

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
2nd February 2022
Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and
Communities
An Update on Key Issues

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To present members of SACRE with a brief update on key issues that have developed or arisen since the last meeting of SACRE.

2 Summary

2.1 Members of SACRE will receive a brief report on a number of key issues. These are matters which have either been raised at previous SACRE meetings and which have moved forward or matters on which it is appropriate to brief members of SACRE.

3 Recommendation

3.1 That members of SACRE receive the report and note the contents

4 Background

4.1 Since the summer term meeting of the SACRE there have been developments in a number of areas which had previously been agenda items for SACRE or which have local or national importance for RE.

4.2 Members will be briefed on these key developments.

5 Equal Opportunities

5.1 This report has been prepared in accordance with the County Council's policies on equal opportunities.

6 Financial implications

6.1 Financial implications may be raised; These have been dealt with elsewhere or will be raised at future meetings of SACRE.

Contact Officer

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Key Issues Report February 2nd, 2022

i) Westhill Legacy project- Explore, Engage, Reflect (EER) in conjunction with Youth Net. Autumn Term 2021 report.

SACRE have funded this project from the 2021-2022 budget through commissioning the Entrust Minority Ethnic Achievement Service- MEAS- to deliver workshops on Islam in conjunction with Youth Net who will deliver workshops on Christianity.

This project resumed in the autumn in October 2021 and continued until December 2021. A timetable of workshop support for schools was devised. The chosen schools were mostly concentrated in the Newcastle area. It was hoped at the start of the autumn term that seven schools would be supported by the end of term. This was the case as follows:-

5/10/2021 Langdale Primary

12/10/2021 St Luke's Silverdale Primary

10/11/2021 Silverdale Primary

16/11/2021 Betley Primary

23/11/2021 Westlands Primary

Additional schools for Islam EER only

6/12/2022 Our Lady's and St Werburghs

22/11/2021 Friars Wood Primary

Mary Gale visited three of the schools to receive feedback and quality assure the project in November and December. The comments from the evaluations and the feedback sessions were very positive. The pupils really enjoyed looking at all the resources and learning about the shared aspects between Christianity and Islam. They enjoyed the demonstrations of prayer. The children were all fully engaged and very interested in the exhibitions that were provided. Participation in this activity really increased pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Agreed Syllabus. It was interesting to note that in church schools the knowledge and understanding of RE was on a higher level than in community schools. They were equally fascinated by both exhibitions. In one school a child told me he was a Christian, but nobody knew. In the workshop feedback session, he told the group about his Faith. His teacher was surprised at his wealth of understanding. In other sessions- usually where there were year 6 pupils there were in depth discussions on '*what is God, where is God?*'

Staff also reported that the workshops supported them in increasing their knowledge and understanding of the Agreed Syllabus and the AS gave them ideas on how to use it to deliver RE in their schools in line with the three aims.

Here are some examples of the comments from the pupils.

- *I learnt that Christians don't pray on a mat*
- *They don't need to cover their hair like Muslims*
- *There are different ways of prayer*
- *There are different holy books called the bible and the Quran*
- *We enjoyed exploring and comparing the two religions*
- *We enjoyed both workshops, there was so much to learn*
- *The Bible is written in different languages.*
- *To give love is an important rule.*
- *One of the shared values is generosity towards others and giving money to charity.*

ii) Continuous Professional Development

Mary Gale has been supporting RE leaders in several schools through email, virtual meetings and face to face meetings. This has involved supporting schools in understanding *greater depth* in RE assessment, whole class reading through RE texts, planning and preparation for Ofsted '*deep dives*'. In addition, Mary is supporting a school to work through the Agreed Syllabus and how Understanding Christianity can dovetail into the AS.

Planning support is needed most. Mary has re-written some of the planning to support schools. One topic that needed a refresh was learning about *Sacred Texts* in year 5.

Church of England schools have also asked for support with preparation for their next SIAMS inspection. Mary Gale has facilitated this.

Governors through the Governor Information Pack have received an update on RE in Staffordshire, the status of the AS and the process for the review. They have been encouraged to work in their link governor roles to discuss the impact of the current AS. This information has reached 300 plus schools and over 200 leaders from these schools have joined an update webinar where RE was discussed as part and parcel of the information provided.

iii) Update on mini-Christianity conference in conjunction with Youth Net

This project is aimed at key stage 3-years 7, 8 and 9 in High schools.

This conference has been designed to give an overview of Christianity and it covers Worship, Prayer, the Bible, Church, Jesus and Big Questions.

This experiential learning is supported with an introduction looking at 'Who is God' and then an opportunity for a Q and A session at the end.

This is now being advertised and schools have been offered the opportunity to take part.

A timetable of support for schools will then be devised.

So far only one school has asked for the RE mini conference and that will take place tomorrow on the 3rd Feb at King Edward's school with Year 8. To allow the whole year to access this resource, the conference will be delivered twice.

There has been unusually low interest in the conference and we're putting this down to the fact that schools are having to focus heavily on the core curriculum and bringing students out of timetable for RE is hard at the moment.

In contrast, we have had more interest in Sacred Spaces and RE lessons.

iv) Association of Religious Education Inspectors and Advisors and Consultants (AREIAC) and the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) Meetings.

Mary Gale attended a virtual Midlands AREIAC group meeting on 30th November 2021. Items discussed mostly centred on a question by **Nick Gibb (Conservative)** Bognor Regis

and Littlehampton, Minister of State for Schools Standards to the then Secretary of State for Education. The questions stated

'what level of religious education is legally required to have been achieved by the time a student reaches 16 at (a) maintained and (b) academic schools.'

The answer was as follows:-

'State-funded schools in England have a duty to teach religious education (RE) to all pupils aged 5 to 18. While academies, free schools and most maintained schools designated as having a religious character may design and follow their own curriculum, all other maintained schools must follow their area's locally agreed syllabus for RE.

A locally agreed syllabus sets out what pupils should be taught and may include the expected standards of pupils' performance at different stages. Legislation requires that every agreed syllabus must reflect 'that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'.

Neither legislation nor academies' funding agreements prescribe how much time should be devoted to RE or how it should be provided. However, we would expect an academy to have a plan or scheme of work which demonstrates how provision across the year groups is structured to ensure that all pupils receive RE which matches the legal requirement for an agreed syllabus as set out above.

Although not mandatory for all schools, teaching an accredited religious studies qualification at key stage 4 may be required by a locally agreed syllabus; and many schools teach religious studies GCSE. The Department has set out the educational outcomes and content coverage required for GCSE specifications in this subject, which can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-religious-studies.

Where key stage 4 pupils do not take a religious studies qualification, the requirement to teach religious education still applies.

Department for Education guidance on religious education for maintained schools is at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010;

and for academies and free schools at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools/religious-education-re-and-collective-worship-in-academies-and-free-schools

The next meeting is on 8th March 2022, these meetings are virtual.

In addition, Mary attended a local meeting of the NATRE group held as a combination of virtual and face to face meeting in Chadsmead Primary Lichfield on 23rd November 2021 at 4.30. A date for the next meeting is to be arranged. Discussion centred around the AS – see AS section, and updates on resources.

v) Update on RE Quality Mark application- St Chad's Pattingham.

The school received the SACRE grant to enable them to apply for this quality mark.

They are very grateful. The application was submitted before Christmas 2021, so the journey has commenced. The RE lead has downloaded the necessary documents and has started collecting evidence for the assessment. Due to Covid-19 this could be a virtual assessment and not a face-to-face assessment. They are awaiting more information.

Mary Gale will visit the school to ensure they have a strong evidence base before the assessment. They have recently had an Ofsted inspection with a good outcome. The report states that the school has been working on a broad and balanced curriculum and especially made a reference to their work on diversity by using appropriate texts and reading books. The school was praised for highlighting Black History month in its curriculum. This bodes well for a future positive assessment of the REQM.

vi) Update on grants received last year.

Mary Gale asked for impact reports from the schools who received £200 grants to enhance RE or Collective worship.

The reports are all positive and include some of the following comments:-

We spent the small grant of £200 from SACRE on books and resources to support our teaching of Global education. These resources have had a real positive impact within our school. We now have a weekly global assembly/collective worship using a range of the resources bought and have developed a Global Education display in the hall for all the children to access. We have found this has inspired our children to discuss global issues and how we can make an impact on other people's lives. This has led us to sponsoring a 4-year-old girl in Haiti. The children are enjoying communicating with her.

We were very grateful for the money from SACRE which has been spent on some additional resources. In KS2 we used the money to buy resources for learning about Judaism; the children have very much enjoyed exploring the artefacts purchased (mezuzah, Sabbath tablecloth, Kippah, Pessever plates and other items) and are identifying these in books and videos.

In KS1 we are now using more age-appropriate resources for Islam, such as a Muslim child doll and his belongings which support the theme 'What do Muslims believe?' EYFS are using the money to purchase some additional Christianity resources.

At our school we have used the £200 grant to create new religious resource boxes. This means that we have individual boxes for different religions that hold special items associated to that religion.

We have just implemented a new R.E scheme and so the creation of these boxes will support the new topics/lessons being taught.

Additionally, during a recent R.E learning walk, feedback from children indicated that they remembered and enjoyed lessons more when they were able to see and handle real items such as prayer mats and prayer hats (instead of looking at pictures) so this has also influenced how we have spent this money.

vii) Report on Collective Worship (CW) during the pandemic and after the return to full time education.

Mary Gale has spoken in depth to a cross section of schools on this very important subject. In total 25 schools were asked to comment on CW, some were faith schools, and some were community schools including Maintained schools and Academies.

Some Secondary and High schools reported assemblies/CW was not a priority for them during the pandemic as there were so many other aspects to be covered during online

learning. Faith schools reported otherwise as they strived to continue to fulfil their Christian vision for their schools.

Those pupils (key worker's children and vulnerable pupils) who were taught at schools did take part in their *bubbles* in assemblies/CW and enjoyed the opportunity to make a contribution in smaller groups. This increased their confidence and supported them in taking a more active part than they would normally have taken.

Those pupils learning from home did not have that opportunity, but they did take part in pastoral activities and well-being sessions with their form tutors or heads of year.

All agreed that on return to full time education one of the highlights was the return to face to face assemblies/CW. This highlighted the family feel of the school. Leaders were pleased that assemblies/CW generated the family feel, this was further evidenced by speaking to pupils and asking for their opinions about assemblies/CW on the return to full time education.

Primary, including First and Middle schools reported that they strived to promote at least twice weekly assemblies/CW for those pupils who were learning from home. These included, pre-recorded sessions, usually by leaders. Some were shared live sessions including those key worker and vulnerable pupils being taught at school.

Parents joined in with these opportunities and there was much positive feedback.

Those pupils in school during lock down continued to take part in assembly/CW on a regular basis and enjoyed planning and delivering worship to their *bubbles*. This was very positive.

In faith schools the local incumbent together with their pastoral team often pre-recorded regular assembly/CW sessions which were delivered at convenient times throughout the week. These were much appreciated and shared widely throughout the school community.

Many schools indicated that their delivery improved over the pandemic. This was because these aspects were better planned, and more research was carried out to recognise and include the diversity of the school community. Some schools used the suggestions provided by SACRE; others used resources from the Diocese or local faith communities. This has set a better foundation for assemblies/CW going forward.

When full time education resumed, 100% of schools reported that the return to face-to-face whole school assemblies/CW was an overwhelmingly positive experience. The spiritual elements of these experiences were reported over and over, especially the return to singing songs and hymns in the assembly/CW context and the sharing of prayers.

Future support for SACRE

Mary Gale has been asked by SCC through Entrust if she would continue in her role as advisor to SACRE from April 2022 to March 31st, 2023, especially during this crucial period as the Agreed Syllabus continues to be reviewed. The Chair was asked to confirm that this would be appropriate. Mary Gale has agreed to continue in this role until March 31st 2023.