

HEREFORDSHIRE SACRE
A Survey of RE in some Primary School

Report By: Head of Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

1. To consider the outcome of a survey of Religious Education in 10 Primary Schools, representing a cross section of schools in Herefordshire.

Financial Implications

2. The costs associated with this survey and report are funded from the SACRE budget.

Report

3. **Introduction:** This survey is the result of a letter to schools from the Chairman of the Herefordshire SACRE, Councillor John Stone, dated 1st September 2003, in which he asked for the support of a sample number of schools (primary and secondary) to participate in a series of visits to be made by two external consultants during the autumn and spring terms, in order to discuss the way in which RE and Collective Worship were progressing so that SACRE could evaluate its progress against its development plan.
4. In consultation with Ted St. George, Head of the Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service, and the support of the Board of Education of Hereford Diocese, a list of 10 primary schools representing a cross section of schools within the County was compiled. These included:
 - a very large primary school,
 - an Infants' school,
 - a Junior school,
 - a small rural (2 class) primary school,
 - a Special school, and
 - five other schools of varying sizes representing urban and rural situations.
5. Of these schools, 3 were church schools.
6. Schools were made aware of the fact that the visits were not inspections and that no lesson observations would take place. The information gathered derives from discussions with the Headteacher and RE Coordinator, (where appropriate) of each school. Schools were informed of the areas for discussion before the visits took place. Most schools were prepared to share their documentation about the subject

For further information on the subject of this report is available from
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which included samples of children's work. The duration of visits ranged from just over an hour, to half a day.

7. **Policy, Guidelines and Planning in RE:** Schools consider that they are well served and supported by the locally agreed syllabus for RE and the QCA guidelines in the subject. The agreed syllabus is, in fact, very highly regarded and all schools involved in the survey commented without prompting on its accessible format and the usefulness of the guidance materials.
8. In almost all situations, the agreed syllabus forms the basis of a school's approach to the creation of its policy and guidance for the teaching of RE. The church schools that participated in the survey opt to use the agreed syllabus, and one of them has made adjustments in order to provide more opportunities for the development of Christianity, particularly in Year 1.
9. About half the schools involved in the survey willingly offered their policies and planning for review and it is very apparent that the agreed syllabus has had a considerable influence on the way that school's plan for the subject. This largely stems from the generous information that is given in the guidance contained within the agreed syllabus.
10. In schools with mixed age-ranges, particularly at Key Stage 2, considerable care is taken to ensure that pupils receive their full entitlement to the range of experiences presented in the syllabus. In one school, pupil tracking is used to monitor subject coverage; this ensures that each pupil experiences the full range of coverage within the subject.
11. Time allocated to the subject in each school is about an hour per week. In one school, this time is sometimes 'blocked together' so that children have an opportunity to engage in more sustained activities on occasions, such as the preparation for Harvest and Christmas festivals. In another school, RE becomes the major Humanities focus one term in six allowing the school to carry out more detailed study within the subject.
12. One school convenes a class meeting for parents at the start of a new session at which the curriculum content for the forthcoming year is shared; RE is part of this process.
13. **Perception of Teaching and Learning in RE:** Although not an overt part of the Foundation Stage curriculum, the majority of schools made a point of stressing the importance of involving children in activities that featured some aspect of RE, where appropriate, as part of personal and social development and knowledge and understanding of the world.
14. One school, in stressing the importance of first-hand, practical experiences for pupils in the Foundation Stage, had recently arranged for this age group to visit the local church where the vicar had involved them in a baptismal service. The children took an active part in the service, at which a doll was christened. The pupils have in the past, also experienced a wedding service in a similar fashion.
15. In one of the church schools, the Year 1 topic about 'Homes' has been adapted for children in the Foundation Stage so that RE is experienced in such themes as 'friendship' and 'rules for living.'

- In Key Stage 1, RE tends to be experienced through a thematic approach. In a small rural church school, RE teaching is managed by a specialist part-time teacher who teaches all pupils within the Key Stage 1 class. The teaching is well differentiated and supported by a teaching assistant, and pupils' work shows that learning is effective across the age range.
 - In Key Stage 2, two schools (both church schools), make use of subject specialists to teach RE. In one of these schools, this is carried out by a part-time teacher and in the other, the headteacher takes on this responsibility as well as the coordination of the subject. While the headteacher takes RE in the Key Stage 2 classes, the respective class teachers have the opportunity to specialise in teaching PE or Science elsewhere in the school.
16. In this school, the pupils make use of a unique colour coding system to identify particular elements of the major faiths studied during their time in Years 3 to 6. Each element of a faith has a particular colour associated with it that enables pupils to make rapid comparisons of particular aspects of religious belief and practice more easily. In Year 6, pupils engage in a world overview of faiths where the colour-coded approach to analysis is particularly helpful.
 17. Most of the schools involved in the survey were keen to present examples of the pupils' work in RE in each of the Key Stages. Samples of work show that in these schools good use was being made of a range of resources to support development in the subject. Children's work includes the use of quizzes, narrative and report writing, list making and contrasts and comparisons, art work, the use of ICT and digital photography; they also engage in role play, dramatisations and puppetry. Samples of work also indicate the use being made of particular religious artefacts, records of visits to places of worship and other schools and accounts of visitors to school – mainly from Christian denominations.
 18. In one of the church schools, written work in RE is kept to a minimum with emphasis being placed on opportunities to respond creatively in painting, photography, clay and construction modelling. Bible and other religious stories are brought to life through role-play, dance, drama and puppetry.
 19. Section 23 inspections of the three church schools involved in the survey show that RE is well taught and managed and is a particular strength of each school, making a positive contribution to its life and work.
 20. **The Assessment of Progress and Achievement in RE:** Recently appointed RE coordinators tended to voice concerns about the management of the assessment of progress and achievement in RE, but this mainly results from being new to the post and an understandable unfamiliarity with the processes and requirements of the subject. Most of the schools in the survey, however, were only too willing to share samples of pupils' work in RE. Some of these schools have made, or are in the process of making, portfolios of evidence that directly relate to the RE syllabus and the expected levels of achievement.
 21. Where a school has a portfolio of evidence or collects samples of pupils' work on a regular basis, coordinators were able to explain how they used these materials, along with teachers' planning, to ensure coverage of the syllabus and make judgements about the rate of progress being made within the subject across the age range.

22. At least two of the schools have yet to embark on the more formalised process of a whole school approach to assessment. The coordinators concerned are aware that this matter is an important issue for the school to resolve as soon as possible.
23. In one of the church schools, the standard of presentation of work in pupils' RE books is extremely high across the age range. The headteacher, who is also the RE coordinator, carries out assessments of progress through formal discussions with pupils about their work. In another church school, the local vicar, who actively participates in teaching RE and Collective Worship, is involved in discussions with the pupils about their work in RE.
24. At another church school, the output of one week's work from each child in each subject is placed each term in a Progress Book. These progress books remain with the child throughout their time in school and are used for monitoring attainment and achievement. Moderation of standards forms part of a regular staff meeting agenda.
25. Because of the way in which planning is developed in a Special school, it is possible to track individual achievement within each subject. Considerable use is made of digital photography in this school to supplement the more traditional forms of the assessment of progress and achievement. Some schools make use of end of unit quizzes or tests to make progress checks.
26. **The Contribution made by RE to Citizenship and Personal and Social Development:** All schools view RE as a subject in which teachers can create a climate of confidence for children to hold, share and question beliefs, values and attitudes. RE provides an opportunity for children to become aware of and gain an understanding of other people's attitudes, beliefs and values, their points of view and opinions. One of the schools refers to the opportunity to share views and opinions in circle time as a 'time for fellowship'. Involving children in assemblies that also involve their parents and other members of the community serves to enhance pupils' self-esteem.
27. Schools actively promote links between RE and personal and social development. The recent development of values education by LEA Primary Inspector, Bridget Knight, is helping to strengthen ties between RE, personal and social development and citizenship. Most of the schools that participated in the survey were aware of the LEA's initiative on the development of values education, and at least 4 are actively involved in promoting values education as part of an integrated approach to RE – collective worship- personal and social development and citizenship.
28. Links are also being made in one of the schools between RE, collective worship and citizenship, through the development of approaches to the mediation of conflict and the creation of friendship schemes, particularly at break and dinner times. The school's council is actively involved in promoting this development.
29. One headteacher stressed the need to ensure that although RE needed to be closely related to personal and social development and citizenship, care needed to be taken to ensure that the subject retains its individuality and does not become submerged as an aspect of personal and social development or citizenship.
30. **The impact and Influence RE has within the wider Community:** This aspect of RE derives from the notification given by HMCI David Bell to SACREs in January

2003 of OFSTED's intention to inspect the work of SACREs. The actual area for consideration is:

'What contribution is being made by SACRE and the LEA towards the social cohesion agenda, particularly in respect of improving religious and racial harmony within the community?'

31. If one of the purposes for teaching RE in schools is to help children become aware of other people's points of view, their values, attitudes and beliefs, then it seems reasonable to suppose that this aspect of education should have an eventual impact or influence on the wider community. How this impact or influence might be assessed and evaluated remains to be seen. Understandably schools, when confronted with the question, 'In what ways does RE have an impact or influence within the wider community', felt this to be an extremely difficult area about which to be objective.
32. Schools work hard to 'practise what they preach' – particularly when it comes to engaging in activities that promote Christian and humanitarian principles. The following examples serve to show that the principles considered within RE are exemplified in practice within the communities associated with schools involving not only the pupils but also parents and other s from the locality.
33. All schools involved in the survey consider they have very good rapport with their pupils' parents who faithfully attend assemblies and festivals at school or in church at which the principles of Christian living are promoted.
34. All comment favourably on the way in which parents and the local community support any fund raising venture associated with a religious theme such as the Christmas Shoe Box appeal.
35. Issues such as caring, friendship and tolerance for others' views and beliefs are frequently the subject of class or whole-school assemblies at which parents and members of the local community are present.
36. The three church schools involved in the survey are overt in letting people know what they stand for and in what they believe. Those attending these schools are left in no doubt about the religious practices and processes that feature prominently in so much of what each schools does. This features prominently in each school's Section 23 report.
37. One of the schools, not a church school, is actively involved with its local church's parish plan.
38. The Special school involved in the survey draws pupils from a county-wide catchment area. Each pupil has a 'Link Book' in which a dialogue between home and school takes place. There is also a weekly school newsletter that keeps parents informed of school activities, including RE.
39. Two of the schools are actively involved in supporting the Tengeru Project in Tanzania, Africa.
40. Two of the schools take an active interest in visiting local homes for the elderly to sing and perform musical and dramatic items for the residents, one of the occasions being carols at Christmas time.

41. One headteacher feels that during his time at the school, parental attitudes towards the school's involvement in charitable initiatives has become more positive. Initially parents were hostile to such involvement, now there is considerable support for such activities.
42. All schools involved in the survey undertake visits to local places of worship, usually to the local church and the cathedral. Most use their local churches, wherever possible, to celebrate the major Christian Festivals, particularly Christmas. Some of the schools have contacts with several different places of Christian worship and visit these places to consider their similarities and differences and invite their clergy into school to lead Collective Worship.
43. Church schools make good use of their local churches, not only as interesting places to visit, but also involve the pupils in regular opportunities to participate in worship. In each of the schools that participated in the survey, their clergy are actively involved in the schools, as governors, regular leaders of collective worship and take part in the teaching of some RE. Close links are maintained with the Diocese.
44. One of the church schools hosts the diocesan worship group 'Acts 2'. This group is being trained by the Diocesan Schools Officer to lead and participate in school acts of collective worship within the Diocese.
45. One of the city schools has also established links with two rural primary schools and reciprocal exchanges take place between these schools. City children have an opportunity to visit a rural church and compare it to their local church.
46. One rural school has found that with increasing road traffic, it has had to discontinue visits to the nearby church as it is now considered unsafe to walk the children along the main road through the village. Use is made by some schools of the Malvern Third World Centre.
47. The Special school is well supported by visits from different local clergy and visits are made from the school to various local places of worship, including Belmont Abbey and the cathedral, where the pupils participated in a very successful 'sign along' service.
48. **Links with other faith communities:** There is very little evidence of sustained opportunities for pupils to benefit from visits to other faith communities, or receive visitors representing other faith groups. Just under half the schools involved in the survey have been involved in visits to other cultural centres, though not necessarily other faith communities and their places of worship. Those that have not would like to be able to participate in such visits but the considerable cost of arranging transport to such places prevents schools from attempting such a venture.
49. Three of the schools in the survey belong to a Beacon Cluster which arranged for representative pupils from some of the schools involved to participate in a visit to Wolverhampton to meet pupils from other races and cultures and participate in a day of culturally diverse activities. The visit was considered successful and plans are being made for a reciprocal visit and for additional visits to Wolverhampton to become a regular feature of the Cluster programme. One school benefits from occasional links with other faith groups in the city, such as Sikhs.
50. **The Management and Co-ordination of RE:** Just under half the schools in the survey were in the process of either taking on a new coordinator or were

contemplating doing so as a result of internal staff changes or vacancies resulting from the retirement of coordinators.

51. Those coordinators in place within schools have received some training in the management of the subject and speak positively of the quality of the training experienced. A number of the coordinators, especially those new to the role, expressed an interest in training that would help them become aware of the availability and use of resources.
 52. In one school, the recently appointed coordinator is also a Christian minister who is keen to see the subject achieve a high profile within the school.
 53. Some schools, particularly smaller schools, share responsibility for coordination of the subject; this might involve a part-time teacher assuming responsibility for RE, or the headteacher being responsible for a Key Stage, such as Key Stage 2.
 54. Coordinators are aware of their responsibility to monitor the way the subject is taught and assess and evaluate the progress being made by pupils. Those new to the post express some concerns about the way in which progress and achievement can be assessed, and although all recognise the value of the agreed syllabus in providing information about this matter, training in the way that this can be organised and managed within school would be appreciated.
 55. Headteachers endeavour to provide some degree of non-contact time for coordinators to carry out their responsibilities, though in smaller schools this is problematic.
 56. **RE Resources:** Schools have built up a good range of resources to support the teaching of Christianity. Most schools have a good collection of planning resources, audio and video tapes and a reasonable collection of children's books covering religious stories as well as factual books about different religions.
 57. Schools concede that they perhaps have an insufficient range of resources to support the teaching of different religions, particularly artefacts.
 58. A practice has developed within one school where children are encouraged, while on holiday, to locate and bring to school interesting artefacts to supplement resources to support the teaching of subjects such as history, geography and RE – one such example is a plastic model of the Taj Mahal from India.
 59. The Special school, where RE is experienced by the pupils mainly through multi-sensory activities, has built up an impressive collection of RE resources or kits to support particular RE themes and topics. These kits contain not only relevant RE artefacts but a wide range of multi-sensory activities such as puppets, cookery resources and materials, as well as videos and books. RE stories are presented in the same format as 'book sack' stories with appropriate resources and materials.
 60. **Summary:** Schools consider they are well served by the locally agreed syllabus for RE and the QCA guidelines for the subject. All church schools involved in the survey have opted to use the agreed syllabus.
- Although no observation of teaching and learning in RE formed part of the survey, it was apparent from the evidence being presented to support discussions with

the Headteachers and RE Coordinators, (policies, guidelines, schemes of work and samples of pupils' work), that RE is taught imaginatively and creatively.

- Section 23 inspections of the three church schools visited indicate that RE is well taught and managed and is a particular strength of each school.
- The standard of assessing progress and achievement in RE is high in many of the schools visited, although recently appointed coordinators voice concerns about the management of the process.
- All schools see RE making an important contribution to citizenship and personal and social development, in which a climate of confidence is created that enables children to hold, share and question their own and other people's beliefs, values and attitudes. Effective links are being made in some schools between RE and values education.
- Schools work hard to 'practise what they preach', ensuring that RE has a practical impact and influence within the wider community in which they are set. Some play an active part in community issues that have their roots in the teaching of RE, such as involvement with the Christmas Shoe Box Appeal, participating in a parish plan, supporting the Tengeru Project in Africa and a noticeable improvement in supporting charitable events.
- There is little evidence of sustained opportunities for pupils to benefit from visits to other faith communities or to receive visitors representing other faith groups. The will to develop such links is there, but the practicalities of arranging visits to distant locations for these experiences are costly and time consuming.
- Just under half the schools were experiencing changes in the appointments of RE Coordinators. Training in the management of the subject has been experienced by existing RE Coordinators, but those new to post expressed an interest in training, particularly in the way that RE is assessed and the use and management of RE resources.
- Schools are well resourced to support the teaching of Christianity but most concede that they probably have insufficient resources to support the teaching of different religions.

RECOMMENDATION

That SACRE discuss the report and consider the practical implications arising for its future work.