

At a meeting of the STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) held at the SANDHILL CENTRE on TUESDAY 18TH NOVEMBER, 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Mr. C. Short in the Chair

Church of England

Reverend G.M. Beck
Father C. Collins
Mrs. W. Lundgren

Christian and Other Denominations

Mrs. S. Slater
Ms. K. Shipley
Mr. S. Singh
Ms. J. Judson
Mr. J. Bhatt
Mr. L. Dorjie

Teacher Associations

Local Councillors

Councillor Francis

In Attendance:-

Margaret Ferrie - School Chief Inspector
Debra Dorward - Democratic Services Officer

1. Appointment of Chairman

It was agreed that Mr. C. Short be appointed as Chairman for the academic year 2008/2009.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors P. Smith and Stewart along with those from Mrs. C. Gibson, Mr. C. Hobbs and Mrs. L. Richardson.

3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

It was agreed to defer this item of business to the next meeting.

4. Minutes

It was AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th June, 2008 be approved.

The Chairman took the opportunity to thank Gary Shaw for servicing the SACRE meetings and notified Members that Gary had recently left Sunderland City Council to take up the post of Democratic Services Officer at South Tyneside Council.

Also, whilst referring back to the previous minutes, the Chairman updated Members on the following matters arising:-

Agreed Syllabus Conference

The meeting of the sub group involving Mr. Candon, Ms. Laybourne, Miss McChesney, Ms. Chapman and himself was yet to be arranged. However, since the June meeting the Chairman advised that he had met with Lynda Brown on 15th August, 2008 where a full and frank discussion had taken place. Since then he had also met with Margaret Ferrie who would be representing the Authority at all future SACRE meetings.

5. Appointment of Member

SACRE Members considered the report of the City Solicitor regarding the nomination of Mr. Lobsong Dorjie for Membership of the Council.

The Chairman advised that Mr. Dorjie had written on Buddhist traditions and history and undertook weekly outreach work to HM Prisons. Members were advised that Mr. Dorjie was well versed in speaking to those not of the Buddhist faith, and was happy to talk non-denominationally giving balance to all traditions. He also had experience in lecturing and working with those of school age as a civilian instructor with the Air Cadets.

AGREED that the Membership of SACRE be amended as outlined above.

6. Update on Natalie Chapman's Replacement

Margaret Ferrie, Chief Inspector of Schools, advised Members that since Natalie Chapman had left, work had been undertaken to realign the provision of support and that Patrick Candon, Senior Secondary Advisor was acting up into the role of Secondary Strategy Manager.

The nature of support on the subject of Religious Education required reviewing, including how SACRE link with schools. However, due to Government's requirements to make £100,000 savings, a full-time appointment had not yet been made.

In order to ensure that the person appointed to the role would be of the right calibre someone of seniority would be commissioned from a school. Two honorariums would also be offered. Ms. Ferrie went on to advise Members that she wanted to establish for SACRE's consideration how Religious Education could relate to other subjects in a moral, ethical and cultural significance. She was eager to get specialist Religious Education teachers together with other teachers to discuss this window of opportunity to change the curriculum. Ms. Ferrie asked whether any Members of SACRE would like to assist in the process, and provided a series of potential meeting dates.

The following members then expressed an interest in attending a meeting on 4th December, 2008:-

Mr. C. Short (Chairman), Mr. L. Dorjie and Father. C. Collins. Councillor Francis stated that he would also try to get there.

Ms. Ferrie advised that she was in the process of writing to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) regarding a template that they had supplied for completion. She had a range of questions and issues for the QCA regarding what level of support they were able to provide. She stated that SACRE needed to create additional networking opportunities to involve the community, particularly as Religious Education was going to be more involved in other subjects.

7. Report on School Visits

The Chairman alerted the Council to the fact that in the past Ofsted reports had been intermittent and often late on Religious Education. As a result, Marilyn Longstaff – an independent consultant, had been employed to undertake a series of monitoring visits to schools.

The Chairman then went on to deliver a verbal report, which summarised the findings contained in Ms. Longstaff's reports for which he held copies.

The Council were advised that six primary schools and two secondary schools had a monitoring visit, he then took the opportunity of thanking them for welcoming the visit, and also expressed his gratitude to Ms. Longstaff who, some members may remember, had introduced the Durham syllabus to Sunderland, which was how it had been adopted.

The reports from the six primary schools had given a clear indication that Religious Education was good in KS1 and KS2, plus all Head Teachers had been helpful and realised the importance of Religious Education in their schools, not only that, but the teachers responsible for Religious Education were keen and took their responsibilities seriously. There was a wide use of resources and almost every school visited used a library. It was also clear that there was good use of the interactive white board.

Ms. Longstaff had seen twenty lessons in those six schools, all of which were satisfactory, however some were 'good' and some good with 'excellent' features. Scrutiny of the work had indicated that appropriate time had been allocated. However, an instance had occurred where too little RE time had been spent on the subject because of preparation for SATS. Nonetheless, most comments were positive. Ms. Longstaff also described some children as good ambassadors for Religious Education. She had remarked in her report that discussion and debate occurred in some schools and that mutual respect and feelings for others was encouraged.

The Chairman explained that one of the areas for improvement, highlighted in the report, was that schools were struggling with assessing children to the relevant levels and that guidance was required. There was also a need for support from Religious Education specialists to assist with learning.

In relation to secondary schools, Ms. Longstaff had reported that the two schools visited represented 20% of schools in Sunderland, which was a noticeable sample. She commented that in secondary schools there was too much emphasis on data sheets, however there was good use of ICT in Religious Education and teacher-driven worksheets. The RE Locally Agreed Syllabus was mentioned within the humanities department of the school but Ms. Longstaff saw little evidence of this and no evidence of the use of the Bridging Unit.

Ms. Ferrie stated that the Council must not feel too negative about this, and that pressure existed in schools: nevertheless schools were aware that Religious Education was a statutory requirement and that efforts were to be made to redress the balance of RE in schools. On the other hand, there was much to celebrate within the reports. As Chief Inspector, Ms. Ferrie would like to raise questions and work with SACRE Members to devise a positive way forward.

8. Annual Report

Members of the Council agreed that the Chairman of SACRE would work towards completing the annual report with assistance from Father Collins.

The Chairman advised that Mark Chater would be in attendance at a conference due to be held on 24th January 2009 entitled "Have Faith in the Curriculum". The conference would feature the role that Religious Education would play in community cohesion. The event would be held from 10.00 a.m. – 12 noon at the National Glass Centre and was to include a buffet lunch. All were welcome.

Ms. Ferrie suggested that a meeting be held with schools and Head Teachers prior to the conference to ensure all are fully briefed and to encourage representation.

9. Budget

Ms. Ferrie reported that there was £9,500 remaining in the budget, and suggested that SACRE make available £5,000 in bursaries. SACRE could invite schools to put forward an application to take into account travel and then consider what to do with the rest. Members AGREED that it would be useful if an action plan for the budget could be drawn up.

In doing so, care would need to be taken to adhere to Corporate Procurement's strict rules and procedures.

The Chairman suggested that the closing date for bursary applications be 30th January, 2009. MF AGREED to write a letter to all schools regarding furthering the teaching of the locally agreed syllabus.

10. Religious Education Results

Ms. Ferrie AGREED to bring the Religious Education results to the next meeting of SACRE.

11. Any Other Business

Bursaries

Councillor Francis enquired whether there were any Terms of Reference for the process of dealing with bursaries. In response, the Chairman advised there was already a proforma and format in place, and that usually applications are completed on-line.

Ms. Ferrie added that she was happy to devise some Terms of Reference if none currently existed. The Chairman AGREED to check.

Father Collins commented that it was important that guidance was provided to allow applicants to relate to the syllabus.

Roman Catholic Representation

The Chairman advised that Caroline Nicol, a Religious Education Co-ordinator at Usworth Primary School would attend future meetings of SACRE. Arrangements would be made by Democratic Services to add Ms. Nicol onto the distribution list.

Having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance, the Chairman closed the meeting.

(Signed) C. SHORT,
Chairman.