

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.