

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 26 July 2016

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) Annual Report and new Agreed Syllabus

Recommendation

That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee:

1. scrutinise the work of the Staffordshire SACRE through their Annual Report;
2. ensure membership of Committee A is representative of the religious make up of Staffordshire residents and reflect on membership changes; and
3. consider the work undertaken on the Agreed Syllabus.

Report of the Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills

Summary

What is the Scrutiny and Performance Committee being asked to do and why?

SACRE's are required to produce an annual report detailing the work they have undertaken and the Select Committee receives a copy of this report each year.

Each SACRE is also responsible for ensuring that the locally agreed syllabus for Religious Education (RE) is reviewed every five years. Staffordshire's RE syllabus was last reviewed in 2009. Having carried out a review SACRE members undertook considerable work rewriting the Syllabus to ensure its relevance following the significant changes within education.

SACRE membership is made up of four committees. Membership of Committee A should include representation of the Christian denominations and other religions and their denominations reflecting the principal religious traditions of the area. Changes have been made to the representation within this group as well as to the co-opted membership of the SACRE.

Report

Annual Report

Each SACRE is required to produce and publish an annual report outlining the work they have undertaken throughout the year. The Staffordshire SACRE Annual Report 2014-15 (Appendix 1) gives a summary of SACRE's work, details the standards and quality of RE provision within Staffordshire, considers the effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus, looks at the issues around collective worship, and considers the contribution of the SACRE to the community cohesion agenda.

Agreed Syllabus Review

The Education Act 1993 requires the Local Authority (LA) to institute a review of its locally agreed syllabus every five years. This is because whilst there is a requirement for all schools to teach RE, RE is not part of the National Curriculum but is a local responsibility. Through the SACRE local communities have the opportunity to influence directly what pupils learn in RE. Staffordshire's Agreed Syllabus was last reviewed and issued to schools in 2009.

The Locally Agreed Syllabus is the statutory document for RE in the LA. It sets out what should be taught to pupils in all key stages and the standards expected of them at the end of each key stage. It is produced by an agreed syllabus conference.

An agreed syllabus conference (ASC) is a statutory body brought together in order to produce an agreed syllabus for RE. It is a separate entity from a SACRE although it has the same committee structure and can be made up of the same members. There is no provision for co-opted members on an ASC.

Staffordshire SACRE convened an ASC to undertake the syllabus review and a range of options for rewriting the syllabus were explored. It had been hoped to include RE Today specialists in the development of the new syllabus, however funding constraints had prohibited this. The LA was however able to commission 20 days from within Entrust, separate from the SACRE budget, to support the syllabus review. SACRE Members undertook to rewrite the syllabus themselves, drawing on their own expertise and that of the Entrust RE Specialist, Emma Jardine, and that of Independent Consultant Mary Gale during Emma's maternity leave. The work was undertaken by a small working group of SACRE Members, led by the SACRE Chairman, Rev Prebendary Michael Metcalf, and was mostly undertaken during twilight sessions.

SACRE considered a draft of the new syllabus at their spring term meeting. The Syllabus sought to avoid being too prescriptive whilst still providing schools and teachers with adequate support. The new Syllabus has a core strand of Christianity as the predominant religion to be studied, with Islam also being studied at each key Stage. Whilst it is proposed that only these two faiths are considered in detail at Key Stage 1 (KS1), learning and celebrating other religions and religious festivals at a less in-depth level is also envisaged. A third religion should be included as a main focus from Key Stage 2 onwards, while opportunities should be taken throughout the Key Stages to enable pupils to become aware of the wider diversity of faiths and non-religious stances, and to consider the challenges of living together in a plural world.

Assessment is no longer prescribed using "levels", however guidance on assessment is given using "age related expectations". These make clear the expected knowledge and understanding for pupils of a specific age within each KS and will be used to assess whether a pupil is working at, above or below the expected level.

At their 6 July meeting the ASC agreed the revised Syllabus (Appendix 2) and commended it to the Cabinet Member for adoption as the County's statutory Agreed Syllabus in RE for all maintained schools. It is anticipated that the new Syllabus will be implemented in schools from September 2016.

SACRE Membership

Each SACRE is made up of four committees:

- Committee A – The Christian denominations and other religions and their denominations, reflecting the principal religious traditions of the area;
- Committee B – The Church of England
- Committee C – Teacher and head teacher associations
- Committee D – the Local Authority

The make-up of Committee A will vary from SACRE to SACRE to reflect the diversity of the various faith communities in the locality. The group is made up of representatives of Christian denominations (other than the Church of England), and may include representation from the Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches, Free Churches (for example Baptist, Methodist, United reformed, Pentecostal and the Salvation Army) and the Society of Friends. It will also include representatives from other faiths in the area, for example, Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs.

Staffordshire SACRE has the following representation on their Committee A:

- Catholic
- Free Churches
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Salvation Army
- Buddhist
- Humanist

The latest data on the religious make-up of Staffordshire's population is taken from the 2011 Census, as set out below, which indicates that SACRE's Committee A reflects the diversity of the various faith communities in the locality.

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Religion	All categories: Age	%
Christian	578,352	68.2%
Buddhist	2,017	0.2%
Hindu	2,773	0.3%
Jewish	299	0.0%
Muslim	10,817	1.3%
Sikh	3,086	0.4%
Other religion	2,783	0.3%
No religion	193,662	22.8%
Religion not stated	54,700	6.4%
Total	848,489	

According to their terms of reference SACREs have the authority to co-opt members onto their Council, with co-opted members being able to take a full part in any debate but not

being entitled to participate in any vote. SACRE agreed the co-option of a humanist representative in March 2002 and a Baha'i representative in 2008.

Having received representation from Mr Richey Thompson, Campaigns Officer for the British Humanist Association (BHA), SACRE considered changing their membership to include humanist representation on Committee A. Whilst humanism is not a religion a recent European court ruling indicated that "faiths" included faiths and other life stances, and therefore it was legally possible to include a humanist representative as a full SACRE member. SACRE recommended the inclusion of humanist representation on Committee A to the Cabinet Member, who agreed this in 2012.

SACRE has recently been contacted by Staffordshire members of the National Spiritualist Union (NSU) seeking representation on the SACRE. At their Spring term meeting SACRE heard details from Julia Almond on the NSU in Staffordshire and after consideration they agreed to recommend to the Cabinet Member that the NSU have a co-opted place on the Staffordshire SACRE. The Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills has approved this co-option.

Link to Strategic Plan

Ready for Life- Focus on school improvement and providing access to a good education.

Implications

Equalities and Legal:

In line with the Education Act 1993, and the Education Act 1996, Part V, Chapter 111, Schedule 31 and the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, Chapter Vi and Schedules 19 and 20.

Resource and Value for Money:

SACRE Members have undertaken the majority of the work necessary to rewrite the agreed syllabus on a voluntary basis, enabling a fit for purpose syllabus to be produced alongside the 20 days commissioned from Entrust to support this process.

Contact Officers

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Appendices/Background papers

Appendix 1 - SACRE Annual Report 2014-15

Appendix 2 – Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus for RE