

Public Document Pack

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
St Edwards Primary School, Havering Drive, Romford RM1 4BD
28 June 2016 (7.35 - 8.45 pm)**

Present:

**Representing other
Christian and religious
denominations
(Group A)**

Dr John Lester
Mrs Jenny Fox
Mrs Christine Seymour
Mr Kamal Siddiqui
Saddhabhaya
Mrs Pamela Coles
Mr John Smailes
Pastor Aloysius Peter
Mr Barry Smith

**Representing the
Church of England
(Group B)**

Mrs Stephanie Ellner
Mrs Susan Freeman
Mr Mike Dean

**Representing the
Teaching
Profession
(Group C)**

Ms Linda Munday

**Representing the
Local Authority
Councillors
(Group D)**

Jason Frost
Gillian Ford

SACRE was welcomed by the Head Teacher of St Edward's CofE Primary School and its Chair of Governors and groups of members were conducted on a tour of the school by the children. At the conclusion of the tour, members congregated in the hall along with parents and friends of the Junior Choir and were treated to a recital of songs from the Jazz Mass. This was very well performed and enthusiastically received by the audience. The choir and choir mistress were thanked for their sterling efforts and members were then escorted to the Staff-Room where a fine cheese and wine repast awaited them. The meeting commenced after a period of refreshment.

The Chairman opened the meeting by announcing that Mrs Deborah Weston – the person who had contributed greatly to the production of the new joint Agreed RE Syllabus – had recently been honoured with the award of an OBE “for services to RE and Inter- and Intra-Faith relations”. The news was greeted by a round of applause and expressions of congratulations as it had been well deserved.

46 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE & NEW OR SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, Joshua Chapman, Dilip Patel, Stephanie Nunn and Wendy Brice-Thompson, Mr Kevin Walsh, Mrs Dawn Ladbrook and Mr Tariq Mahmood

The Chairman welcomed Mr Barry Smith who had just accepted the nomination of the United Reformed Church to represent it on SACRE. It had been a number of years since the URC had had a voice in the Advisory Council.

The Chairman then welcomed Julia Diamond-Conway to the meeting. She had been invited by the Education Service to take over the role of Professional Advisor. Mrs Diamond-Conway was part of RE-Today and said that she was looking forward to working with SACRE and the Education Service and develop its role going forward. To assist her with this, RE-Today had volunteered the support of Mrs Weston as well as she was familiar with the area and had intimate knowledge and experience of the borough's religious educational needs.

47 WELCOME TO VISITORS

The Chairman welcomed Marlene Wylie who had come from the Diocese of Chelmsford to observe what took place at a SACRE meeting.

48 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2016 were agreed and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising from that meeting. There were no matters arising.

49 UPDATE ON SCHOOL ACTIVITY & NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Mrs Diamond-Conway gave her first presentation to the Advisory Council. The full text of the report is appended to the minutes. Members were energised by the enthusiasm which Mrs Diamond-Conway presented her report and asked a number of questions about how SACRE could take a more prominent role in promoting RE across the borough. She mentioned in particular that she intended to provide teachers with detail about the "G-dly Play" teaching technique. Both Advisors said that they would need access to the Portal in order to access the Agreed Syllabus and fulfil their role.

In respect of the changes being introduced to GCSE and "A" Level RE, Mrs Weston informed members that Edexcel had now been accredited and joined the other major examining boards. She suggested that an item should be added to the agenda for October to focus on the subject content for all religions at GCSE and members agreed.

50 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT - 2015/16

The draft Annual Report was considered by the Advisory Council. Mrs Weston raised an issue concerning the low numbers of pupils being entered for the RE courses at certain schools as shown in the accompanying statistics. This might indicate that schools were not fulfilling the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus or in Academy Schools, their funding agreement. Members were concerned that if pupils were not studying RE –

a mandatory provision – it begged the question about what they were doing. It was suggested that a letter be drafted (by the Professional Advisors and signed by the Chair) which after discussion with the Education Service could be sent on SACRE's behalf enquiring from head-teachers how RE was being studied in their schools. Members felt that the Education Service needed to be asked about what actions it was appropriate to take to ensure that all schools applied the requirement to provide religious education. It was further agreed that the Professional Advisors would pursue the matter with the Education Service and that the clerk would also raise the matter. A report would be prepared and presented to SACRE at its next meeting.

Members asked whether further training sessions after the January 2016 one could be recorded in in the Report. It was agreed that the clerk would contact the Education Service and enquire and, if there were, would add them to the final version being sent to Council in July.

One member raised concerns about the quality of teaching in schools relating to Islam. The Advisory Council felt that this highlighted an area where it could become more involved and, with a closer working relationship with the Education Service, provide expertise, advice and support for the on-going training of teachers in order to assist them in delivering the RE Syllabus effectively and without prejudice or discrimination.

There was discussion about the Education Portal and whether bulletins were monitored in any way. Who was it that read them and how could it be verified that the information contained within them was being implemented? Members were informed that bulletins were e-mailed to schools and this raised the question of how it could be audited to see who actually received these bulletins and how they were applied. Various ideas were put forward, but it became clear that a greater understanding about how it worked was necessary to ensure that proposals which would be effective were made.

There was discussion about the use of teachers to lead training for others, but this evoked a strong reaction which drew attention to the already over-stretched work-load of the teaching profession and asserting that it would be unreasonable to give them even more work to do. A different approach needed to be found.

The clerk said that the Annual Report would be a public document once published in the agenda. It was also available on the Council's website and members suggested that the Council's Communications Team could be asked to make a press statement to ensure that it was given greater coverage.

Councillor Ford stated that the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee would ask the Education Service to provide it with information relating to examinations and for a report on its statutory duties towards SACRE.

Mrs Weston observed that it was vitally important for the Education Service to make use of SACRE by referring items for discussion by SACRE and by receiving reports from SACRE. In this way, the education service would

ensure that it fulfilled its legal obligations. Now that many schools had become – or were becoming - academies, this made the bond even more necessary. SACRE members had a wealth of knowledge and experience to offer and this provided an exciting opportunity for greater dialogue.

Councillor Ford added that it would be advisable to approach the Cabinet member for Children and Learning and enlist his support.

Resolved:

- 1: To adopt the Annual Report subject to verification of further training and to Recommend the Annual Report to Council.
- 2: To send a letter to all secondary schools enquiring about how they met their responsibilities in respect of the teaching of RE.
- 3: The Professional Advisors would make enquiries of the Education Service to determine what systems were in place to check compliance in relation RE.
- 4: To discuss the Portal with the Education Service and how best to ensure that bulletins reached the appropriate staff. Could a mechanism be set up to verify this and assess its efficacy?
- 5: A report to be presented to the October SACRE to highlight the outcomes of the above and propose further courses of action where necessary or appropriate.

51 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The clerk informed the Advisory Council that he had intended to add two reports to the agenda. He said that he did not want to go into detail but that on the advice from the Legal Service he had held them back for further consideration, but that it was probable that at least one of them would be on the next agenda.

52 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The clerk reminded members that the next meeting of SACRE was **Thursday 20 October** and would not be in the Town Hall as usual, but at the Romford Synagogue. The start time was yet to be confirmed. The meeting following was scheduled for **Thursday 23 March 2017** and that would be in the Town Hall commencing at 7.00pm.

Chairman

Adviser Report to Havering SACRE

28th June 2016

Havering Primary Subject Leaders' Meetings

This term's meeting focused on resources that could be used in schools to support the new Agreed Syllabus. We looked at both resources that can be bought into schools and those which can be freely used through the internet.

The group also focused on assessment, with two schools bringing models of assessment that they are using in line with the new Agreed Syllabus. There followed a general discussion on how different schools might assess RE in the future.

The new syllabus mentions using G-dly Play as a teaching technique and staff expressed an interest in being trained to use this method. Therefore our meeting next term will focus on G-dly Play and will involve a demonstration by Carol Dawson who has provided many G-dly Play sessions in schools.

Primary staff have brought up difficulties with accessing the new Agreed Syllabus on the portal. It is important that they can get to it quickly and easily, especially as it needs to be taught from September.

It should be noted that secondary RE teachers were invited to a fairly impromptu RE TeachMeet held in Redbridge. This was incredibly short notice – there have been arrangements for a longer notice period to be given if another TeachMeet is held in the future.

Exam Reform

The new GCSE and A level RE will be ready for first teaching in September 2016. The content for these exams was decided by the DfE last year and the exam boards have been preparing their specifications since then.

Most of the new specifications have now been accredited. These include: AQA GCSE and A level specifications, Educas/WJEC GCSE and A level specifications, OCR GCSE and A level specifications, Pearson/Edexcel A level specifications have been accredited whilst their GCSE full and short course specifications have been submitted to Ofqual for accreditation.

The Havering syllabus was written with these new exams in mind, which can clearly be seen by its focus on knowledge. Secondary schools following the syllabus should choose the exam board that best meets their needs before September for any student who is about to start a course in GCSE or A level RS that will be examined from 2018 onwards. Students who are taking the GCSE or A level in 2016/17 will be examined using the current criteria.

Religious Studies and Non-Religious Worldviews

A High Court ruling was made last November on the place of non-religious worldviews in light of the new GCSE Religious Studies criteria. The ruling made clear that the

teaching of RE at KS4 must take into account both religious and non-religious worldviews in schools without a religious character.

The case was brought by families of Humanist teenagers who were challenging the DfE's claim that following a GCSE course in RE would fulfil the legal requirements. The families were concerned about the exclusion of Humanism from the GCSE criteria as a separate focus of study. The judgment says that GCSE RS may fulfil the legal requirements for RE, but does not necessarily do so. It points out that the state has a duty to take care that information or knowledge included in the curriculum is conveyed in a pluralistic manner. The state is not entitled to discriminate between religions and beliefs on a qualitative basis and its duties must be performed from a standpoint of neutrality and impartiality. However, it also points out that this does not require 'equal air-time to be given to all shades of belief or conviction'. Relying exclusively on GCSEs to deliver RE at KS4 may mean that schools and Agreed Syllabuses fall short of delivering the RE obligations and if so, would need to afford some additional educational provision.

Since November, there have been different interpretations of the judgment including those made by the DfE and British Humanist Association. Although several documents offering legal guidance have been produced over the last few weeks and months, these have not yet been tested in court, so we have no precedent to follow at this time. Whilst, these documents should not be ignored, they remain guidance at this time, rather than legal requirements. There may yet be more documents produced relating to this matter in the near future.

Commission on RE

The Religious Education Council of England and Wales is setting up a commission to investigate into the recommendations brought up by three recent reports (A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools, REforREal and Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life).

The Commission has four main tasks:

- 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.
- 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.

Commissioners to be appointed will have been decided by the REC Board earlier this month. The REC has also arranged a meeting with the Schools Minister to discuss the Commission and future opportunities for the REC and the Department to work together.