

**WEST BERKSHIRE
STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY, 11 JUNE 2019**

VENUE: THEALE GREEN SCHOOL, CHURCH STREET, THEALE, RG7 5DA

Present:

Group A – Other Faiths Members

Revd David Taylor (Thatcham Baptist Church) and Mr Mobasshir Mushtaq (Muslim)
(from 4.40pm)

Group B – Church of England Members

Mrs Val Bolan (C of E) and Mrs Mary Stagg (C of E)

Group C – Teaching Association Members

Mr Bernard Eggleton (NASUWT) and Ms Clare Nolan (NASUWT)

Group D – WBC Councillors

Councillor Peter Argyle, Councillor Tony Linden, Councillor David Marsh

Also Present: David Rees (Religious Education Adviser to West Berks SACRE), Sue Dey (Observer), Linda Pye (Principal Policy Officer) and Julie Webber (Theale Green School)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Billy Drummond (WBC), Janet Giddings (Democratic Services Officer), Rachel Manley (LA, Advisor) and Mrs Maria Pratico (C of E)

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2019 would be presented to the next meeting of SACRE for approval.

2 Matters arising from the Minutes

This item was not discussed.

3 Membership

David Taylor welcomed the three new local authority Member representatives to the meeting – Peter Argyle, Tony Linden and David Marsh.

Councillor Tony Linden noted that the two Teaching Association Members were from the same union (NASUWT). David Taylor responded that there was not always that much of a choice. He welcomed Julie Webber as a guest speaker for this meeting and also Sue Dey as an observer. It was noted that all four groups needed to be represented for the meeting to be able to take place.

4 Religious Studies at Theale Green School - Julie Webber

Julie Webber confirmed that she had joined Theale Green School as a newly qualified teacher 14 years ago and had become Head of Department in 2018.

Theale Green offered both a GCSE and A Level in Religious Education. The GCSE would include extended writing and evaluation and pupils were supported with this skill right from Year 7. There did appear to be some disparity from what pupils had looked at in regards to religious education in primary schools from what was covered in the secondary school. There seemed to be a mixture of content between schools but Julie Webber confirmed that some improvements in this area was now being seen. Staff at Theale Green were trying to go out to Primary Schools to look at what was being done in terms of teaching religious education to ensure that there was more consistency.

The GCSE in Religious Education was now an options subject and Julie Webber confirmed that Theale Green still had a reasonable number of students choosing it – indeed a quarter of pupils in Year 10 had chosen to take this GCSE. 94% of pupils taking the GCSE had achieved a grade of 4+ (C). The GCSE included Ethics and Philosophy. A particular challenge was supporting those less able pupils with the evaluation and analysis element which carried 15 marks. Hinduism was also an area which was challenging as there seemed to be a lack of resources for revision guides. She stated that Theale Green had put together their own revision guide. It was hoped that a trip could be arranged next year to Neasden or Reading Mandir. Councillor Tony Linden asked if it would be possible to obtain more information from Hindu's in the UK or from Universities. Julie Webber replied that she had used RE online which was quite a good resource. Clare Nolan also stated that she had attended seminars at various Conferences and had taken away resources which might be useful.

At A Level standard Theale Green had six pupils in Year 12 and eight in Year 13 taking Religious Education and it was hoped that numbers would improve in the following year. One of the challenges here was that Christian Theology had recently been introduced with only one teacher who was able to deliver it and therefore timing was an issue.

Mary Stagg queried whether there was a difference between non-church and church schools in terms of the delivery of religious education. Julie Webber confirmed that there was a difference with the church schools having a more positive attitude.

David Taylor said that it was good to see that the best results in the school had been in RE and it was noted that they had even been better than in PE.

Sue Dey asked what kind of resources was required in relation to Hinduism. Julie Webber confirmed that the school had made its own revision guide but it was not in depth and she had had to search around to find any information. David Rees confirmed that he would let Julie have some ideas in this area.

Val Bolan noted that the A Level included some very meaty subjects. Julie Webber agreed that it was a big jump from GCSE and the evaluation and analysis essay increased from 15 to 40 marks.

Bernard Eggleton queried whether there were any cross curricular links with other subjects such as History. Julie Webber confirmed that there were links with History and English in particular i.e. Ann Franks Diary and Passion plays.

David Taylor thanked Julie Webber for her presentation and he felt that it was particularly good to see the links with primary schools being strengthened.

5 Actions from previous meetings

Crossing the Bridges:

Val Bolan recommended the Crossing the Bridges website which included a list of religious premises which had been put together in 2017. The list only listed two places in Newbury and Val Bolan had been volunteered to look at the list and to see why some premises were not listed. She had been in contact with a number of Church of England premises and whilst their doors were always open they had not realised that they had to be on a list.

The website was good but it might require some additional resources to update it. David Rees stated that Jan Lever had initially put the list together and that the original database now belonged to the Hub and was protected. He confirmed that he would try and obtain an editable version of the database so that it could be updated. He would try to update the list and get more premises on board if possible. It was noted that the template on the website was fine but it did not state where it needed to be sent once completed.

David Taylor asked if David Rees could explain what the Hub was and how it related to SACRE. David Rees explained that there were six SACRE's in a small area. The idea of the Hub was to pull all the SACRE's together and it included representatives from each area. The focus in the current year was to develop materials to support the syllabus. It was a way of ensuring that all six SACRE's worked together cohesively and he said that if anyone had any ideas of where the Hub could get involved in the future then please get in contact with him.

Communications Representative:

There was a desire to keep communications with the local authority strong and it was noted that SACRE had a page on the Council's website. David Rees stated that it would be good to include some links on that web page e.g. Crossing the Bridges and he would contact the Council's Information Officer to see if he could progress that further.

Action:

- **David Rees to contact Council's Information Officer to see if links to other organisations/resources could be included on the SACRE web page.**

6 Schools

Primary Schools:

David Rees confirmed that the notes from the West Berks Primary RE Teachers' meeting on 14th May 2019 had been circulated for information. The meeting considered what had been happening on a national and local basis and what was working well and not so well.

National Updates:

- RE Online – a new refreshed website was being launched on 25th June 2019 which would make it easier to find resources
- Email a Believer – this was part of RE Online and 10 faiths and world views would be represented. It would be fully monitored and edited and was an excellent way for schools to access faith communities which might not be present locally.

- RE Definitions App – this was a free app which helped develop confidence for RE teachers and students. This was being updated for the second time and was free to use.
- SHAP Festivals Calendar – hosted by RE Online this was free and provided festival information and links to other helpful sites.

Local Updates:

- An update on Hub activities had been given and looked through examples of Teachers' working group output with key questions, recommended content and outcome examples.
- More documents had been developed since the last meeting including KS1 and KS2 Sikhism, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism – some of these had been shared and discussed and had also been distributed electronically after the meeting. It was noted that Clare Nolan had done a lot of work on this and thanks were given for that.

Secondary Schools:

David Taylor updated SACRE in relation to Religious Education in Secondary Schools.

There were a number of challenges with Secondary Schools. A network meeting was usually held on a termly basis and the last meeting had been held at St. Barts where concerns had been raised about the new GCSE. A further network meeting would be held in the following week at Trinity School.

Two schools were a particular concern as they were not fulfilling their duty in that every child should be receiving religious education and those schools were John O'Gaunt and Park House. John O'Gaunt had lost the GCSE and any religious education teaching that pupils received was not from a specialist in that subject. They did have specific days for the whole school, i.e. 'iDays' and the intention was to include some element of religious education within that. John O'Gaunt was not particularly a big academic school and David Taylor hoped to link up the school with a local faith community – Church of England was strong in Hungerford.

In respect of Park House the school did an afternoon lesson (Wednesday) each week with the whole school called "Character & Values". There was a very small RS element to this. David Taylor confirmed that he had visited the school in September 2018 and not a lot had moved forward to start with. He had then approached Ofsted who had made contact with the school. The school had now appointed RE Coordinators for Key Stages 3 and 4.

Councillor Tony Linden queried whether Ian Pearson or the new Portfolio Holder was aware of this. David Taylor thought not but stated that he was trying to work with schools but by using the carrot method rather than the stick. He confirmed that he would raise the issue with Ian Pearson.

It was queried whether there was a legal requirement to provide a GCSE in Religious Education. There was no requirement to provide a GCSE in Religious Education on the curriculum but there was a requirement to provide some element of religious education across the school and quite often that was just a tick box exercise. David Taylor stressed the need to tread carefully particularly if progress was being made in the schools in question.

Ramadan:

Mobasshir Mushtaq confirmed that he had sent around an update on fasting during the exam period. Pupils would have stopped eating at around 3am until 9pm and there were guidelines for teachers urging them to be mindful of that. There was an option for pupils not to fast during Ramadan but to do it on other days when there were no exams taking place.

Councillor Tony Linden stated that Examination Boards should be made aware of this as he would not like to see pupils disadvantaged. Clare Nolan confirmed that it was possible for these pupils to go into another room if they wished. Bernard Eggleton asked if schools were also aware. Mobasshir Mushtaq replied that some were aware and some were not but that was one of the reasons why guidelines had been produced.

7 2019-20 Action Plan

David Rees presented the West Berkshire SACRE Action Plan for the period April 2019 to March 2020.

The following updates were provided:

- Action 2 – Provide a termly primary RE network meeting for West Berkshire Teachers – David Rees confirmed that he had the dates for Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020 which he would forward to David Taylor.
- Action 3 – Support existing secondary RE network meeting and offer Adviser support – This was difficult as there were not that many secondary schools attending this. However, David Taylor and David Rees would support this network between them. Schools were in the second year of the new GCSE and training had been revised which had made it better.
- Action 4 – Contact primary schools who did not attend networks to arrange visits by SACRE members – David Rees confirmed that he was struggling to identify the right people in schools to which he could send a flyer to directly.
- Action 5 – Continue to work with secondary schools not yet complying with the law, especially Park House – David Rees stated that West Berkshire SACRE was the most proactive in this respect as it was in contact with schools.
- Action 7 – SACRE members attend termly SACRE meetings (3 per year) and when possible teacher termly network meetings and training events – It was noted that training events could be arranged and there was a possibility of another pan teacher conference coming out of the Hub.
- Action 8 – Produce annual SACRE report – A draft would be brought to the November meeting.
- Action 9 – Review the action plan at each meeting and update for the following year – the action plan was reviewed and updated prior to each meeting.
- Action 10 – Subscribe to NASACRE – it was noted that the AGM for the current year would be held in Manchester.

8 Hub

David Taylor stressed the need to get more information on the website. David Rees said that Sarah Payne was the RE Ambassador for this area but that she only worked one day a month. He recognised that this was a small amount of time but she did cover a large area. He would try and make contact with her.

David Taylor noted that some SACRE's had a newsletter and he wondered if that would be useful for West Berkshire. Clare Nolan felt that it would be useful as not everyone was aware of what was going on. It could include a summary of the current year's plans, resources links and dates of meetings. David Taylor proposed that if it was agreed to produce a newsletter then it would be useful to use a template from another authority. It would also be necessary to decide what the format would be and how often it would be produced. It was therefore proposed that David Taylor would obtain examples of other newsletters for the group to consider at the next meeting.

Action:

- **David Taylor to obtain examples of other newsletters for the group to consider at the next meeting.**

Clare Nolan informed the group that Reading University was going to start to train RE Teachers from September 2019. David Taylor felt that would be beneficial for West Berkshire as it would attract new teachers in the area.

David Taylor advised that the next SACRE Conference would be held in June/July 2020 at the Holiday Inn in Wokingham. If anyone was interested in attending please let David Taylor or David Rees know.

David Taylor stated that membership of the Hub cost £900 and he asked if it was a valued service. He felt that it showed real benefit and value as SACRE could draw on the expertise of David Rees and his colleagues. Clare Nolan agreed that resources which were pan-Berkshire were valuable on a local level and were therefore important. SACRE confirmed that they would continue to support the Hub.

David Rees referred to an application for a Westhill NASACRE award to fund a project entitled 'Real People, Real Faith'. Using the new Pan-Berkshire syllabus as a basis it was intended to take groups of teachers to places of worship and record interviews with the hosts answering key questions from the syllabus. The short interviews would then be used by teachers to create lesson activities and units which would enable students in class to engage with the syllabus questions directly, hearing first hand responses to the same questions from a range of believers. An award of £4,000 had been agreed. David Taylor confirmed that as this was a tight schedule progress would need to be made at the next Hub meeting in July.

9 Any Other Business

There were no items of other business to discuss.

David Taylor thanked Julie Webber for giving a presentation to the meeting and he confirmed that the next meeting would take place on 12th November 2019 at Thatcham Baptist Church at 4.15pm. One item of business for that agenda would be a discussion on Collective Worship from Sue Ball.

(The meeting commenced at 4.15pm and closed at 5.44pm)