

MINUTES

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education Meeting - 20 June 2018

Present: **Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf**

Sonia Andjelkovic, Mrs J Grundy, Sam Kirwan, Sam Phillips, Ian Lawson, Lauren Nicholson Ward, Judy Wyman, Gabi Oldfield, Vickie Longson and Bob Spencer

Apologies for absence: Linda Goodwin, Andrea Hopkins, Diana Cutler, Dr Laow Panyasiri, Mark Sutton and Syed Hussain

Also in attendance – Emma Jardine-Phillips, Mary Gale and Julie Roberts

PART ONE

1. Welcome to New Members

The Chairman welcomed Bob Spencer, County Councillor representative, to the SACRE.

2. Minutes of the SACRE Meeting held on 7 February 2018

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 7 February 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

3. Update on Key Issues

The SACRE received an update on key issues that had occurred since their last meeting, including:

- a) Staffordshire SACRE had been mentioned in a book, "How to be a Peaceful School – Practical Ideas, Stories and Inspiration". This was a practical guide which provided a simple four step system for improving wellbeing and nurturing the potential of pupils and staff. It was full of easy to implement anti-stress and anti-bullying strategies, plus ideas for getting children interested in peace on a global level. Chapter 6, "A Peaceful Classroom – Creating Space and Using Philosophy for Children" was written by Christine Easom, a former Staffordshire RE teacher. At the start of her chapter Christine expressed her thanks to Staffordshire SACRE for their support during the project and for helping to put her in touch with schools at which to conduct her research.
- b) Following the success of the Explore-Engage-Reflect student conference an email had been received from The Youth Net, one of the organisations involved, which said that three additional schools had contacted them about booking the exhibition and that potentially a cluster of schools in Stone were planning a whole day conference in the Autumn term.
- c) The Department for Education (DfE) had offered support for SACREs facing financial and other challenges in meeting their statutory duties. In response to a recent parliamentary question, the minister Nick Gibbs had stated "If the Department is informed that an individual SACRE or ASC is experiencing

difficulties in fulfilling its statutory duties, the Department will contact the local authority to remind them of their duty to support their activities satisfactorily”.

- d) The consultant to SACRE, Emma Jardine-Phillips, would be leaving Entrust and Staffordshire SACRE at the end of term. Emma had been with the SACRE for eight years, and the Chairman outlined a number of successful initiatives which she had been involved with. Whilst very pleased for Emma and her career development, the Chairman and SACRE members agreed that they would be very sorry to lose her services to SACRE and her enthusiastic and very professional support of RE across the County. Mary Gale would now take over as associate RE Consultant until March 2019.

RESOLVED – That the update on key issues be noted.

4. Compliance at KS4

The Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus required all pupils in Key Stage 4 (KS4) to follow an accredited examination syllabus in RE. The 2017 examination results suggested a varied picture of compliance with this requirement at KS4 in maintained schools. As a monitoring exercise Staffordshire’s maintained secondary schools had received a three hour visit from the RE Consultant to SACRE, during which all aspects of their RE provision was discussed. The DfE had published its response to the consultation over the EBacc in July. In paragraph 72 there was a re-affirmation of the statutory nature of RE in all maintained schools. The SACRE, in fulfilling its monitoring role, could act when a school was not fulfilling its statutory role in regard to RE.

All schools were contacted formally by both email and letter to arrange a visit to review their RE provision. A template was used to record the findings from each visit, an updated template was tabled at the meeting. The findings were also shared with the school to support their internal review processes. The following schools failed to engage with the process: King Edward VI High School, Stafford (which would become an academy next term) and The King’s C of E (VA) School (a diocesan school). Several schools had been identified as being a cause for concern:

- Codsall Community High School, provision at KS3 and KS4. Core RE was delivered in Y9 and Y11 only. Pupils received six hours RE in total in Y9 and Y11. In all probability the school was not meeting the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus.
- Great Wyrley High School, provision at KS4. There was one GCSE examination group at KS4, but no discreet Core RE for the rest of the year group.
- Nether Stowe School, provision at KS4. From September 2018 RE would be an option subject only at KS4, with no discreet Core RE for the rest of the year group.
- The Friary School, provision at KS4. There was currently no discreet RE provision for non-examination groups at KS4. It was questioned whether the school Focus Week approach met the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus, and it was suggested that SACRE may want to raise further queries about this.

The RE Consultant commented that the RE leads in the schools had valued the opportunity to discuss provision, and had fed back that they were grateful for the Agreed Syllabus. The exercise had highlighted some really good practice. In relation to next steps, it was suggested that SACRE may wish the new RE Consultant to do some additional monitoring work, or they may wish to commission a similar study on Primary

Schools. Members were referred to an article from NATRE which outlined the complaints process available to SACREs.

SACRE agreed that it was important to handle this issue with sensitivity, and it would be better to follow up the initial findings before starting on the Primary sector. It was suggested that it would be helpful to go back to the headteachers and governors to ascertain if the visit and report had had an impact, and offer help with any action plans. Bob Spencer pointed out that Codsall was his division, and he had a meeting booked with the headteacher of Codsall Community High School. It was agreed that it would be very helpful for him to start a dialogue with the headteacher around RE provision in the school. The new RE Consultant pointed out that an information booklet was produced for senior leaders and governors of schools each term, and suggested that a list of questions could be included which governors could ask around compliance. The Chairman expressed the view that it was important to pursue this issue in a firm but polite and constructive way, and undertook to take this forward with the RE Consultant.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) A letter of congratulation be sent to schools with full provision, and aspects of good practice be investigated further;
- b) Further clarity be gained on the legalities of provision at KS3 and KS4, particularly in relation to the outcome of the two test cases currently in court and the further guidance given by the DfE regarding investigating complaints in relation to RE provision;
- c) Schools be contacted where issues needed further investigation to clarify the school position; and
- d) Consideration should be given as to whether certain aspects of the Agreed Syllabus need to be re-worded, changing “should” to “must”.

5. SACRE Self Review

Members considered a summary of the work of the SACRE over the past year. The NASACRE website provided a number of strategies and tools to support SACREs and their members in being effective in carrying out their work. Members broke into groups to discuss an activity grid, produced by NASACRE, which listed various characteristics of an effective SACRE. They were invited to review the performance of SACRE against each of the characteristics listed by using a RAG (red, amber, green) rating. The majority of these were rated as green.

RESOLVED – That the actions that the SACRE have been involved in to support and develop RE over the past academic year be noted.

6. NASACRE Update

The NASACRE 25th Jubilee Conference and AGM took place in the Merchant Taylors’ Hall in London on 24 May. The theme for the conference had been “Stronger Together – Celebrating the Power of Community”. There were two keynote speakers, Dr. Vanessa Ogden of the Mulberry Schools Trust, and David Hampshire of the Inter Faith Network. At the AGM there was a unanimous vote in favour of increasing the Annual Subscription to NASACRE from £95 to £105, to take place immediately. This year’s winners of the Westhill/NASACRE awards were announced, and it was confirmed that

the final report from the Commission on RE was due to be published on 12 September. Full details of the conference were included in the latest NASACRE Briefing which had recently been circulated.

RESOLVED – That the oral update by the Chairman be noted.

7. Applications for Variation of Practice

There were none on this occasion.

8. SACRE Budget 2018-19

SACRE received a breakdown of the current budget for the financial year 2018-19, together with details of the final outturn for 2017-18. The total budget was £12,860, and the spend to date was £6,910 contribution towards support for SACRE and £100 on conference fees, leaving a remaining balance of £5,850.

NASACRE had been involved with discussions at the DfE around funding for SACREs, and the cost of SACREs would be met from the Central School Services Block (CSSB) from 2018-19 onwards. It had been reported that some local authorities were trying to cut the budget for SACREs claiming that the costs of the SACRE, which the DfE had clearly defined as forming part of the General Duties element of ESG, were now to be met from Retained Duties DSG, ie this would be a top slice off the money they have been given for other purposes. This interpretation was not correct. Since the cost of SACREs was being met from the CSSB, local authorities should not be charging maintained schools for this duty, which in effect they were doing by top-slicing money allocated for schools.

RESOLVED – That the current and outturn budget positions be noted.

9. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – That the next SACRE meeting be held on Wednesday 7 November 2018, at 2.00 pm, the venue to be confirmed.

Presentation

The meeting closed with a presentation to Emma Jardine-Phillips, in recognition of her support for SACRE. Good wishes for her future career were expressed by all.

**Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Chairman**