

MINUTES of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 3 March 2008 at 2.00 p.m.

Present: Councillor J Stone (Chairman)

Mrs. C. Ault, Revd. P. Barlow, Mr. P. Bowen, Mrs. J. Brown,
Mrs A Daniel, P Jones CBE, Miss L Langstaff, Mrs S McCamley,
Sr. D. O'Donnell, Rev L Rickards and Revd. I. Terry

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs WU Attfield; Mr Z. Pandor and Mr M Rollnick.

29. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

30. WELCOME TO ROMAN CATHOLIC REPRESENTATIVE

The Chairman welcomed Sister Denise O'Donnell to SACRE. Sister Denise joined SACRE as the Roman Catholic representative on Committee A.

31. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 10th December 2007 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

32. RESPONSE TO WRITTEN PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No written questions had been received.

33. SACRE RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT HEREFORDSHIRE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES PLAN

SACRE considered its response to the draft Herefordshire Children and Young Peoples Plan.

At its December meeting SACRE received an introduction to the Children and Young Peoples Plan and, to enable a response to be made to the consultation, decided to form a small group who would review the draft plan and bring their suggested response to SACRE.

SACRE considered the suggested response by the group, copies of the consultation response form having been circulated at the meeting, and the Consultant for RE, together with other members of the group, took SACRE through their reasoning behind the suggested amendments to include spiritual development/spiritual health, creativity and the adoption of positive values in the sections relating to mental health;

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educational attainment of children and young people, particularly at Key Stages 1 and 2.

RESOLVED: that the suggested response to the draft Children and Young Peoples Plan as formulated by the working group be agreed and submitted to the Local Authority.

34. FINDINGS FROM SCHOOL MONITORING VISITS - AUTUMN 2007 - SPRING 2008

SACRE considered the findings from school Religious Education monitoring visits undertaken between Autumn 2007 and Spring 2008, and considered any themes arising from the monitoring visits.

The Consultant for RE reported that a sample of primary schools (16) were offered the opportunity of a visit to help them with monitoring and evaluating their provision for the statutory teaching and learning of RE. These schools were selected as they were due an Ofsted inspection. The sample included both Diocesan and Community schools. Two had only recently been visited in the previous sample, so were not included again. 5 others responded positively to the invitation. In addition, a new RE coordinator requested a visit. One high school also requested a visit.

There was a delay in organising the primary school visits due to her commitments to the Multifaith event's for children held in September 2007 and January 2008. This resulted in two of the schools requesting that, due to time factors and other pressures, their visits be put 'on hold'.

Two community primary schools have been visited. One other monitoring visit arranged for March has been postponed until April at the request of the Head. One visit has been reorganised (in consultation with the school and diocese) to become an inset staff meeting on assessment.

She further reported that in addition to formal visits other sources of information had been used namely through activities such as the multi-faith event, the SACRE Conference and the 'Finding Treasure' collective worship training. She acknowledged that while this was qualitative rather than quantitative research, and not necessarily representative, it did provide an indication of some of the 'successes' and also the areas requiring further support and development. SIAS Inspection reports from the Anglican Diocese also provided information about RE in church schools.

She further commented on the following themes which were debated by the meeting:

Multi-faith events – these events had: actively involved pupils and teachers in meeting people from at least five faith communities; encouraged children and teachers to articulate questions for faith visitors and reflect on their own beliefs and values; shared their experiences through speaking, listening and presentation activities back in the school; raised the profile of RE in the 32 schools who had participated in the Holmer based event so far; directly led to similar events being run in 2 other schools; helped to share good practice and develop understanding of RE standards and expectations for teachers – through the training activities associated with the two Holmer schools events. The events had also contributed strongly to the community cohesion agenda of enabling pupils to meet and interact with people from other communities – and explore shared values.

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SACRE considered the means of continuing to support and encourage such Multi-faith events and to ensure that multi faith and community cohesion issues were required elements of teacher training in Herefordshire.

The effectiveness of RE Co-ordinators - Enthusiastic and informed RE co-ordinator's raise expectations, encourage the subject to be valued and support effective teaching and learning. In one of the schools visited the RE co-ordinator had made a significant impact on standards and attitudes towards the subject, in the other, a newly appointed co-ordinator was already beginning to transform the 'very low profile' the subject seemed to have had previously.

SACRE considered that a central point of support for co-ordinators through network meetings and informal links should be developed. SACRE wished to encourage the setting up of localised RE network meetings. The setting up of a data base of RE co-ordinators would be beneficial to facilitate setting up meetings and the dissemination, if possible by e-mail, of information.

Standards of achievement and assessment for learning – She reported that feedback through informal conversation, together with findings from SIAS reports indicated that carefully thought out measures for recognising pupils achievement (assessment) were not yet in place in many schools.

SACRE considered the means of providing further support to schools to improve assessment for learning in RE. It was noted that SACRE had no power to inspect RE in schools and therefore had to rely on being invited to visit. They debated how to encourage schools that were reluctant to engage in the visits and suggested that the style of the offer be reconsidered so that there was no misinterpretation of the intentions.

Time for RE – She reported that there was a perceived concern about the dangers of RE slipping off the curriculum. There was a need for guidance to co-ordinators about how to manage the pressures and opportunities of the changing curriculum. She gave an example that a school had talked about an event replacing existing provision for RE. The introduction of the New Secondary curriculum was also raising questions about how to ensure that statutory RE was delivered within the more flexible and interdisciplinary possibilities of the revised key stage 3 curriculum.

SACRE debated the provision of support to schools and the delivery of RE in a changing school curriculum. SACRE acknowledged that trips and events can take longer than a lesson. It was emphasised that flexibility in subject teaching time was needed and that elements of RE could be included in other subject teaching and therefore a degree of quid pro quo was needed.

RESOLVED: That

a) SACRE recommend to the Local Authority that:

- 1. The Local Authority and its partners support, resource and encourage such Multi Faith events;**
- 2. It ensures that Multi Faith and Community Cohesion be required elements of the training of teachers in Herefordshire;**
- 3. A central point of support for RE Co-ordinators be established, possibly through network meetings, and that termly informal links between schools and teachers be encouraged to develop;**

- 4. The Local Authority be encouraged to set up and resource localised RE meetings for teaching staff;**
- 5. To support the effective provision of RE the Local Authority provide additional guidance to schools on the improvement of assessment for learning in RE;**
- 6. SACRE be provided with information about how schools are making provision for RE within the more flexible curriculum structures; and**

b) the SACRE Conference explores ways in which RE can be delivered effectively at the heart of a changing curriculum.

35. SACRE CONFERENCE 2008 - UPDATE ON PLANNING

SACRE considered plans for the 2008 SACRE annual Conference.

The Consultant for RE reported upon, and circulated, a draft programme for the Conference. The key note speaker would be Dr Mark Chater, QCA Programme Advisor, Partnerships and Evidence Team, who would address the Conference on the theme of "RE at the heart of a changing curriculum". Presentations would be made by students of Whitecross High School and St Paul's C of E Primary School. Delegates would choose from both morning and afternoon workshops, one of which was specifically aimed at secondary schools.

On debating the delegate fee, SACRE noted a comment that a number of training events run by the Local Authority were free and questioned whether further support could be made towards offsetting the Conference delegate fee.

Arising from debate on advertising the Conference it was suggested that letters/flyers be sent not only to the school heads and RE subject leaders but also to Chairs of Governors and, where possible, the incumbents of team ministries. It was further suggested that in view of: the changes to the curriculum; the importance of social cohesion, and the opportunity for continued professional development (CPD), the benefits to the RE subject leader attending the Conference be highlighted.

RESOLVED: That the report on plans for the SACRE Annual Conference be noted and the suggestions regarding the advertising of the Conference be implemented.

36. SPEECH BY JIM KNIGHT MP, MINISTER OF STATE (SCHOOLS & LEARNING)

SACRE considered the content and implications of the speech by Jim Knight MP, Minister of State (Schools & Learning) given at the QCA/NASACRE conference on 17 January 2008. A copy of the speech had been included in the agenda.

The Chairman commented that it was pleasing to hear a Government Minister acknowledging that Religious Studies was more popular than ever and that it was the third fastest growing subject at GCSE. He welcomed the statement that Mr Knight's Ministry would be working with the Department of Communities and Local Government to raise the profile of SACREs. He further commented that while the announcement of a further £1 million package of support measures to help spread best practice across the schools and authorities was welcomed, this funding would probably go directly to national bodies rather than schools and SACREs.

It was noted that £1 million towards RE was a small sum when compared to the millions put into other curriculum subjects.

The Consultant for RE reported that a review of the guidance on RE (Department for Education Circular 1/94) was well overdue. It was noted that the guidance needed to be brought up to date to include reference to the non-statutory framework and to support schools in their new duty to promote community cohesion. The intention would be to separate guidance on RE from guidance on collective worship. The focus of the review would be on RE with Collective Worship being considered in the future.

RESOLVED: that the speech by Mr Jim Knight MP and comments recorded above be noted.

37. DUTY OF SACRE TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY COHESION

SACRE considered the duty to support Community Cohesion highlighted in the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) publication "Guidance on the duty to Promote Community Cohesion".

Copies of the publication had been supplied to members prior to the meeting.

The introduction to the guidance stated "From September 2007 schools will also be under a new duty to promote community cohesion. Most schools already consider this as a fundamental part of their role and already work in ways which promote community cohesion. Similarly, many local authorities are working to promote community cohesion and should also regard this as an area to support schools." The document looked at ways in which schools can build on what is happening already in the light of the new duty.

Reference was made to page 9 of the document (section 3.2 What does a school need in promoting community cohesion?) and in particular:

"Many schools have built very successful approaches to using the curriculum and teaching and learning techniques as a tool in building community cohesion, for instance, by providing:

- Opportunities across the curriculum to promote shared values and help pupils to value differences and to challenge prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping. As well as the opportunities in citizenship described above, there are opportunities across the curriculum and in the new programmes of study for Religious Education (RE) and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).
- A programme of curriculum based activities whereby pupils' understanding of community and diversity is enriched through fieldwork, visits, for example to places of worship, and meetings with members of different communities."

SACRE acknowledged that schools received many documents, but it hoped that this document will encourage schools to raise the profile of RE, noting the particular contribution the subject can make to the community cohesion agenda. SACRE hoped that it will lead to schools giving greater emphasis to RE in the curricular timetable.

RESOLVED: that the publication "Guidance on the duty to Promote Community Cohesion" be noted.

38. FEEDBACK ON THE 2ND MULTI FAITH EVENT HELD JANUARY 2008

SACRE received feedback from the 2nd Multi Faith event held January 2008 organised by the Herefordshire Multi Faith Development Group.

Following the very successful Multi Faith conference in September 2007 this further conference had been organised by the Herefordshire Multi Faith Group.

SACRE were informed that the two-day conference for 10 and 11 year olds from 16 county primary schools had been held at Holmer Primary School, Hereford. Pupils and teachers had met representatives of four separate non-Christian faiths and in feedback had reported an enjoyable and uplifting experience. The pupils were introduced to Hinduism through Rangoli pattern making and Hindu storytelling. They learned Sikhism through spiritual music, the Jewish religion from festival celebrations, dance and games, and Islam via an Arabic calligraphy workshop.

SACRE were pleased to learn that arising from the conferences similar learning events had been organised by individual schools, some of which had been reported in the local press. A further two conferences were being planned for 2008/9.

Responding to questions on whether the event might be suitable for pupils at Special schools it was thought that, with minor changes, it could, as it contained a high degree of creative activity.

SACRE thanked Mrs J Cecil, Head of Holmer Primary School, for again hosting the event.

It was suggested that a display based on the Multi Faith conferences be provided at the Annual Conference so that delegates could reflect back on the events one year on.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

39. QCA GUIDE FOR WRITING AN AGREED SYLLABUS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

SACRE noted the publication by QCA of guidance to Agreed Syllabus Conferences on reviewing or revising a locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education using the National Framework, copies having been supplied to Members prior to the meeting.

40. ROLL OUT OF THE NEW SECONDARY CURRICULUM - UPDATE

SACRE received an update on the roll out of the New Secondary Curriculum.

The Consultant for RE reported that a regional briefing would take place on 10 March in Birmingham and that a small number of representatives from Herefordshire schools would be attending. The Local Authority had also set up a Subject Leaders meeting for 13 March to which the Regional Subject Advisor would attend and inform of developments so far e.g. on compelling learning activity and disciplined innovation.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

41. SACRE ANNUAL REPORT TO QCA

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SACRE were informed of changes to the format of the SACRE Annual Report to QCA.

The Democratic Services Officer reminded Members that in autumn 2006 QCA piloted a new reporting format for drawing up SACRE annual reports. The piloted format had been revised in light of the experience gained and in response to other comments and observations. The revised new format is optional as SACREs may use it voluntarily, as an alternative to the existing (1997) annual report format. The new template contained five main sections with some general summary questions at the end. Within each section there were specific questions that were designed to capture information on aspects of SACREs work. The specific nature of the questions also facilitated the annual analysis of reports by QCA.

The Democratic Services Officer reported that he would be consulting the Lead Officer and the Consultant for RE on the future use of the template.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

42. NASACRE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SACRE were invited to nominate a delegate to attend the NASACRE Annual Conference to be held 10.30 am at Mander Hall, Hamilton House, London on Thursday 8th May 2008.

RESOLVED: That Bridget Knight, Lead Officer, be nominated as Herefordshire SACREs delegate with the Chairman, Councillor J Stone as reserve.

43. FUTURE MEETING DATES

SACRE noted that the following provisional dates had been identified and that confirmation would be issued in due course:

- 2pm Tuesday, 24th June, 2008, at Brockington, Hafod Road, Hereford
- 2pm Monday, 1st December, 2008, Shirehall, Hereford.
- 2pm Monday, 9th March, 2009, Shirehall, Hereford.

The meeting ended at 3.45 p.m.

CHAIRMAN