

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Thursday 18 July 2019

PRESENT:

Miss Katie Freeman, in the Chair.
Councillor Mrs Aspinall, Vice Chair.
Councillors Drean, Mrs Johnson, Tuffin and Tuohy.

Margaret Thompson, Liz Hill, Dr Judith Beckman, Emma Butler, Sara Wells, Gwen Hughes, Martin Edmonds and Ben Kerr.

Apologies for absence: Dr Catherine Bowness and Councillor Morris.

Also in attendance: Heather Ogburn (Senior Leadership Adviser) Michael House 9Healthy Child Leadership Associate) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 3.25 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.

1. **Nomination of Chair and Vice Chair**

Agreed that Groups B and D would take on the roles of Chair and Vice Chair for the next two year period.

Following a discussion, it was agreed that –

- (1) the Chair for the forthcoming municipal year would be Miss Katie Freeman (Group B);
- (2) the Vice Chair for the forthcoming municipal year would be Councillor Mrs Aspinall (Group D).

2. **Declarations of Interest**

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

3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2019 were agreed as an accurate record subject to the inclusion of Mrs Helena Mitchell's apologies.

4. **Matters arising from previous minutes**

There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

5. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business.

6. **SACRE Constitution**

Heather Ogburn (Senior Leadership Adviser) advised that the SACRE Constitution was attached to the agenda in order for members to consider if it needed to be updated.

Members discussed:

- (a) that the constitution was of a generic model and was similar to that of Devon SACRE's; it was considered the constitution was quite dated therefore it was suggested that advice was sought from NASACRE;
- (b) that the information contained came from legislation therefore it would be beneficial to approach the Council's Monitoring Officer for advice;
- (c) Members questioned if SACRE had the correct representation for Groups A, B and C;
- (d) it was important for Plymouth SACRE to be represented by the Plymouth Community;
- (e) the representation of secular communities on a voting group; in order to represent a vast number of people who weren't religious.

It was agreed that the discussions above would be taken on board and an update would be provided at the next meeting.

7. **SACRE Membership - Verbal Update**

Heather Ogburn (Senior Leadership Adviser) advised Members to consider SACRE's current membership as several groups were often poorly represented at meetings.

Members discussed the following:

- (a) if the appointment for several individuals should be reconsidered as some had not attended a SACRE meeting in six months or at all in some cases;
- (b) it was questioned how many active teachers sat on SACRE; it should be a priority to attract more teachers due to the number of vacancies in Group C; Members raised the importance of specifying Religious Studies teachers in order to have a better understanding of compliance in schools;
- (c) the feasibility of contacting a Roman Catholic School in order for them to recommend someone who might want to join SACRE ;
- (d) the importance of members attending meetings and actively participating;

- (e) the Secondary Head Association could be approached to help SACRE fill a vacancy for a secondary Head Teacher;
- (f) it would be beneficial to contact the Plymouth Education Board as they represented a mix of different sorts of schools (Maintained/ Academy etc);
- (g) there were several vacancies in Group A; it would be useful to contact those faith groups to query if SACRE had the best representative as part of their membership; it was highlighted that the Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity could help with these discussions as they worked with faith reps regularly;
- (h) it was questioned if the number of representatives in each Group was flexible; it was highlighted that the constitution specified the numbers in each group and legislation set the Groups.

It was agreed that efforts would be made to fill current SACRE vacancies based on the suggestions raised by Members.

8. **Annual Report 2018/19**

Heather Ogburn (Senior Leadership Advisor) presented the Annual Report 2018/19 to Members.

Members discussed the following:

- (a) SACRE's role in seeking assurance from schools regarding their compliance of teaching RE and collective worship. It was suggested that a letter could be sent from the SACRE Chair to Head Teachers highlighting how Ofsted was due to operate in the future, with a focus upon RE in order to act as a reminder to schools to fulfil their obligations. Heather confirmed that she was willing to contact maintained schools direct in order to speak to Head Teachers;
- (b) Members felt it was a good time to approach schools and discuss compliance with the introduction of the new Agreed Syllabus; Members considered that it was a high quality syllabus which was well supported by RE Today and there was no reason why schools couldn't teach good RE;
- (c) Heather advised Members that all maintained schools received a visit from her whereby she would discuss the syllabus; it was agreed that the Chair and Heather would agree separately how best to approach the issue of compliance in schools;
- (d) section 2.2.1 in the Annual Report referred to the number of secondary school candidates that had been entered for the full GCSE examination in Religious Studies in 2018/19; this was a fall of 224 students from 2017/18. Members discussed what SACRE were doing about the fall in numbers and wanted reference in the annual report as to the dangers of non-compliance at key stage 4. It was also discussed that a SACRE in another local authority

had named and shamed non-compliant schools in the local press however this approach was not one that all Members were comfortable with;

The Annual Report 2018/19 included reference to the Agreed Syllabus Conference led by RE Today. The Chair and Heather Ogburn (Senior Leadership Advisor) provided a brief overview of the conference as follows:

- (e) Plymouth had the same RE Syllabus as Devon, Torbay and Cornwall;
- (f) over 80 people attended Plymouth's syllabus launch on 8 July 2019; Heather had since been advising those who were unable to attend on how to access the new syllabus;
- (g) forms collated from the syllabus launch contained positive feedback overall; some secondary teachers considered however that the information was quite primary orientated.

Members agreed:

1. the Annual Report 2018/19 with the addition of information to section 2.2.1;
2. that the NASACRE member logon information would be emailed to Members.

9. **Plymouth RE Hub and Learn Teach Read - Verbal Update**

The Chair advised Members that Catherine Taylor attended the RE Hub and led a group in reflective story telling; Members were advised that it demonstrated how stories could be told in different ways. It was praised as a positive session that could be used to help tell stories in religious studies.

The RE Hub was planning to meet six times in the academic year; SACRE Members were welcome to attend the hub meetings.

It was agreed that dates of the hub meetings would be provided to the SACRE secretary in order to send around to Members.

10. **Local and National Developments - Verbal Updates**

Ed Pawson provided Members with a presentation upon the current issues in RE focusing upon:

- religion and worldviews: a new vision for RE;
- the 3 'I's of Ofsted (intent conceived, implementation taught, impact experienced);
- the influence of Big Ideas;

It was highlighted to Members that:

- (a) 1,095 young people aged 16-18 across the UK were surveyed regarding their

favourite and least favourite subjects; survey results demonstrated that RE was one of the least favourite subjects in the curriculum;

- (b) national trends continued to show a drop in entries for GCSE Religious Studies in both full and short courses; A level entries had also been significantly down over recent years;
- (c) the Commission on RE Final Report (2018) proposed a new vision for Religious Education as Religion and Worldviews; the inclusion of 'worldview' was considered to highlight the change in focus upon cultures and individual viewpoints;
- (d) the report states that the time is right for a new vision for the subject:
 - to prepare children for an increasingly diverse world;
 - where people may identify with more than one institutional worldview, or none at all;
 - to ensure that a wider range of institutional worldviews is taught (particularly Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism);
 - understanding how they influence behaviour, institutions and forms of expression;
- (e) the Commission for RE report received mixed feedback with the Secretary of State for Education concluding that 'now was not the time to begin these reforms';
- (f) the new Ofsted inspection framework will mark a significant change to the way subjects like RE are inspected:
 - all pupils in maintained schools would be required to study the basic curriculum, which included RE;
 - there would be two-day long school inspections ;
 - to improve the way schools are held to account for RE;
 - continued focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development.

Members considered that the reduction in take-up for RE could be down to a lack of teaching expertise and pupils not realising the connection between RE and civil society and the people that live within it. It was discussed that the support for, and quality of teaching needed to improve.

Members noted the update and agreed to invite Ruth Flanagan (University of Exeter - Lecturer in Education, Race Equality Resource Officer) to the next SACRE meeting to

provide Members with an overview of how she uses a worldviews perspective to train teachers.

Under this item the Chair thanked Ed Pawson for his work in supporting the organisation of the Plymouth Agreed Syllabus and for sharing several documents that he had prepared for the Devon launch.

11. **The RE Commission**

This item was discussed in minute 10.

12. **OFSTED and RE**

This item was discussed in minute 10.

13. **AREIAC and NASACRE Membership**

This item was discussed in minute 10.

14. **Proposals for Holocaust Memorial Day 2020 - Verbal Update**

Katie Freeman (Chair) advised Members that 2020 would mark the 75th Anniversary of the end of the Holocaust; in commemoration of the anniversary the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust were running a national project for faith groups, schools, charities and community groups to make their own Memorial Flames. In total 75 flames would be selected (each flame would commemorate a year since the end of the Holocaust) and would form a national exhibition that would be launched at the UK Ceremony for HMD 2020. Other artworks that were not selected in the exhibition would be displayed as part of local HMD commemorations.

The Chair highlighted that she had signed up to take part in the project and asked members if this was something that SACRE could organise for schools to take part in.

Members discussed:

- (a) if SACRE could provide support in gathering materials;
- (b) if a venue could be identified to display the pieces of artwork; it was highlighted that the Council House foyer was used to display a exhibition recently for the Merchant Navy however the Council did not have display boards so these needed to be sourced separately;
- (c) this project could be linked with the reuse recycle project at schools – plastic could be used and the exhibition could be displayed outside – it was highlighted that there were restrictions in place as to what could be done in a public space;
- (d) Ed highlighted to Members that a daughter of a Holocaust survivor as well as the son of a concentration camp guard would be talking at an event in Exeter on 29 January 2020 for Holocaust Memorial Day.

It was agreed that the Chair would contact schools regarding the Memorial Flames project and a venue for the exhibition space would be explored.

15. **Collective Worship - Verbal Update**

Members discussed the issue of collective worship in schools and referred to a document originally produced by SACRE's previous RE Advisor, Jonathan Marshall.

It was agreed that this document would be attached to the agenda for the next meeting for discussion.

Under this item the Chair highlighted the WIRE Award (Widening Inclusivity in Religious Education) to Members - the award recognised excellence in RE in schools and the criteria for the award was as follows:

- somebody from your school must attend an RE conference or attend an RE Hub meeting;
- students must visit a place of worship that is not Christian (or a majority faith represented in your school);
- arrange an encounter day or RE event and invite a member of SACRE OR enter a competition to do with RE, such as Spirited Arts

It was agreed that this would be added an agenda item for the next meeting.

16. **Agreed Syllabus Update - Verbal Update**

This was discussed in Minute 8 above.

17. **Update from Members - Verbal Update**

Under this item Councillor Mrs Aspinall (Vice Chair) brought to Members attention an issue that a family member had experienced in a Plymouth school. Members were advised that her nephew had sadly passed away and her nephew's daughter was offered bereavement counselling; someone had made a comment that the girl's father had 'gone to Heaven'. This caused upset to the family as they were practising Jehovah Witnesses therefore the comment wasn't aligned with their belief.

Members discussed:

- (a) bereavement services in schools and the importance of religion;
- (b) if SACRE had a role in highlighting this issue to schools;
- (c) if schools recorded what religion/ faith (if any) a child was part of;
- (d) the importance of taking a personal approach if a child had experienced a family bereavement;

- (e) the role that the Multi Agency Support Team (MAST) had in dealing with bereavement;
- (f) that the majority of schools did not have a dedicated trained grief counsellor and instead a member of staff was trained in loss training;

Heather responded that she had contacted the school and a parent support advisor was due to respond with details of the incident; it was agreed that Councillor Mrs Aspinall would be kept updated.

18. **Date and venue of next meeting**

Members were advised that the next meeting of SACRE was scheduled to take place in the Council House on 11 November 2019, 1pm.