

ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

9 March 2021

PRESENT: Karen Butler (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Richard Rhodes, Chris Sayers, Darcy Chesterfield-Terry, Saghir Ahmed, Louise Ceska, Rev Margaret Dudley, Ila Gangotra, Hilary Harris, Thomas Kingsley-Jones, Sarah Bradley, Anthony Lewis, Sally Lynch, Barbara Meaney, Councillor Donna Stimson, Councillor Julian Sharpe and Councillor Shamsul Shelim.

Officers in attendance: Anne Andrews, Clive Haines, Fatima Rehman and Mark Beeley

ACTION

1 Welcome

Karen Butler, the Vice Chairman of SACRE, welcomed those present to the meeting. She informed the meeting that the Chairman had given his apologies, so she would be chairing.

2 Reflection

Chris Sayers gave a short reflection to SACRE.

3 Apologies For Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Ravinder Singh, Michael Gammage and Deborah Firth.

4 Minutes Of Meeting on 09/12/20

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2020 were approved, providing the following amendment was made:

- Under Membership Update, it was corrected so that the representative from Kings Church International would join group A and not group B, as had been stated in the minutes.

The Vice Chairman asked what position the survey was in, which was an action from the last meeting for Anne Andrews and Clive Haines. Anne Andrews said that the survey had not been started yet, it was a busy time for schools so this could commence sometime after Easter.

Another action point was exploring the possibility of virtual tours for schools of places of worship. Anne Andrews suggested that this could be trialled at the next RE Network meeting where a live virtual tour could take place. This would give the teachers present the opportunity to interact and ask questions.

Darcy Chesterfield-Terry said that he was happy to discuss this with Anne Andrews.

ACTION – Darcy Chesterfield-Terry to discuss with Anne Andrews about potentially giving a virtual tour during an RE Network meeting.

The Vice Chairman asked for confirmation from Hilary Harris that Maidenhead

Synagogue were happy for the Westhill films to be shared, Hilary Harris said that they were.

The Inclusivity Award was also discussed at the last meeting in December 2020 and that this should be advertised to schools. Anne Andrews commented that it had been hard to judge how inclusive schools had been at the moment due to the third national lockdown.

5 Pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub Update

Anne Andrews said that six films had now been completed, edited and notes compiled to accompany them. All of the resources had now been sent to NATRE and it was hoped that these would be available on their website by the end of March 2021. A launch event had been set for 28th April 2021 on Zoom, which would allow up to 300 participants. The link in the Hub notes that was part of the agenda pack showed what the aim was for the films, and the filmmaker was happy to do one in a Catholic church after Easter. The films would also be presented at the NASACRE AGM at the end of May.

The Vice Chairman said that this was an exciting opportunity to showcase the work that had been undertaken by SACRE. She believed that there would be a lot of interest and take up in the films that had been created and asked if the launch event would be advertised.

Anne Andrews said that she had not planned the launch event yet but it would probably involve sending out a special invitational email to all schools in Berkshire.

The Vice Chairman expressed her delight that there was a good variation in the faiths that had been represented in the films and she was looking forward to the launch.

Anthony Lewis suggested that it would be good to have a film from a humanist perspective at some point in the future.

Anne Andrews said that there were plans to make more films so this was something that could be considered.

Sarah Bradley asked what the accompanying notes included.

Anne Andrews explained that it was a one-page overview which included the key questions, key content, a summary of the answers and next steps or activities which could be undertaken. The plan in future was for teachers to be involved and help produce the notes.

The Vice Chairman asked if the link included as part of the Pan Berkshire Hub minutes was to the supporting documents which had been discussed.

Anne Andrews clarified that they were not the exact documents that had been created by SACRE, but they were example ones.

6 Westhill Films Update

This was discussed as part of the Pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub Update agenda item.

7 Feedback from RE Network Meeting

Anne Andrews explained that the last network meeting was attended by 13 people and they had been looking at creating a coherent curriculum by looking at the big concepts, and how to form a 'golden thread' through teaching. It was a really good event but there was a bit of distraction at the time as the reopening of schools on 8th March had just been announced.

Barbara Meaney attended the meeting and said that it was really good, particularly the breakout rooms which helped those that were new to network meetings. She passed on her thanks to Anne for organising the meeting.

8 Feedback from Strictly RE

Thomas Kingsley-Jones shared his experience of the Strictly RE conference with SACRE. He thanked SACRE for the bursary which had been provided and covered the cost of attending the conference. There were some great key talks and seminars across the weekend, where the curriculum was seen as a narrative and there was discussion about how to embed this in teaching. The event was completely online and was very well organised and informative.

Anne Andrews explained that the conference was run by NATRE and was usually held somewhere in London. Some of the big names in RE attended and gave talks on themes including curriculum world views and anti-racist RE. The new Ofsted HMI for RE was in attendance too and explained how Ofsted was looking to improve RE in schools going forward. Anne Andrews suggested that Thomas Kingsley-Jones's experience could be shared in the summer newsletter which would be sent out to schools to make them aware for next year. The success of holding the conference virtually this year meant that it was suggested it should be online again next year, or at least partly virtual.

ACTION – Thomas Kingsley-Jones and Anne Andrews to discuss sharing the experience of the conference in the summer newsletter.

9 Reporting back from schools

Louise Ceska said that Newlands Girls School had been very busy with the return to school taking place and all pupils needing to be tested. Children were pleased to be back, online teaching during lockdown had gone well but it was good to be back in the classroom.

Richard Rhodes explained that at All Saints, around 75% of pupils were back. Remote learning had gone well but he believed that it was better being back in school. The school had ensured that RE continued to be taught during lockdown and there had been regular assemblies, with open book sessions provided by local faith leaders.

Barbara Meaney gave an update on St Edwards. She said that RE had been taught exactly as it would have been in school, with assemblies and collective worship being maintained. Remote collective worship would continue, this could then be recorded which could be shown to parents, who had been very appreciative.

Thomas Kingsley-Jones said that at Churchmead, RE had continued to be taught. He agreed with the comments from other RE teachers, that while lockdown learning had worked well he believed that there was no replacement for being in the classroom.

Sarah Bradley said that the return to school had gone well so far, she thought that there would be more anxiety amongst pupils but they seemed happy to be

back.

Sally Lynch said that she had done a little bit of recording for collective worship, for example things like Open Book for St Luke's.

Margaret Dudley said that she had some new initiatives and activities planned but it would be unlikely that she would be able to go into schools again until September at the earliest.

Deborah Firth sent her apologies for the meeting but had provided a written update in advance. Boyne Hill had now fully returned and had started to settle in. There had been some issues with staffing and shielding and they also had families hit by Covid including deaths, but the school had been trying to support those families which had been affected. Regarding RE, Boyne Hill had continued throughout lockdown to provide RE both in school and in remote learning activities. A Zoom staff meeting had been organised at the end of term to chat about RE and reflect on the current position.

Clive Haines, Schools Leadership Development Manager, said that schools had been doing really well by offering good quality remote learning and also with the return to the classroom.

Darcy Chesterfield-Terry commented that all of the schools that he worked with had now gone back. He said that once faith leaders had been vaccinated, there would be greater confidence in being able to go back into schools again.

10 Plans for monitoring RE in future

Anne Andrews said that it was important that SACRE started to consider how it could monitor RE teaching in schools again, especially as it was one of SACREs core functions. She suggested using online platforms to engage with teachers.

Thomas Kingsley-Jones asked if it was known what other SACREs did to monitor teaching and if SACRE had done any monitoring pre-Covid.

Anne Andrews explained that monitoring RE across the SACREs that she was involved in was sporadic. Buckinghamshire were planning to undertake a website trawl, with members of the SACRE investigating the school website. At Bracknell Forest, they had come up with a three-year plan, including questionnaires and engaging with school governors.

Thomas Kingsley-Jones suggested that the questionnaire was a good idea but believed that talking to the subject leads and trying to get into the classroom would be better.

The Vice Chairman mentioned that Louise Ceska had invited her to a day at Newlands Girls School in the past, where a report was produced on what had been seen. At the time, a plan was made to go into more schools but this had not happened. The Vice Chairman believed it was important for SACRE members to get into the classroom, they could then be invited at the next meeting to share their experience rather than having to write a report.

Louise Ceska said that she found the visit from the Vice Chairman useful and was provided with helpful feedback. Looking at a school website would not give much information. Over time, a number of reports could be produced which would give SACRE a good understanding of what position RE teaching was in across the borough.

Sarah Bradley asked what exactly SACRE wanted to monitor, as it would depend on what would be the best approach. For example, if it was more quantitative an audit could be produced but if it was a qualitative approach then it would need direct input from teachers.

Sally Lynch said that when making visits to schools it was key to observe without making judgements. It would be great to get back into schools and see what had been going on.

Councillor Stimson suggested that there could be broad report template which could easily be filled in by whichever SACRE member was making the observation.

The Vice Chairman said that it would be good to have an agenda item that invited comments from those that had recently been in a school. She agreed with the comments from Sally Lynch, it was important that the experience was descriptive rather than judgemental.

Anthony Lewis said that he had visited a number of schools for various reasons, but it said something about the school that they were happy to invite a representative from a Humanist viewpoint. He commented that it was possible to gain a good feel of a school as an external visitor.

Anne Andrews agreed with the Vice Chairman that it should be a standing item for future SACRE meetings to allow members to share information and experiences about any visits that they had done. Schools could then be approached using the information for future visits, it was better to go where the door was open to these opportunities. A short summary of the experience could also be included as part of the newsletter.

ACTION – Standing item on SACRE members experiences from schools to be added to the agenda for future meetings, if appropriate.

At the conclusion of the item, Ila Gangotra joined the meeting.

11 Forward thinking - Syllabus Review

Anne Andrews said that the last review had taken place in conjunction with other Berkshire SACREs, before going through the Pan-Berkshire Hub. The curriculum then went live in 2018, but it was now time to think about what SACRE wanted to do for the next review in a couple of years' time. There was a question around whether a new or revised syllabus would be ready for September 2023 and also whether SACRE wanted to still work with the Hub. It was important that preparations were made in case the review was not postponed.

The Vice Chairman said that it was important to gain the views of the other Berkshire SACREs and if the current syllabus had worked well in schools so far. She felt that it had not been that long since the last review, so a postponement made sense.

Anne Andrews said that other SACREs would need to be emailed to find out what their position was.

ACTION – Anne Andrews to email other Berkshire SACREs as part of the next piece of Hub work.

The Vice Chairman added that things were cost effective when done in collaboration and therefore it would be ideal to continue working with the Hub for this syllabus review.

Councillor Sharpe asked if schools were using the correct, updated syllabus. This was following on from the discussion on monitoring RE and it might be something that would need to be investigated.

Anne Andrews said that many schools across the borough were using the new curriculum. Monitoring how RE was taught would discover which schools were using it and which were not. It was a legal requirement for the syllabus to be reviewed every five years.

Councillor Sharpe said that it would be important to discover which schools were not using the new syllabus and find out why.

Barbara Meaney said that SACRE could suggest to schools that it was there to help with any 'catching up' that was needed. She clarified that she did not agree with the term catch up in this case as it implied children were behind or failing when this was not the case.

Anne Andrews said that it could be a way of framing the survey. She agreed with Barbara Meaney's comments on catching up, children were only behind on some measures and it was a damaging word.

12 Volunteering for health, wellbeing and sustainability

Councillor Stimson explained that the climate change strategy had recently been passed by the RBWM Cabinet and as Lead Member for Climate Change and Sustainability, she was trying to connect communities, health and wellbeing, climate change and sustainability. Part of the strategy was to grow things more sustainably in certain areas of the borough and a piece of work had started with Maidenhead Mosque. Councillor Stimson was particularly interested in working with faith leaders and schools, so if anyone was interested in being part of this work she encouraged them to get in touch.

Hilary Harris said that the synagogue was working on becoming an eco-synagogue and would be interested in being part of this.

Louise Ceska also expressed an interest in being involved.

Richard Rhodes mentioned that at All Saints, they had dedicated an area of land that they were planning to turn into an eco-garden.

Barbara Meaney said that St Edwards Middle School currently had an allotment and were also a plastic free school so would also be interested in discussing this project with Councillor Stimson.

ACTION – Individual schools to make contact with Councillor Stimson on this project.

13 Any Other Business

The Vice Chairman asked if there was an update on any changes in the SACRE membership.

Mark Beeley, Democratic Services Officer, had asked Kings Church International for an update to determine progress in finding a replacement for

the vacancy in their position. They had not had anyone come forward yet but would try and appoint someone to SACRE over the coming months.

Anne Andrews said that she was happy to receive any ideas or suggestions that members had for SACRE newsletters.

14 Dates Of Future Meetings

The proposed dates of future meetings were noted.

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 17th June 2021, starting at 6pm.

The meeting, which began at 6.00 pm, ended at 7.30 pm