

**SLOUGH STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION –  
Meeting held on Wednesday, 17th October, 2007 at Slough Town Hall.**

**Present:-**

**Committee 1 – Christian Denominations and Other Faiths**

Dr Igan Hayati – Baha'is  
Jo Osborne – Judaism

**Committee 2 – Church of England**

Roy Davey  
Christine Isles

**Committee 3 – Representatives of Teacher Associations**

Lil Abdo – Professional Association of Teachers  
Kevin Marsh – National Union of Teachers

**Committee 4 – Representatives of the LEA**

Councillor Patricia O'Connor

**Also Present:** - Kevin Barrett (Clerk).

**Apologies for Absence:-** Bill Alexander, Rev Alan Bignell, Sue Elbrow, Latif Khan, Councillors Brian Hewitt & David Maclsaac and Maggie Stacey.

**PART I**

**1. Election of Chair**

**Resolved** - That Lil Abdo be appointed Chair of the Slough SACRE for the 2007/08 academic year.

**2. Appointment of Vice-Chair**

**Resolved** - That Jo Osborne be appointed Vice-Chair of the Slough SACRE for the 2007/08 academic year.

**3. Minutes**

The minutes of the last meeting of the SACRE held on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2007 were approved as a correct record.

## Slough SACRE - 17.10.07

### 4. Matters Arising

#### Membership

Mr Davey noted that he should be able to provide a nomination for the current vacancy within the Church of England Group on the SACRE. Members noted that there were currently vacancies for the Black Free Churches, the Secondary Heads Association and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. It was suggested that Primary and Secondary Heads' Associations in Slough be approached for teacher nominations.

#### Professional Support to the SACRE

Notwithstanding the fact that Bill Alexander had been unable to attend this meeting, there was considerable concern at the lack of any dedicated professional support to the SACRE or to schools in the delivery of the RE syllabus. Moreover, the SACRE had a very limited budget and was therefore unable to "buy in" additional support. Members noted the difficulty in meeting the SACRE's statutory duty to monitor the delivery of RE in Slough and asked the Clerk to write to the LEA setting out its concerns and seeking a response on its proposals for supporting RE in Slough.

**Resolved** - That the Clerk write to the Local Education Authority in the terms indicated.

#### Slough RE Resource Centre

Jo Osborne advised the meeting that there was ongoing uncertainty about the future of RE Resource Centre both in terms of its premises and its future role.

With regard to premises, the meeting was reminded that new accommodation would be required once the Lea Junior School closed in the summer of 2008. A number of options had been considered with the Central Library not being an option and Beechwood School having insufficient space. There was still an outstanding offer from the new Islamic Faith School to house the facility although it was not currently clear whether this offer would be taken up.

In addition, it was noted that a special general meeting of the Centre's Trustees was taking place on 30<sup>th</sup> October to consider a proposal that the current work of the Centre as a drop-in centre and lending library of resources should be terminated next summer and that the artefact boxes and core texts be preserved in store and accessible on request, with other resources being distributed to other RE Centres in the area. The meeting was also being asked to look at the possibility of the Centre becoming an inter-faith consultancy for Slough, appointed in conjunction with like-minded religious groups, with an administrator appointed on a part time basis having access to the stored resources referred to.

The meeting noted that it was important that consideration was given to the future role of the Resource Centre and whether it was still essential to the

## **Slough SACRE - 17.10.07**

delivery of religious education in Slough's school. Roy Davey commented on alternative arrangements which had been established in Milton Keynes whereby a book of contacts had been produced where RE teachers and others could get information.

It was noted that the SACRE was continuing to support the RE Centre through payment of its premises rent and there was no question of this support ceasing at the present time. However, until the Trustees had taken a decision on the future of the Centre, it was not possible to take the matter forward.

A suggestion was made that the Trustees might wish to explore the possibility of accommodation at Slough and Eton School and Jo Osborne undertook to pursue this possibility.

### **5. 'Making Sense of Religion' - OfSTED Report**

The meeting considered a report produced recently by OfSTED reviewing religious education in schools and the impact of locally agreed syllabuses. The report contained a number of key findings and recommendations, those specific to local authorities and SACREs being to:-

- Consider ways in which SACREs can be better supported to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively.
- Use the Framework rigorously in reviewing their agreed syllabus, and thoroughly assess the impact of their existing syllabus on standards and the quality of planning and assessment.
- Consider how the work of SACREs might support further the promotion of community cohesion and educating for diversity.

The report also addressed the future role of SACREs, commenting that many SACRE members fear that increased centralisation of the curriculum may threaten their role. In addition, many local authorities found it very difficult to provide their SACRE with the necessary level of professional support to function effectively and respond to change. Moreover, the increased emphasis on school self-determination and self-evaluation raised questions about the role of SACREs in monitoring provision. The current arrangement whereby each local authority and SACRE tried to develop and implement its own syllabus was considered by the report authors to be inefficient and not serving the subject well. It was suggested that garnering the limited resources and focusing them on developing national guidance might be more effective.

The report did however acknowledge that there were powerful arguments for retaining SACREs as they reflected the continuing importance of religious and non-religious beliefs in the lives of individual and communities. It was felt to be essential that local faith communities were confident that what was taught was accurate and balanced. The parents, whether involved in faith communities or not, needed to be assured that their child's school respected diversity, understood the importance which belief and commitment played in developing personal identity, and supported the growth of community cohesion. In addition, through the Agreed Syllabus Conference, the SACRE provided diverse religious

## Slough SACRE - 17.10.07

and non-religious communities with a unique opportunity to contribute to the curriculum.

The report also commented that whether the RE curriculum was locally or nationally devised, SACREs were necessary to give faith communities and other local interests confidence that schools provide a broad and balanced RE curriculum that meets legal requirements. However, many SACREs were not focused sufficiently on raising achievement in RE and improving the quality of teaching and learning. They were not integrated sufficiently into the professional structures and priorities of their local authorities and did not receive sufficient support. The strength of SACREs lay in their multi-faith, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural compositions. Some had responded very effectively to the current priorities of community cohesion and diversity, for example by developing links with inter-faith networks or introducing Youth Faith Forums. These achievements suggested a widening of the defined role for SACREs to reflect these priorities.

Members noted the following points in the subsequent debate:-

- The report acknowledged that RE was becoming a more popular subject among school pupils.
- It was noted, uniquely, that although RE was a statutory subject, it was not part of the national curriculum and some members of the SACRE expressed the view that it should be included as a compulsory subject within the national curriculum, whilst retaining a local flavour to reflect diversity, etc.
- The issue addressed at earlier meetings by SACRE that many of the teachers delivering RE in Slough schools were not specialists was noted. In primary schools, there were seldom RE specialists available whilst at secondary level, whilst there should be specialist teachers, this was not always the case as there were insufficient graduates coming through to deliver RE. SACRE expressed the view that there needed to be proper support for the teachers delivering RE, particularly where it was not their specialist subject.
- RE was often “squeezed out” by other subjects that were within the national curriculum and this was a real problem in primary schools in particular.
- The view was strongly expressed that RE was extremely important in a multi-cultural town such as Slough and needed to be taken seriously and given the correct resources as it was felt to be extremely crucial for community and social cohesion.
- A Member referred to her understanding that the new Khalsa Sikh faith school had suggested charging for other faith groups to visit the school and concern was expressed at this.
- The current focus on results and targets in schools had been to the detriment to the delivery of RE.
- A Member expressed the importance of spirituality in schools and whilst not all parents were happy about learning about other religions, many people were interested in spirituality and it was therefore very important that there was time given to it in schools.
- Given the views expressed by SACRE, it was felt very important that the SACRE was given sufficient resources to support the delivery of RE schools.

## **Slough SACRE - 17.10.07**

On conclusion of the discussion, it was agreed that the Assistant Director of Education be asked for his feedback and comments on the report, including his vision for the delivery of RE and the LEA's objectives for it in Slough. It was suggested that this issue should be discussed further at the next meeting.

**Resolved** - That the report be noted and that the LEA be requested to report back to the next meeting as set out above.

### **6. Joint Berkshire SACREs Conference 2007**

The meeting considered a report prepared by Jo Fageant feeding back on the outcomes of the Joint Berkshire SACREs Conference held on 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2007. Christine Isles, who was present at the Conference, reported back on what had been a very useful event. A number of issues were raised in the subsequent discussion:-

- It was noted that the Surrey SACRE had established a Youth SACRE and this may be something worth considering for Slough.
- It was noted that previous meetings of SACRE had been held in different schools around the town and that, if possible, this practice should be reinstated.
- It was noted that it had been intended to establish a SACRE website but that due to staffing and resourcing issues this had not been progressed.
- One of the views expressed was that it would be extremely helpful to set up a day short course for RE Co-ordinators in Slough schools, possibly by making a small charge so that the event was cost neutral. It would perhaps be possible to get representatives from different religious groups in the town to speak on their religions.

**Resolved** - That the report be noted and that the proposal for a training day for RE Co-ordinators be progressed.

### **7. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting of the SACRE be held on Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2008. Following discussion, it was agreed that this should be held at Parlaunt Park School, provided that the school could accommodate the meeting. Christine Isles kindly offered to make a short presentation on the meeting on RE in the school.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 4.30 p.m. and closed at 6.05 p.m.)