, Mr. Knight, Dr. Lee, Miss. McVicker, Mrs. Shelmerdine and Mr. Maudsley.

Also in attendance: Kelsang Ratna, Mr. Marshall (RE Advisor) and Mr. Johnston (Democratic Support Officer)

The meeting started at 1.10 pm and finished at 3.30 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.

43. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by SACRE members.

44. **MINUTES**

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2010 be approved.

45. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

Visit to Plymouth Islamic Education Trust (PIETy) Mosque prior to the meeting

The Committee was advised that the visit to PIETy was part of the SACRE Development Plan to foster good relationships with faith communities and promote faith literacy across the City. This visit had provided a very interesting and informative introduction into Islam and the Muslim community in Plymouth.

A concern was raised by the Imam on the visit, that some of the negative effects from a minority of the wider community were having an undermining effect on Muslim parents trying to promote Muslim values to their children. This concern was shared by SACRE members who identified these values as common to all religions and the British way of life.

46. **WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS**

The Chair welcomed the following members to SACRE –

- Fiona Hutchings, Headteacher, Notre Dame RC Secondary School;
- Heather Farrow, Downham Special School;
- Martin Edmonds, Tamarside Community College;

- Philippa Wightman, Senior Lecturer, University of Plymouth;
- Councillor Tina Tuohy;
- Councillor David Reynolds;
- Councillor Ken Foster.

The Chair said good-bye and offered thanks to the following members who were no longer on SACRE.

- Jim Knight, Church of England;
- Dr Peter Lee, The Jewish Community;
- Councillor Mary Aspinall;
- Councillor David James;
- Councillor Susan McDonald;
- Councillor Wendy Foster;

Agreed that a letter expressing SACRE's gratitude for the service given by Dr Lee and Jim Knight would be sent to them.

47. **MEMBERSHIP ISSUES**

The Religious Education Advisor informed SACRE Members on membership issues as follows –

- (a) there were still vacancies in Group C, Teachers' Associations and these were being followed up with the aim of filling them;
- (b) the British Humanist Association had formally requested to have a place on SACRE as a co-opted representative;
- (c) three young people had shown an interest in being co-opted on to SACRE.

Agreed that –

- (1) as there was only one co-opted representative position vacant this would be offered to a representative of the British Humanist Association;
- (2) the three young people would be invited to attend SACRE as observers, however, with the Chair's agreement they would be allowed to participate in discussions.

48. **OFSTED REPORT: RE IN SCHOOLS 2006 - 2009 "TRANSFORMING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION"**

The RE Advisor presented the OFSTED report RE in schools 2006-09 "Transforming religious education". Members were informed that –

- (a) the report was a key document for RE and the findings had been conducted over three years with over 180 schools across 70 local authorities being visited;
- (b) the report re-stated that RE was a statutory subject and that the findings provided a mixed picture, these included –
 - the teaching of RE in primary schools had stayed much the same as the previous three year report;
 - the standard of RE teaching in some secondary schools had deteriorated; it was reported that changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum had been

detrimental to RE and this was the reason for the decline in some schools;

- teachers appeared unclear about what they were supposed to achieve and, in particular, the teaching of Christianity appeared to be of greatest concern. There was also confusion around the teaching of non-religious perspectives, eg Humanism;
- (c) the weakness in how Christianity was taught had previously been identified by SACRE and was part of the SACRE Development Plan 2008 - 2011;
- (d) following the change of national government the Rose Review had been withdrawn;
- (e) SACRE had been invited to provide a response to the findings of the OFSTED report.

SACRE members commented that –

- (f) in order to provide a more conclusive response to OFSTED it was important to know how the teaching of RE in Plymouth schools compared to the national average;
- (g) the value of promoting short course RE GCSE (as it did not count towards a GCSE score) was potentially counter-productive for the enhancement of RE as a full subject at full GCSE level;
- (h) as RE was not a core subject and lacked a high profile it was important to have strong leadership from school heads to ensure that the subject had the backing it required. Additionally national leadership was required to put pressure on schools to improve the teachings of RE;
- (i) SACRE can help in supporting schools to teach RE and the services offered by SACRE should be promoted to teachers and schools; with an improved budget SACRE could potentially make a big difference in offering support to teaching staff and improving RE;
- (j) it was agreed that the Department for Education should carry out a review and note the role of SACRE;
- (k) there should be an improvement in the assessment of attainment in RE, this could help in making the teachings of Christianity more appropriate.

Agreed that –

- (1) a recommendation be sent to the Department of Education stating that SACRE believe that there should be a review of the current statutory arrangements for the local determination of the RE curriculum to ensure that these provide the best means of promoting high quality and consistency of RE in schools, and they also define the role and power of SACRE's;
- (2) all future recommendations agreed by SACRE be sent to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, the Director for Services for Children and Young People, the Chief Executive of Plymouth City Council and the Chair of the Children and Young Peoples' Overview and Scrutiny Panel asking them to provide a response to the next meeting of SACRE;
- (3) the SACRE budget should be improved and increased to allow supply cover to enable teachers to attend approved training opportunities. This should be referred to the Schools Forum review;
- (4) the concerns in the report about the inadequacy and confusion around teaching of

Christianity were reflected in the SACRE Development Plan 2008 – 2011. It was hoped that the local authority would work with SACRE to address this problem;

- (5) the Chair and the RE Advisor would respond to the OFSTED report on behalf of SACRE highlighting the concerns and feelings raised by members.

49. **PLYMOUTH SACRE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

In respect of the SACRE Development Plan 2008 – 2011 the RE advisor informed members that –

- (a) the role SACRE had played in enhancing the role of RE to community cohesion should be celebrated;
- (b) the Devon RE Advisor had created a small working group on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimension and collective worship. Plymouth SACRE members had been invited to attend this meeting;
- (c) the RE syllabus “Every Child Matters in RE” that was used in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay schools was recognised nationally as a good model;
- (d) when monitoring the syllabus in schools members must be mindful that it was not an inspection of the school and they were there to offer support and guidance;
- (e) Ms. Mitchell had created a guidance note for SACRE members giving advice and protocol when in schools;
- (f) it was hoped that a group would be organised inviting a number of schools to participate. As part of this group SACRE could demonstrate what support and guidance they could offer to schools with regard to RE.

50. **NATIONAL AND LOCAL UPDATES**

The RE Advisor provided SACRE Members with an update on national and local updates. Members were informed that –

- (a) nationally the RE picture appeared critical with the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) being decommissioned. The QCDA had a subject lead in RE who had a significant role in promoting RE at Government level;
- (b) The RE representative Officer at the Department for Education (DFE) was stepping down and it was uncertain whether this post would continue. This was another national post that RE had lost;
- (c) locally there was a great deal of excellent work from schools promoting RE.

The RE Advisor handed out a summary, prepared by Graham Langtree, the Devon RE Adviser from the NASACRE Annual General Meeting’s keynote speech by Clare Short,. It made some interesting and significant comments regarding the importance of RE and SACRE.

51. **PLYMOUTH COUNCIL OF FAITHS**

The Religious Education Advisor provided SACRE Members with an update on the Plymouth Council of Faiths. Members were informed that –

- (a) Plymouth City Council had requested through a Service Level Agreement with the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity that a forum or Council of Faiths be created to ensure that consultation with people of faiths and other

cultures was taking place;

(b) The next meeting of the Council was scheduled for 5:30pm on 6 July 2010.

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

SACRE members were informed that due to a clash with a meeting of the City Council the meeting on 6 December 2010 needed to be re-arranged and a new date would be disseminated to members as soon as possible.

53. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.