

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) held remotely via Microsoft Teams on Thursday 4 March 2021 at 1.30 pm**

**Present:**

**P Welch (Chair) In the Chair**

### **Church of England**

Canon L Burton, N Dodd, K Passmore, H Tait and C Weir

### **Other Religious Denominations and Faiths**

J Bainbridge	- Methodist Church
W Gray	- Buddhism
J Pallister	- Roman Catholic
Bhakti Rasa Dasa	- Hinduism
C Spencer	- Bahá'í Faith
D Van der Velde	- Judaism

### **Teachers Associations**

B Dunn	- RE Curriculum Group
A Hartley	- NASUWT
S Lupton	- RE Curriculum Group

### **County Council Representatives**

Councillors L Brown, E Huntington, J Shuttleworth and F Tinsley

### **Co-opted Members:**

M Dixon	
S Walker	- Humanist

### **Education Durham Support and Provision Lead**

J Rimmer

### **Religious Education External Consultant**

C Robson

## **1 Introductions, Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked Members to introduce themselves.

Apologies for absence were received from V Bain, F Johnson, M Lowden and Councillor C Martin (Councillor L Brown substitute).

## **2 Minutes**

The Chair asked that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2020 be withdrawn and considered at the next SACRE meeting.

C Spencer referred to the endorsing of the additional guidance for Humanism produced by the North East Humanists that was not part of the Agreed Syllabus and was supplementary information and indicated that there was no role for SACRE to endorse this document.

The Chair indicated that the endorsement of the Humanist support material would be discussed under 'Any Other Business'.

## **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest in relation to the items of business on the agenda.

## **4 Matters Arising**

C Spencer asked that she be included as part of the SACRE planning team.

The Chair advised that the planning team had not met due to the global pandemic, but he would diary a meeting before the next SACRE meeting and would note C Spencer's interest in being part of the team.

L Burton asked if C Robson could report to SACRE in relation to the Durham Agreed Syllabus launch and the work she had carried out following the launch of the Durham Agreed Syllabus.

The Chair responded that the virtual launch of the Durham Agreed Syllabus was to be discussed under agenda Item No. 6.

J Rimmer reminded members that C Robson was employed by Education Durham and SACRE could not necessarily direct her to carry out work on their behalf.

## **5 Chairs Comments**

The Chair referred to the global pandemic that had resulted in the postponement of the Summer and Autumn SACRE meetings. He felt that was the right decision to make at that time and he did not feel that there were any pertinent items that needed to be considered.

He wished to point out that members of SACRE were members in a voluntary capacity. He was glad that SACRE could meet today because it was important to have regular meetings. He asked for members' understanding as to why he postponed the last two meetings.

The Chair then referred to Religious Education in a virtual world and how education had gone through a transformation of educating in a virtual environment and so much had been achieved in a small amount of time. He would welcome some discussion on this under agenda Item No. 8.

## **6 Agreed Syllabus Virtual Launch**

Members considered the report on the implementation of the 2020 Durham Agreed Syllabus that provided details on the initial plan for the launch of the new Durham Agreed Syllabus; the response to the national lockdown; the digital blended learning programme and the costs associated with the production and launch of the Durham Agreed Syllabus (for copy of report, see file of Minutes).

The Chair indicated that the launch of the Durham Agreed Syllabus was never intended to be virtual.

The Education Durham Support and Provisional Lead Officer and C Robson, Religious Education Consultant were in attendance to present the report.

The Education Durham Support and Provisional Lead Officer indicated that it had been a challenge to move to a virtual launch event. The event was launched roughly around the same time as they had planned for the physical event, so that the agreed syllabus would be implemented from September 2020.

The model that was used for the virtual launch was something that had subsequently been used in two other local authorities.

Members were advised that the feedback on the launch was extremely positive but they did acknowledge that there were some challenges to overcome initially due to teachers not being familiar with Microsoft Teams and some school systems not being set up with the right permissions, but this was overcome.

The way the syllabus was launched was the same way that training had been delivered to schools since last April. They felt that since Easter 2020 they had maintained the same presence that they had before, because they switched all training to online.

They had received more requests for support and made available more training courses than they would have previously for Religious Education, at the request of schools.

The platform that was used for the launch was still available and could still be used to communicate with each other and access the materials used at the launch event.

In response to a question on the e-book of resources, C Robson advised members that this included support materials that had been put together for KS1 and KS2. Within the Agreed Syllabus there were exemplar long term plans and the e-book contained editable support materials for seventeen of the units. The e-book was also extended to other local authorities who purchased the agreed syllabus. Members could access the e-book by downloading and purchasing it, but Education Durham would share some of the resources with SACRE Members.

Members asked for a comparison of the attendance for the virtual launch as opposed to the physical launch of the Durham Agreed Syllabus. The Education Durham Support and Provisional Lead responded that attendance was slightly more for the virtual launch.

Members asked if they were able to access the recordings of the launch so that they could see what was presented on the day. The Education Durham Support and Provisional Lead Officer indicated that they may be able to provide some selections, as it was delivered over a period of time. There may be some copyright issues and, as some of the material was interactive and they were not recorded to be published, they would also need to check around GDPR.

It had been intended for SACRE Members to be involved in the physical launch. The Chair indicated that he had had some involvement in the launch of the Durham Agreed Syllabus. He provided some voice-overs for the virtual launch. As the materials used were still available some schools had been able to buy into the launch at a later date.

The Chair also indicated that if they had not taken the decision to carry out a virtual launch of the Durham Agreed Syllabus it would still not be launched today. He commended the Education Durham Support and Provisional Lead Officer and C Robson for their work, alongside the launch, that enabled

teaching staff to work on the medium and long term plans to help them implement the Durham Agreed Syllabus from September.

The Chair then referred to the costs associated with the launch of the Durham Agreed Syllabus that were included in the report. It was a substantial amount of money and was an investment for Religious Education in Durham schools. Members commented that the costs associated with the Agreed Syllabus did not include the time spent by SACRE members over a period of two years.

In response to a question on the use of the Durham Agreed Syllabus with other local authorities the Education Durham Support and Provisional Lead advised Members that an Agreed Syllabus had been provided for North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Hartlepool and they had carried out a virtual launch for Hartlepool and South Tyneside.

## **7 Education Durham Report to SACRE**

Members considered the Education Durham Report to SACRE that provided details of the support to schools in 2020-2021 to date (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Education Durham Support and Provisional Lead Officer presented the report and advised Members that the national data around examinations had not been collected in the same way as it would normally be collected due to the way in which grades were awarded to pupils in terms of their GCSEs and A Levels, so a comparison could not be made, and the data had not been published.

Members were advised that the Primary Christmas Resource Pack was provided to schools free of charge as a gesture of goodwill and the Easter Resources Pack had launched today.

Members asked if C Robson would be in attendance at future SACRE meetings to feedback on work she had done with schools and on national conferences she had attended

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

## **8 RE in a Virtual World**

The Chair referred to teaching in a virtual world and said that it was important that SACRE had awareness of the potential increased workload for teaching and support staff to deliver virtual lessons. Most schools already had virtual learning platforms in place. He provided details of the platform that was used

in the school where he taught, and the resources that were made available for children in poverty.

He then referred to the difficulties encountered once children were back in school, then some classes had to self-isolate at home, so some weeks teachers conducted face to face lessons, then had to quickly revert to virtual lessons.

He wanted to make SACRE Members aware of the impact of COVID in the classroom and how schools had gone above and beyond normal workloads to adapt and change resources and to deliver quality education. He then indicated that Religious Education was a subject that requires high levels of analysis and evaluation involving critical thinking, which was difficult to teach in a virtual environment where there can sometimes be limited responses, interaction and engagement; but there was some positive work done using the virtual platform.

D Van der Velde indicated that the problems encountered with Durham Schools reaching out to children who did not have computers or internet access was the same in Northumberland and across most of the North East. There were also issues with poor internet connections.

She then mentioned that access to a range of faith communities was an important part of RE and said that she had carried out some virtual and face-to-face sessions for schools during the pandemic. The Chair responded that schools had not been inviting visitors due to the additional risks and that offers to carry out virtual sessions with schools were welcomed and would be fed back to the RE network.

B Dunn indicated that, from a teacher's perspective, he supported the chair's concerns regarding the social economic factors and access to technology, which had been a massive challenge. Schools had put a huge amount of effort into getting technology resources, but some students still needed paper resources, and that had resulted into two lots of work having to be produced. A lot of work was done by teachers to prepare different ways to get engagement. He provided some examples of how this was achieved. Teachers had put in a lot of effort and work to get the best possible deal for young people, and had been well supported by schools and their leadership.

W Gray indicated that she had also had a request to visit a school virtually, and was happy to do this. As a parent she appreciated the work that schools and teachers had done so that education had continued during the pandemic.

The Chair wished to give a note of thanks to RE colleagues and school leaders, and for the support received through Education Durham for all their work during these difficult times.

## **9 Date of the Next Meeting**

The date of the next SACRE meeting was to be determined.

## **10 Any Other Business**

W Gray asked if an item could be placed on the agenda for the next SACRE meeting to discuss the 'Additional Guidance for Humanism' that Members received at the last SACRE meeting.

She wished to debate the document and make a formal decision on whether the additional guidance for Humanism should be endorsed by SACRE.

She indicated at the last meeting it was agreed that 'Agreed Syllabus' should be removed from the title, and noted that some secondary school colleagues had used the document and found it an excellent resource.

There were concerns in relation to the links contained within the document to further online resources. At the last meeting members were advised that the document, including those links, could not be amended, and she believed that there was not a clear consensus about endorsement of the document.

The published document shown on the Humanism website carried a forward that was an endorsement by Durham SACRE. Endorsement of documents was not something that SACRE had done before and this could set a precedent and be open to requests to endorse other teaching resources.

The document contained links to resources that could be amended without SACRE approval and she was not sure what value it was for SACRE to endorse. In secondary schools you had specialist RE teachers, but this was not the case in primary schools, so she was particularly concerned about some of the resources at primary level, and that an endorsement by SACRE may lead people to assume that the resources were suitable for use without relevant links to the Durham Agreed Syllabus.

Materials produced by a faith were developed with that community in mind whereas SACRE was responsible for the provision of Religious Education which was non-partisan. She felt that the document was good quality but that SACRE had not had an opportunity to look at the document properly.

She suggested that some primary teachers could give some feedback on the document in advance of the next SACRE meeting.

She asked if the draft document that was available on the Council's website if a clarification could be applied to the document to make it clear that it was not part of the agreed syllabus. She also asked that the endorsement of this document be temporarily rescinded.

Members discussed the proposals from W Gray, and the Chair indicated that the document formed part of the agenda and was on the Democratic Services area of the website under SACRE and not the Education Section and was the historical version that was presented to SACRE and formed part of the agenda for that meeting. He accepted that, if someone carried out a Google search, it might lead them to a more recent or amended version. He indicated that he was of the understanding from the meeting that SACRE had asked for some changes to be made to the document, but the document had been endorsed by SACRE as no one opposed the proposal.

He suggested that SACRE proceed with the suggestion made by W Gray, that an item be placed on the agenda for the next meeting of SACRE, and that the endorsement of the document be temporarily rescinded by SACRE. He would approach the Council to ascertain if the website could be amended.