

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education – Meeting held on Wednesday, 11th June, 2008 at the RE Resource Centre, Lea Junior School, Grasmere Avenue, Slough.

Present:-

Committee 1 – Christian Denominations and Other Faiths

Soofi Mohammad Afzal – Islam
Sue Elbrow – Free Churches (part of meeting)
Jo Osborne – Judaism

Committee 2 – Church of England

Christine Isles

Committee 3 – Representatives of Teacher Associations

Lil Abdo – Professional Association of Teachers (Chair)
Kevin Marsh – National Union of Teachers

Committee 4 – Representatives of the LEA

Councillor Diana Coad
Councillor David Maclsaac
Councillor Mewa Mann
Councillor Sukhjit Dhaliwal

Also Present: - Bill Alexander (Assistant Director, Raising Achievement), Kevin Barrett (Clerk) and the Reverend Mervyn Eden (Chair of the RE Resource Centre Committee).

Apologies for Absence:- Rev Alan Bignell, Roy Davey, Sue Elbrow (for lateness) Councillor Patricia O'Connor and Kevin Walker.

PART I

8. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting of the SACRE held on 17th October, 2007 were approved as a correct record.

Christine Isles expressed her disappointment at the cancellation of the February, 2008 meeting which was due to have taken place at her school, Parlaunt Park Primary, particularly given that she had prepared displays of the children's work to be shown to SACRE Members. It was noted that the meeting had been cancelled due in part to another event involving elected Councillors taking place that evening as well as to the non-availability of Mr Alexander.

9. Matters Arising

Slough RE Resource Centre

The Chair welcomed to the meeting the Reverend Mervyn Eden who had been asked to attend to update SACRE on the future location of the Resource Centre, given the imminent closure of the Lea Schools and their replacement with an Islamic Faith School within the premises. The Islamic School would occupy the Lea School buildings for a further year until summer 2009 while their new premises were constructed. Reverend Eden had attended the recent tree planting ceremony to mark the start of construction of the new school and he expressed his delight at having been present at the start of the project. He commented on the importance of the Resource Centre and was pleased to report that the Centre was to be located within the new Islamic School. Bill Alexander added that a great deal of hard work and negotiation had taken place on behalf of the Centre to secure its future and there had been the options of locating it within Beechwood school or within the new Islamic School. However, the current site was favoured in that it was nearer the town centre and was more accessible. He believed that the current proposals were an excellent outcome both for the Resource Centre and for the town as a whole.

Jo Osborne added that she was pleased with the outcome and was building good relationships with the individuals involved.

The meeting went on to discuss a number of related issues including ways of encouraging greater use of the Resource Centre by schools and others.

Resolved - That the current position be noted and welcomed.

10. Role/Vision for Slough SACRE

Bill Alexander presented a report picking up on a number of the issues raised at the last meeting concerning the role of the SACRE, the lack of any dedicated professional support to it and the LEA's vision for RE in the town. He outlined the main tasks of a SACRE and commented that its broad role was to support the effective provision of RE collective worship in the town including:-

- Giving advice on methods of teaching the Agreed Syllabus for RE including the choice of teaching materials.
- Advising the LEA on the provision of training for teachers.
- Monitoring inspection reports on RE, collective worship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC).
- Considering complaints about the provision and delivery of RE and collective worship referred to it by the LEA.

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He commented that the local authority provided support to schools regarding teaching, standards and achievement irrespective of the nature of the subject. It continued to emphasise the key qualities of learning and teaching and this was reflected in the quality of teaching and learning judgments made by OfSTED and local authority officers. What the Council was unable to do was to provide direct support in developing the RE knowledge of teachers. However, it did disseminate information to schools regarding conferences, teaching materials and local RE meetings. He emphasised that in monitoring the delivery of RE, the SACRE did not have an inspection role but should be provided with the necessary information in order to assess whether schools required additional support and/or advice.

With regard to inspections, he reminded the SACRE that the nature of school inspections had changed and subjects were no inspected as part of the current process. However, SMSC remained a focus and the SACRE had an important role in monitoring the comments arising from OfSTED reports. He would ensure that any comments made in respect of SMSC were reported on a regular basis to the SACRE so that any issues could be addressed.

He also referred to the increase in the number of children taking RE in Slough schools and was happy to provide data about this on an annual basis.

With respect to specialist support, there was no RE specialist employed by the LEA. Whilst government funding was provided for subject advisors in Maths, English, Science and IT, there was no such similar provision for RE. Because the LEA did not actively recruit subject specialists beyond the current core subjects, he suggested a number of options that could be considered to provide additional support to RE. Three possible options were submitted, namely:-

- All six Berkshire Unitary Authority SACREs could recruit an RE Advisor, sharing the cost between them. This would amount to approximately £8,500 per annum.
- The Slough SACRE and the LEA could recruit a part time RE Advisor (0.2 FTE) who could be combined with a local school RE teacher at a similar cost.
- The third option was to employ a consultant on an ad hoc basis. This could amount to between £450 and £500 per day up to a maximum of £8,500 equivalent.

He cautioned however that any such proposal was unbudgeted at the present time and, if it was to be progressed, approval would be needed from the Council's Cabinet for a growth item in the budget for 2009/10 with a view to such a post coming into effect from September, 2009.

Members expressed a preference for the first option. However, there was some concern that one advisor covering all six Unitary Authorities would be spread too thinly and an East Berkshire solution would be preferred.

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However, this would substantially increase the cost per authority. If this was not feasible, the second option could be pursued but the third option, that of employing a consultant, was not favoured.

The SACRE noted that details as to how such a post would be managed and monitored would be looked at in detail in due course but one authority would need to act as the host and manage the individual. There would also need to be close monitoring of their work if they were working for a number of separate authorities.

Following further discussion it was agreed that Mr Alexander pursue the first option with his counterparts in the other two East Berkshire authorities as a first step and report back to the SACRE at its next meeting on progress.

Resolved -

- (a) That the SACRE receive regular reports setting out the comments of OfSTED inspectors in respect of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in Slough schools.
- (b) That an annual statistical update be provided for the SACRE of the numbers of children taking RE in Slough schools.
- (c) That Mr Alexander report back to the next meeting on progress in pursuing the possible recruitment of an RE Advisor across the three East Berkshire authorities.

11. Application for a Determination - Godolphin Junior School

Godolphin Junior School had applied for a renewal of its determination under Section 12 of the Education Reform Act 1988 and a copy of their application form was submitted. It was noted that in the past where such applications were received, an RE Advisor would visit the school to monitor their collective worship so as to ensure that it was being undertaken satisfactorily. Mr Alexander advised that either he or a colleague would visit the school and, at the request of the SACRE, undertake to provide written details for the next meeting so that SACRE Members could be satisfied that the school was complying.

Resolved - That an LEA officer visit the school and report back to the next meeting of the SACRE on the collective worship taking place.

12. Proposed Dates of Future Meetings

The following proposed dates for future meetings of the SACRE were agreed:-

Wednesday, 15th October, 2008 at the Town Hall.
Wednesday, 11th February, 2009 at a school.

13. **Any Other Business**

NASACRE Conference 2008

Lil Abdo reported back on her attendance recently at the National Association of SACREs Annual Conference.

Changes to the RE Curriculum

Lil Abdo circulated details of the changes being made to the RE curriculum by QCA which had the effect of including RE as part of Humanities rather than as a distinct subject and she had concerns that these changes were being introduced without a great of discussion or awareness by SACREs or others.

Mr Alexander commented that he did not believe that there would be any loss of the content or knowledge delivered to pupils but rather that what was proposed was a different way of delivery RE. Members commented that there could be problems for teachers who were expected to deliver RE if they were not specialists and were delivering it for example as part of a joint Humanities curriculum including History and Geography. There was concern that the emphasis on RE would be diluted by such an approach.

In addition, Members had some concerns as to how the Agreed Syllabus would be delivered in such a context and this was an area that would need to be flagged up when the Syllabus came up for review. Members asked whether it would be possible for information to be provided as to how schools in Slough were delivering RE and Mr Alexander suggested that information could be collated in this regard and on how much time was being spent on RE by the various schools. This would enable the SACRE to comment from a position of knowledge.

Resolved - That a report be submitted to the SACRE in due course on the way in which RE is being delivered in Slough's schools and on the amount of time that schools are spending on the subject.

RE Matters Conference

Christine Isles referred to a Conference taking place on 15th September, 2008 in Reading entitled "RE Matters" and asked that anyone wanting further information contact her.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 4.30 pm. and closed at 5.50 pm.)