

**OXFORDSHIRE
STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

***Minutes of the Oxfordshire SACRE Meeting
At County Hall, Oxford, on Wednesday 6th March 2019 at 4.00 pm***

Present: Committee A: World Faiths, Christian Denominations
M = Member Steve Beegoo (M)
SD = Standing Deputy Sheikh Ramzy (M)
Chandra Vadivale (M)
Rose Westwood (M)
Nicholas Wood (M)

Committee B: Church of England
Susan Grenfell (M)
Christine Price-Smith (M)
Carol Worthington (M)

Committee C: Teacher representatives
Ruth Cohen (M)

Committee D: Local Authority
Cllr Bob Johnston (M)
Cllr Charles Mathew (M) – Chair

Co-opted Members
Shahin Bekhradnia (M)
Nigel Fancourt (M)
Margaret Godden (M)
Stephen Vickers (SD)
John Webster (SD)

Visitors
Jackie Holderness (Christ Church)
Bushra Taslim Hussain (Islamic Beginnings)

In attendance: Helen Batten (Clerk)
Bill Moore (Advisor to SACRE)

Apologies: Catherine Hayward (LA officer)
Fraser Long (Committee A)
Cllr Glynis Phillips (Committee D)
Helina Taghavi (co-opted)

1 Introduction

- CM welcomed everybody to the meeting and thanked them for attending.
- Apologies tendered were accepted.
- Actions to fill teacher vacancies are ongoing and, in the meantime, it was agreed that RC would represent Committee C (Teachers).
- Provisional appointments agreed at the last meeting, of CM to serve as Chair and NF to serve as Vice Chair, were confirmed.

2 Reflection

BM spoke briefly about the importance of RE, tabling the introductory points about its role from the current syllabus. It was agreed that these remain very relevant and thought-provoking.

3 Minutes of 14th November 2018 & matters arising

- (i) Minutes which had been circulated were approved as an accurate record. It was clarified that Anne Andrews is the Diocese RE Advisor.
- (ii) Matters arising, not otherwise covered by the current agenda, were considered:
 - **Annual report 2017** [item 5]: The final version has now been distributed to the DfE and NASACRE.
 - **Liaison with OCC** [item 7]: BM and CM have met Catherine Hayward and Kim James again, and confirmed the value of being able to set up regular opportunities to discuss the work and concerns of SACRE. Review of the SACRE constitution and membership requirements is ongoing.
 - **Working group on collective worship** [item 8]: MG expressed interest in joining this group when it is established.

4 Bushra Taslim Hussain

- BTH introduced herself and her book for young children, *My A-Z of Islam*, explaining that it developed from a desire to find a simple picture book for her daughter. There was nothing suitable so she ended up writing and illustrating her own, which she has now published as 'Islamic Beginnings'. The book can be used by teachers to introduce Islam to young children and is suitable for those with no prior knowledge.
- SACRE members agreed that the book is clear and attractive and fills the identified gap extremely well. It cannot represent all strands of Islam but this will prompt enquiry and discussion in schools the book should therefore be promoted.

Actions

- ~ **RC will publicise the book via Early Years contacts.**
- ~ **BM will include book in REFocus.**

5 Teachers' Network Meeting

- BM recommended a postponement of the next teachers' network meeting from the previously agreed date in March, to allow sufficient time to develop the right content and publicity. It was agreed that the meeting will take place on 19th June, with University of Oxford venue to be confirmed. The meeting will look at the anticipated effects of increased emphasis on curriculum in the new Ofsted arrangements, which should be beneficial for RE.
- It was agreed that each faith group will produce a single sheet of key facts showing the connections between beliefs and practices and how this information links to the agreed syllabus. This information will be provided to the Clerk in advance of the June SACRE meeting.

Actions

- ~ **NF will confirm venue arrangements for the June 19th meeting.**
- ~ **BM and NF will consider key messages and meeting content.**

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- ~ *BM will liaise with Diocese and independent school contacts to publicise arrangements as widely as possible.*
- ~ *Faith group representatives will prepare fact sheets and send to HB.*

6 Monitoring schools

(a) Feedback from NF and BM

- NF and BM have given further consideration to points raised at the last meeting. It is clear that monitoring delivery of RE in schools is a large task and SACRE will not have capacity to achieve all that would be useful. Some information about schools not delivering RE at key stage 3 is available, but it is not complete and does not show where RE is provided within another subject. So, although the statutory requirement for RE remains and is not being fulfilled in all schools, it will be necessary to approach any concerns carefully.
- SB recommended that schools should be reminded that the requirement for RE is not adequately met by mixing it into other subjects. NF explained that statutory requirements are not always clear and are further clouded by academies being able to follow a different agreed syllabus. SV suggested that SACRE could therefore usefully question schools about the extent to which they follow an agreed syllabus.
- It is generally clear that primary schools are more compliant and are more often in receipt of external RE guidance. However the resources and knowledge required can be an issue for non-specialists and teachers are often not comfortable teaching something outside their own experience. CPS suggested that SACRE will need to get to teachers but also win over school leadership since successful RE in primary schools depends on both. All schools are currently extremely pressured although it is hoped that the Ofsted changes will provide some relief and enable RE to flourish more.
- SR asked how schools are approaching LGBT issues. BM clarified that schools have a duty to promote diversity when covering relationships but do not need to include these aspects in RE teaching. All teaching must comply with equalities legislation but sensitivity to different beliefs and points of view is also essential and it would not be helpful to try to adopt an official SACRE position on these issues.

(b) Monitoring Ofsted reports

BM recommended it will be useful to look at how inspectors pick up RE in the school curriculum. It was agreed to consider at the June SACRE how best to achieve this from September 2019.

7 Commission for RE report

(a) Letters from Secretary of State and RE Commission Chair

- A letter from the Secretary of State and the response from the Commission Chair had been circulated.
- SACRE members agreed that the letter is disappointing and broadly endorsed the Chair's response. However SB also observed that it is pleasing that the Secretary of State does not appear to be minded to make changes that would involve discontinuing SACREs.

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- BM suggested that the letters illustrate just how critical the current position is for RE, and explained that the Association of RE Advisors, in common with the rest of the RE world, is split on these issues. The question for Oxfordshire is whether there is funding to keep things as they are and, if not, what alternatives there could be to support RE. Any changes to the provision of RE can only be carried out with an appropriate change in law. It was agreed it will be best if SACREs continue to champion RE.
- NF clarified that the report was not a government-led project so there is less pressure to follow its recommendations. Some different views on these questions are now appearing. The view that national hubs are the way forward is no longer so popular, and the spread of academisation makes this model appear more restrictive. In these circumstances local SACREs would continue to offer the best support to enable RE to flourish.
- CW drew attention to the 2016 government plea for 'religious literacy' and asked how we can hope to have this unless children receive good quality RE.

(b) Update on All Party Parliamentary Group

- SB reported from the APPG meeting in January attended by himself, SR and SV. Addressing the meeting was a valuable opportunity since key points came from ensuing discussion, which will be put to the Secretary of State. It would also be useful for SACRE to write independently to emphasise its own concerns.
- Content for this letter was discussed. It was agreed to include points around Ofsted requirements, the influence of the EBacc syllabus, local determination and resources for SACRES to complete essential work.

Action: SB to circulate draft letter to Secretary of State.

(c) National entitlement

- Details of the proposed national entitlement had been circulated.
- NW observed that, if adopted, the RE Commission's recommendations, would address some concerns about delivery since schools would have to clearly identify RE in their offer.
- BM asked whether this statement will help with updating the local syllabus. NF confirmed that the statement is an indication of what is considered good RE and should be taken into consideration. However BM felt that there is insufficient emphasis on learning *from* religion, rather than just about it, and that an element of self-reflection is extremely important.

8 Agreed syllabus review

- Following a recommendation from BM, SACRE agreed to defer the agreed syllabus review for at least one year. The Autumn 2019 meeting will set up a new committee to define the way forward and lead this work.
- It was also agreed to work with Bucks SACRE on the syllabus review, pooling resources to benefit RE in both authorities.

9 Annual report

The 2018 annual report is in production and will be circulated before the June meeting.

Action: BM to circulate Annual Report.

10 Website update

Work to update and improve the content of the SACRE pages on the OCC public website and schools intranet is ongoing. SB was pleased to note that website information had produced a request for a speaker for a local primary school.

11 RE quality mark

BM explained that the REQM framework is free to access and schools can use this to guide their practice without needing to apply for accreditation. BM is promoting this as a valuable resource and asked members to also mention it to their school contacts. It is also very pleasing that some schools have completed the accreditation and are achieving recognition for the quality of the RE.

12 Member contributions

- CV and CW drew attention to the decreased emphasis on spiritual, moral, social and cultural education in the new Ofsted guidance and regretted the consequent loss of opportunities for discussion.
- NF provided an update on the argumentation research project, which will require input from RE teachers.
- Members notified forthcoming events, further details of which will be circulated.
- BJ commented on the excellent attendance and useful discussions at the meeting.
- This had been SG's last meeting since she will be standing down from SACRE in the summer. On behalf of SACRE CM thanked her for all her contributions.

13 Next meeting

The next meeting will take place at County Hall at 4:00 pm on Wednesday 5th June 2019.

14 2019-20 meeting dates

- Tuesday 12th November 2019
- Wednesday 4th March 2020
- Tuesday 9th June 2020

CM thanked all members for their attendance and contributions, and closed the meeting at 5:50 pm.

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Agreed actions from SACRE meeting, 6th March 2019

Minute no	Action	Who?	When by?
4	Publicise <i>My A-Z of Islam</i> to schools.	R Cohen B Moore	
5.	Consider teacher network meeting content and publicity.	B Moore	
5.	Provide key points about belief and practice for each faith.	Faith group representatives	Provide to HB before June meeting.
7 (b)	Circulate draft letter to Secretary of State.	S Beegoo	ASAP
9.	Circulate draft Annual Report 2018.	B Moore	Before June meeting.