

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education – Meeting held on Wednesday, 10th June, 2009.

Present:-

Committee 1 – Christian Denominations and Other Faiths

Soofi Mohammad Afzal – Islam
Sue Elbrow – Free Churches
Jo Osborne – Judaism

Committee 2 – Church of England

Christine Isles
Andrew Allen

Committee 3 – Representatives of Teacher Associations

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

Committee 4 – Representatives of the LEA

Councillor Diana Coad
Councillor Maclsaac
Councillor Mewa Mann

Also Present:- Annie Keighley (Senior Adviser, Standards and Achievement), Claire Gray (Clerk)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Fageant

PART 1

1. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting were agreed as a correct record subject to the following amendments. That Lil Abdo is now the representative from Voice which reflects an organisational name change and that Cllr Maclssac be included in the list of apologies.

2. Matters Arising

The Chair reminded all Members of the Joint SACRE Conference to be held on 25th June. A number of Members confirmed that they would be attending.

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Regarding the venue for the RE Resource Centre it was reported that it had been verbally confirmed to the Council that it would remain with Iqra School.

3. Order of Business

The Chair proposed and the Advisory Council agreed that the order of business be changed to take agenda item five first.

4. QCA/DCSF Curriculum Consultation

The Chair advised Members of an email that the Church of England group representatives had received from Jo Fageant which raised a number of points on the Consultation document for the non-statutory guidance. The Chair informed Members that it was important as a SACRE to be familiar with the guidance. It was noted that the first section of this was a fairly straightforward re-stating of the current law without any considerable changes.

It was noted that the guidance made no reference to how RE fitted in with the revised primary curriculum although it acknowledged that there would be some impact from the changes. In response to a question the Chair confirmed that all schools in Slough must use the locally agreed syllabus. This stated that 5% of curriculum time should be spent on RE and should show that Christianity was the predominant faith. Members noted that whilst some teachers were confident in teaching RE many were not. Members advised that Primary teacher training courses only allowed one day for RE. However most primary school pupils generally enjoyed RE lessons.

The SACRE noted that the guidance referred to 'religion and belief'. It was felt that this highlighted the suggestion that secular beliefs systems might be included in the RE curriculum.

The document highlighted SACRE's role in relation to community cohesion. This was also highlighted through the Every Child Matters agenda. It was suggested that there was a danger of politicising an academic subject.

The Senior Advisor, Standards and Achievement advised the SACRE that in the guidance to parents there was a clear role outlined for RE in the primary curriculum. The Officer further advised that RE was now being inspected as a key issue in schools. The guidance stated that it was SACREs responsibility for monitoring RE. However it did not provide any guidance on how this might be achieved. It was noted that Slough had not provided any RE training for teachers but it was suggested that the RE centre was able to provide training. The officer advised that there had previously been a very poor turnout for training that was provided and members suggested that future events could be publicised on the CPD website. It was also suggested that Slough could look into buying into an accredited training course for RE as provided by Surrey. It was also noted that it would be useful for the RE centre to be sent hard copies detailing any future RE training events.

Resolved: That the documents be noted.

5. RE Advanced Skills Teacher

It was suggested that it should be the role of the AST for RE to coordinate the role of RE teachers in Slough. The officer advised that there was a two tier system of ASTs in Slough. Some of these were paid for by the school and this included the AST for RE. Therefore they were under no obligation to take on outreach work to other schools.

A Member asked about whether a check could be carried out to ascertain whether schools were using the Locally Agreed Syllabus. It was felt by some Members that many were probably not, although it would be difficult to monitor this. All RE coordinators in Slough schools had a copy of the syllabus. A Member asked whether it would be possible to observe an RE lesson. It was thought that most schools would probably not be very open to this idea but that RE provision was inspected by Ofsted. However due to the changes in the Ofsted inspections Members felt that RE would not be inspected as it was before. It was agreed that schools would be asked whether they would like to invite SACRE in.

It was agreed that it was important for SACRE to be involved with schools in order to offer assistance to RE coordinators should they require it. It was reported that the catholic primary school coordinators met together on a regular basis but this was not the case with other schools. RE coordinators played an important role in catholic schools but in secular school this was not seen as particularly significant. There was a general consensus that the SACRE should be reaching out more to Slough schools in order to increase their involvement in SACRE.

6. Youth SACRE

The Chair explained that a Youth SACRE was intended to be a voice for pupils. Other Youth SACREs consisted of pupils from years 10 or 11 from different faith groups coming together to discuss what pupils wanted from RE. The meeting usually consisted of a workshop followed by lunch and then meeting with the main SACRE. It was useful to hear the proposals of young people as they often had different perspectives.

Members suggested that it may be helpful to invite primary pupils as well so as to get a broader range of opinions. However it was felt that older pupils would be able to engage better in discussion. It was suggested that it would be useful to aim for the February meeting date to have the Youth SACRE. This would then allow engagement with the new year 10 students. It was suggested that it would be useful to have pupils attend from all Slough secondary schools and from across a range of faiths.

There was some concerns raised regarding funding for a facilitator for the Youth SACRE and auxiliary costs such as refreshments. It was noted that Council

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budgets were very tight at present but it was possible that there would be funding available from NASACRE.

Resolved: That further costings for a Youth SACRE be looked into

7. Any Other Business

The SACRE was informed that QCA focus groups were due to take place but attendance was restricted to one SACRE Member only. It was agreed that a Member would attend.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday, 14th October, 2009.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 4.30 pm and closed at 5.45 pm)