

**Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education
Monday 23 October, 2023 at 6.00 p.m. in Conference Room 2 at the
Council House, Walsall**

Present:

Chair - Mr D. Lomax (United Reformed Church)
Mrs P. Lane (Lichfield Diocesan Board of Education)
Mr A. Orlik (Lichfield Diocesan Board of Education)
Mrs K. Donnellan (Lichfield Diocesan Board of Education)
Ms M. Mather (Quakers)
Dr G. Gomez (Roman Catholic)
Mr G. Singh (Guru Nanak Gurdwara)
Mr Sukhvinder Singh Padda (Walsall Sikh Forum)
Mr B. Green (Humanist)
Councillor M. Statham
Councillor C. Statham
Councillor I. Hussain
Councillor Singh Sohal
Councillor R.K. Mehmi

In attendance:

Fiona Moss (RE Today Advisor)
Nick Perks (Quality Assurance Team Manager, Walsall Council)
Neil Picken (Principal Democratic Services Officer, Walsall Council)
Edward Cook (Democratic Services Officer, Walsall Council)

1. Welcome and Introductions

All present were welcomed to the meeting and introduced themselves. SACRE noted that Mr Edward Cook would be undertaking the role of Clerk at future meetings.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Farhana Hassan and Mr Sacha.

3. Late Items to be introduced by the Chair.

It was noted that Mr Sukhvinder Singh Padda had replaced Balvinder Nijjar as the Walsall Sikh Forum representative.

4. Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th July, 2023, a copy having been circulated, be approved and signed as a correct record.

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

There were no items in private session.

6. SACRE Action Plan

A report was submitted.

(See annexed).

The Chair presented the report and welcomed debate.

SACRE agreed that rotating venues was positive. The Chair requested all present to notify the clerk should they wish to host a future meeting.

When considering Community Cohesion, SACRE requested that the Council's Integration Lead, Mr Nigel Rowe, be invited to a future meeting to discuss Community Cohesion.

Discussion ensued on the Agreed Syllabus and Collective Worship. Members agreed that a questionnaire should be developed by a subgroup of SACRE. Once agreed, the questionnaire would be disseminated by the Primary, Nursery and Special Forum and the Walsall Association of Secondary Heads.

When considering communication with schools, the Quality Assurance Team Manager confirmed that information appertaining to SACRE could be included in weekly briefings sent from the Access and Inclusion to schools and that a representative could attend half termly head teacher meetings to present key messages. The Chair stated that volunteers to attend to speak to collective worship would be sought via the Clerk following the meeting.

SACRE then discussed the most effective approach to developing a guide for visiting places of worship. The RE Today Advisor explained that there was a National Programme via RE Hubs, organised into regional hubs, that listed places of worship once representatives had attended a short training session. It was noted that Mr Green had attended the course. The RE Today Advisor encouraged other members of SACRE to attend and to raise awareness within their networks. The national scheme placed the responsibility to update details on each member and could be updated at any time. A flyer providing training dates would be circulated to members of SACRE.

Members of SACRE agreed that a list of places of worship and contact details was important, especially for those wishing to make contact to arrange school visits. It was discussed whether a locally developed list would be more beneficial than using the national database. The RE Today advisor explained that encouraging

people to attend the regional database was positive as they would then update contact details for those wishing to arrange visits. SACRE noted that the Councils Community Cohesion team may have access to existing data and welcomed an update from the team at a future meeting. A member agreed to raise awareness of the national database at a forthcoming meeting of the Faith Leaders Network. The Quality Assurance Team Manager agreed to circulate details of the National Database to schools in the weekly briefing.

Resolved

That:

- 1.1 The clerk emails members of SACRE to seek volunteers to attend an online meeting to develop a questionnaire in respect of Collective Worship and the effectiveness of the Agreed Syllabus.
- 1.2 The Councils Integration Lead be invited to the next meeting of SACRE to discuss Community Cohesion and lists of places of worship.
- 1.3 The Quality Assurance Team Manager circulates details of the National Database to schools in the weekly briefing.
- 1.4 The RE Today Advisor provides the clerk with a flyer providing training dates for circulation to members of SACRE.

7. SACRE Annual Report

A report was submitted.

(See annexed).

The RE today advisor explained that producing the Annual Report was a statutory requirement. The document would be submitted to the DfE and National SACRE. In terms of broader circulation, it was agreed that the Quality Assurance Team Manager send the document with education updates.

Mr Green commented that he was pleased that Walsall Council took the decision in 2023 to include a Humanist representative in category 'A'. Humanists UK holds regular meetings and trainings for Humanist members of SACREs to ensure Humanists can be constructive and supportive SACRE participants. From attending these and from his experience as both a co-opted member and more recently as a full member in category 'A' it had become increasingly clear that Walsall SACRE was well organised and should be commended both for its inclusivity and for providing the resources required to enhance both the education of its members and that of the students within the Borough.

Other members noted that SACRE was well attended, well organised and focussed on issues that really matter.

Resolved

1. That the SACRE annual report be approved with the inclusion of a quote from the Humanist representative in the chairs foreword.
2. That the Quality Assurance Team Manager circulates the Annual Report to Headteachers.

8. School Workforce Data

A report was submitted.

(See annexed).

The RE today advisor explained that it was a statutory requirement for schools to submit workforce data to the Department for Education (DfE). However, some schools did not submit this information.

The data includes the percentage of time teaching subjects, including Religious Education. SACRE were informed that whilst there was no legal requirement in terms of curriculum time for RE, it was hoped that it would be 5% and good quality provision. It was explained that where the data was recorded as a z, schools had reported their teaching hours for other subjects, but had not reported RE. It should not be assumed that these schools teach or do not teach RE.

An overview of the schools that had submitted data was then provided. The chair undertook to speak with Bloxwich Academy and the Studio School to establish the level of RE provision as he was a Governor at the school.

The Chair enquired as to the consequences should schools not submit the required information. The RE today advisor explained that this had been an ongoing conversation between the DfE and Ofsted. The DfE had written to schools that had no web presence in terms of RE and had said teaching time for RE was zero. It was suggested by the then Minister of State for Education, The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, that SACRE had a role by writing to schools and seeking further clarity as to the level of provision. If there was no provision, this could be escalated to the DfE / Education and Skills Funding Agency. The Quality Assurance Team Manager advised that the Local Authority submit maintained schools' data with Academies providing the information directly.

SACRE members supported the view that this was a matter which should be considered further and asked for a comparison of previous years to establish if there were any trends. The RE Today advisor agreed to undertake this request.

SACRE agreed to write to those schools which either hadn't submitted data or where it wasn't clear what provision there was on the website. It was agreed that the RE Today advisor, together with the Quality Assurance Team Manager, draft letters for sign off by the Chair to establish the current position in terms of RE provision.

Resolved

That:-

1. The Chair to discuss the level of RE provision at Bloxwich Academy and The Studio School.
2. The RE Today Advisor together with the Quality Assurance Team Manager draft letters, signed by the Chair, to those schools that either hadn't submitted data or where it wasn't clear what provision there was on their website.
3. The RE Today Advisor compares previous years' workforce data to identify any trends and provides an update to the meeting in March, 2024.

9. SACRE National Updates from RE Today

A report was submitted.

(See annexed).

The RE Today Advisor drew attention to the recruitment challenges in RE. UCAS data shows that teacher recruitment was down a third of applicants from the last recruitment cycle. As of September 2024, a small bursary would be made available for those wishing to train to teach RE. However, this was less than bursaries for other subjects, expected to be £10k as opposed to those training in other subjects which received up to £25k. This posed a challenge for some that may be switching careers and so were unable to train without sufficient funding, due to responsibilities.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

10. RE in Walsall - OFSTED updates

A report was submitted.

(See annexed).

The RE Today Advisor advised that 2 inspection reports had been published in respect of Hilary Primary School and Rosedale Church of England School but that no comment had been made on RE.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

11. Education in Walsall updates

The Quality Assurance Team Manager highlighted that education in Walsall was improving. In terms of Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 there was only 1 measure where the gap hadn't been closed. In Key Stage 5, results were better than in 2019 and in Early Years and Primary, results were better than in previous years.

The challenge moving forward was phonics and an action plan was in place to visit schools which were below the national average.

The Portfolio Holder for Education explained that the Council had proactively managed the new framework and 89.3% of Schools were now good or better.

The Chair and SACRE congratulated the team on the significant improvements.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

12. Election of Spokespersons for Groups (Teacher Category)

The Chair sought a nomination for the position of spokesperson for the Teacher Category.

Mrs Leadley was nominated and it was:-

Resolved

That Mrs Leadley be appointed as the Teacher representative.

13. Date of Future Meetings:

- 18th March, 2024 at 6.00 p.m.
- 15th July, 2024 at 6.00 p.m.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7:50pm.