

Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

held on Monday, 12 March, 2012 at 5.30 p.m.

at Green Lane Baptist Church, Green Lane, Walsall

Present

Mr. C. Hopkins (Chairman)
Councillor Barker
Councillor Phillips
Councillor Robertson
Mrs. S. Blackmore
Mr. A. Orlik
Mrs. V. Morris
Mr. D. Thakker
Mrs. B. Groombridge
Mr. R. Askari

In Attendance

Lat Blaylock - RE Today		
Earl Richards	}	Walsall Children's
Rhena Sagu	}	Services -
Sandy Moran	}	Serco

Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Arif, Rochelle, Turner, Ms. E. Davies and Mr. D. Lomax.

Minutes - 10 October, 2011

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 October, 2011 were submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October, 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Late items to be introduced by the Chairman

The Chairman agreed to take a late item relating to the Walsall RE Newsletter, March, 2012 at Item 13 on the agenda.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)

There were no items for consideration in the private session.

Notes of Strategy Sub-Group - 6 February, 2012

The notes of the meeting of the Strategy Sub-Group held on 6 February, 2012 were submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the notes of the meeting of the Strategy Sub-Group held on 6 February, 2012 be received and noted.

SOS - RE and Schools

Mr. Blaylock informed the Committee that, following curriculum development by the Government, it was now more difficult for schools to fulfil their statutory obligation for the study of religious education. The introduction of the English Baccalaureate required Secondary Schools to record, and Central Government to report the proportion of pupils achieving "C" grade and above not including RE. The options for GCSE were, therefore, reviewed by schools and RE often received a negative impact. If a student followed an RE course and no certificate was awarded at the end of the course, it would have a negative effect on their education.

During the period 1998 - 2011, the numbers of students studying RE at GCSE increased substantially but these had now begun to decline. Schools were giving a low priority to RE, even though students wanted to study it. The Department for Education was reviewing priorities, including English, maths, science skills and core knowledge. RE had a legal determination and Ministers had indicated that there were no plans or intentions to change the law. As RE was not included in the Government's review, this would impact on study at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Mr. Blaylock informed the Committee that an all party parliamentary group had been set up to support the inclusion of RE in the curriculum and the English Baccalaureate. The Group was known as "Save RE" and he suggested that a letter be sent on behalf of SACRE around the issues referred to above.

Councillor Robertson informed the Committee that representations could be made to Valerie Vaz MP and he requested more information on the matter.

Mrs. Morris referred to the ghetto isolation that had been highlighted in Walsall's ICOCO report and considered that religious awareness would be an important tool in helping to address this.

The Chairman referred to the importance of teaching young people about other faiths, religions and denominations and everything possible should be done to challenge Government thinking on this issue.

Resolved

That the information presented be noted and approval be given to a letter being forwarded to the Secretary of State for Education on behalf of SACRE challenging the deletion of RE as a core subject in the English Baccalaureate and the lack of a requirement for RE to be taught or encouraged as a GCSE subject in Academies.

Action Plan

A copy of the Action Plan was circulated at the meeting:-

(see annexed)

Mr. Richards highlighted support given to SACRE by Walsall Children's Services - Serco and RE Today. He informed Members that three additional Members of the Walsall Children's Services - Serco team were now assisting on SACRE and it was, therefore, necessary to ensure that their time was focussed.

Reference was made to the visits to schools by Members of SACRE and Mr. Richards reported that some schools had been reluctant to take part; he had recently delivered a presentation to Head Teachers regarding this facility. Mr. Moran was an Ofsted Inspector and he had outlined the benefits not just for RE, but for whole school improvement. It would not be possible to assess how well the Agreed Syllabus was being used in schools if such visits could not take place.

Mr. Orlik recognised the importance of such visits and requested that Walsall Children's Services - Serco liaise with his school to arrange a visit in the near future. With regard to subject leader or lead teacher training for Primary Schools, Mr. Blaylock confirmed that half day or twilight sessions had been held and the highest attendance at the sessions was 18 out of 86 schools. 26 Primary Schools had attended half day sessions that focussed on early years curriculum planning with the new Agreed Syllabus, Islam and RE as a subject leader. Groups set their own subjects for delivery at future sessions.

Mr. Blaylock stated that it would be necessary to look at a programme for 14 - 19 year olds in the near future.

Mr. Richards confirmed that there was approximately £2,300.00 remaining in the budget for the services of RE Today which would cover the period to January, 2013. After that date, an additional £5,000 would be included to cover the service until the end of the Serco contract.

Mrs. Morris indicated that priority should be given to providing information on the teaching of Sikhism as it was a major Walsall faith. With regard to the NQT programme, she indicated that Walsall Council was in the process of appointing and funding a Faith Development worker on a one year contract to work alongside the Multi-Faith Forum, part of the work was to establish religious awareness in Walsall and provide a course for existing and new public services employees in Walsall. She felt that the induction programme by Walsall Council could also link in with faith tour guides.

Religious awareness for 14 - 19 year olds could include the faith tour guide programme and their knowledge could be passed on to the primary sector as part of the qualification. The faith tour guides could run the "sacred space" unit in schools.

The Chairman confirmed that this was one of SACRE's priorities.

Mr. Blaylock stated that a conference for pupils identified by schools as gifted and talented could be held in conjunction with Sandwell whereby Year 8 pupils would assist Year 5 pupils on the understanding of good RE. The usual format included the attendance of 80 Year 5 pupils, 5 gifted and talented pupils and a teacher to oversee the day who would receive resources to use in their school.

Mr. Richards confirmed that this suggestion had been promoted on "The Well" and forwarded to schools direct; Mr. Blaylock confirmed that he would report on the outcome at the next meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That a unit of work in respect of Sikhism be provided by RE Today as a matter of priority;
- (2) That information on a field of study for older pupils be developed;
- (3) That the NQT programme be widened to include RE and NQTs leading collective worship in schools;
- (4) That the seven units of work produced by RE Today be launched to all schools at an event to be held in June/July, 2012;
- (5) That a presentation to Primary Forum take place on the proposal to hold a launch for the seven units that address Foundation Stage to Key Stage 5 in order that dates for the launch can be confirmed;
- (6) That future training courses for teachers of RE include teaching assistants who deliver RE in schools.

Promote the use of RE website

A copy of a draft newsletter promoting RE was circulated:-

(see annexed)

The draft newsletter was submitted for comment and SACRE was informed that the newsletter would appear on "The Well". It was proposed to introduce the newsletter on a quarterly or half-yearly basis.

Resolved

That a copy of the newsletter be circulated to all Members of SACRE requesting comments within one month prior to publication.

Statutory Inspections of Anglican Schools:-

(a) St. John's CE (Controlled) Primary School

A copy of the National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the report be received and noted and the school congratulated on the outcome of the successful inspection.

(b) Bloxwich CE (VC) Primary School

A copy of the National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the report be received and noted and the school congratulated on the outcome of the successful inspection.

Venue for 9 July, 2012 meeting

Resolved

That the next meeting of SACRE on 9 July, 2012 be held at Pleck Methodist Church, Bescot Road, Walsall.

Late items to be introduced by the Chairman

There were no late items.

The Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and in particular Mr. Blaylock for the work carried out on behalf of SACRE as well as officers for their support.

Termination of Meeting

The meeting terminated at 7.05 p.m.

Chairman

Date