

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education held on 22 November 2017 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Committee A: Mrs S Lawson and Mr P Anderson (arrived at 6.20pm)

Committee B: Rev. J Guest (Chair) and Rev. D Bates

Committee C: Mrs R Gedalovitch

Apologies: Miss A Ahmed, Mr A Kariyawasam, Dr O Soleye, , Fr J Hutchinson, Councillor Martin Kerin and Councillor Tunde Ojetola

In attendance: Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education
Roger Edwardson, Strategic Lead, School Improvement and Skills
Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer

7. Minutes

The meeting was declared inquorate and it was agreed that the meeting would continue informally and recommendations put to members at the next quorate meeting of SACRE.

8. Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

9. Youth Cabinet

The Chair addressed SACRE welcoming the three Members of the Youth Cabinet, to the meeting and explaining the role of SACRE.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education further explained the role of SACRE and included the following:

- Members met three times a year;
- In 2016 Members completed the agreed syllabus, which was taught within 85% of Thurrock schools;
- SACRE advised the Local Authority on Religious Education matters;
- There were four Committees which made up SACRE, these consisted of Religious groups, Church of England, Teachers and the Local Authority.

It was explained Members had invited the Youth Cabinet to their meeting as they felt it was important to seek their views and experiences of Religious Education in Schools and the importance of Religious Education in Thurrock today.

Members of the Youth Cabinet informed SACRE of their Secondary Schools, 2 attended St Cleres and one Grays Convent. It was explained that at St Cleres Religious Education was compulsory for Years 7 – 9 and could be taken as an option for years 10 and 11, topics taught included, comparisons of the Christian Faith to other Faiths, customs within Faiths and in the later years morals within different Faiths such as blood transfusion.

It was discussed that at Grays Convent Religious Education was compulsory for all years and included a focus on topics such as Marks Gospel and topic at GCSE on morals.

The Chair sought if either of the Youth Cabinet had experience collective worship at their schools. It was commented that there was a pray space for children of the Muslim faith, however this was not always used for its purpose as it was not in the best location and could be seen into.

He enquired if they felt collective worship had improved when they left primary School. Members heard how it took some getting used to when changing from a catholic primary school to a non-religious secondary school, as there were no prays in classes or masses. It was commented that there was an improvement at Grays Convent with visits to different places of worship including a synagogue and Sikh temple.

Members of the Youth Cabinet remarked they remembered a local reverend attending to speak to pupils in a whole school assembly and or mediation.

During their discussions the following was commented upon:

- Different Faiths and their practices;
- Equality within Faiths;
- Faiths and Social Media, such as the public's reaction to the recent attacks in London and Manchester.

When asked if they felt there should be faith schools, it was observed that faith was as important as any other subject taught within Schools. It was highlighted that should there be any problems the Local Authority, should have the ability to look over on a case by case basis.

RESOLVED:

That SACRE welcomed and noted discussions with Members of the Youth Cabinet.

10. Monitoring of Religious Education in Thurrock Schools

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education introduced the report informing Members, in order to discharge its legal duties; SACRE monitored the provision for Religious Education in its local area where RE is delivered in accordance with the local Agreed Syllabus.

She continued by stating Thurrock introduced a new Agreed Syllabus in 2016 and decided it would carry out a monitoring exercise to establish how effective the new syllabus has been in meeting its aim to raise standards of RE. At the meeting of SACRE on 5 September 2017 a mechanism by which SACRE might collect information to meet this monitoring requirement was amended and agreed, this had updated following members' instructions.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education commented the only draw up was receiving back the responses from the Schools to be able to input the results in a system accordingly.

Members discussed the self-evaluation forms commenting they were perhaps too long and therefore timely for teachers to complete. It was suggested as to whether SACRE knew who the Religious Education leaders were within each school, as this would give SACRE a direct contact link to the Schools.

It was agreed that along with a direct contact with the Schools that the evaluation be compiled electronically, using Survey Monkey, this might not shorted the evaluation completely but would give the option of multiple choice.

RESOLVED that SACRE:

- 1. Discuss the revised proforma at Appendices 1 and 2 of the report;**
- 2. Authorise a pilot monitoring programme that might be reviewed in the summer term meeting.**

11. National Update on Religious Education

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education presented the report to those present, explaining the Commission on Religious Education had been established to review the legal, education, and policy frameworks for religious education (RE).

She continued by remarking the review would be a wide-ranging, inclusive and evidence-based process designed to inform policy makers. The ultimate aim would be to improve the quality of Religious Education within schools and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

Members heard how the remit of the Commission would include:

- To consider the nature, purposes, and scope of religious education;
- To identify the enabling factors that currently promote high quality RE and the barriers that currently limit it;

- To identify what changes are needed to ensure the highest quality provision of RE and;
- To ensure that recommendations focus on realistic and specific proposals aimed at both immediate and long-term implementation in the context of continuing educational reform.

During discussions it was highlighted that the percentage of schools either not providing Religious Education or having a little intake on the course for Key Stage 4 was surprising low. It was further discussed as to the recruitment of teachers for the subject, to which it was suggested the recruitment of Religious Education teachers was in crisis, with the subject being taught by other subject teachers.

Members of SACRE commented on the Commissions suggestion that there should be a different word for 'Religion'; the Chair agreed that it seemed to be the wrong word. Members proposed 'faith and belief'.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education mentioned it was necessary to find SACRE's role within the current status of schools relating to the agreed syllabus. She explained that as Academies could, if they wished, follow their own syllabus or that of another authority it was a problem SACRE would have to face as the accountable body for Religious Education within the Borough.

It was agreed following discussions that the Strategic Lead for School Improvement and Skills speak to the Regional Schools Commission to invite them to the January meeting, in the hope to seek their thoughts on joining SACRE.

RESOLVED that SACRE:

- 1. Discussed the recommendations of each report.**
- 2. Considered responding to the Commission on the RE interim report using the online form.**

12. Any Other Business

There were no items of other business to be discussed.

13. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting finished at 8.00 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**