

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) held in Committee Room 1A, County Hall, Durham on Thursday 9 June 2016 at 1.30 pm

Present:

P Welch (Chairman) In the Chair

Church of England

N Chapman and R Sansom

Other Religious Denominations and Faiths

J Bainbridge	- Methodist Church
V Gallant	- Judaism
J Nicholls	- Society of Friends (Quaker)
I Osborne	- Roman Catholic
J Pallister	- Roman Catholic
C Spencer	- Bahá'í Faith
M Stephenson	- United Reform Church
M Turner	- Islam

Teachers Associations

V Bain	- NUT
S Lupton	- RE Curriculum Group
C Newton	- RE Curriculum Group

County Council Representatives

Councillors P Brookes, M Dixon and A Liversidge

Specialist Inspector (Religious Education)

Isobel Short

Voluntary and Community Sector Officer

Ian Hunter Smart

1 Introductions, Welcome and Apologies

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for absence had been received from S Baker, W Gray, A Hartley, J Kidd and K Passmore.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2016, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

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

4 Matters Arising

Councillor Dixon referred to Minute No. 4 and indicated that there had been a change in the Membership of the County Council Representatives.

The Chairman indicated that he had met with the Specialist Inspector for Religious Education prior to the meeting and they had evaluated the new meeting style and agreed to continue with the discussion element as an agenda item, as they felt it had worked well.

5 Chairs Comments

The Chairman referred to the 'White Paper – Every School an Academy', which was to form legislation to make all schools become academies. He reported that the government had decided not to go ahead with this legislation but the idea and concept of academisation was still a big issue with the Department of Education and if schools became academies where would that leave the role and functioning of SACRE, they needed to be aware of the impact of academies.

Members briefly discussed the issues before the Chairman suggested that this could be a discussion item for the next meeting.

6 RE Inspector Report

Members considered the report of the Specialist Inspector for Religious Education which was the RE Inspector Report for the Summer Term 2016 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The report looked at the following:-

- RE Networks
- GCSE Conference
- New GCSEs in Religious Studies
- Contribution of RE to British Values
- Local Partnerships
- RE Hub
- Withdrawn of RE and Collective Worship
- RE, Academies, Free Schools, White Paper and all that
- KS3 Unit – What Do Christians Believe?

Members discussed the contents of the report.

J Bainbridge sought clarification if RE networks still took place in schools. The Specialist Inspector for Religious Education responded that they did not have networks in schools anymore and a central network is held at Durham Leadership Centre in school time each term. This has resulted in an increase in the number of attendees.

C Spencer sought clarification on withdrawal from Religious Education and Collective Worship and if parents withdrew their child would any siblings automatically be withdrawn. The Specialist Inspector for Religious Education responded that her advice would always be not to assume that parents will withdraw all children in the family from Religious Education and/or collective worship.

I Hunter-Smart sought clarification on the terminology of Religious Education and Religious Studies. The Specialist Inspector for Religious Education responded that Religious Education was statutory for all pupils. Religious Education involves knowledge and understanding of religions, critical thinking and reflection. It is therefore both academic in its approach to the study of religion but also gives opportunity for spiritual moral, social and cultural development of the child. The phrase Religious Studies refers to the externally accredited academic qualification e.g. GCSE and advanced level.

This is not compulsory. This is an academic approach to the study of religion and does not involve personal or spiritual reflection in the same way.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7 Presentation on Islamophobia across County Durham

The Chairman welcomed Mr G McArdle, Community Safety Co-Ordinator who was in attendance to talk to Members on Islamophobia across County Durham.

He advised Members that his role was to monitor tensions in communities and report to the Department for Community and Local Government.

He provided Members with details of various active groups across County Durham who were anti Islam. He also provided Members with details of his preventative role in schools and talked about work being undertaken by the County Council to promote social cohesion including advising schools.

The Chairman thanked Mr G McArdle for his attendance and the valuable and useful information he had provided.

8 Discussion Item 1: Teaching Assistants and Religious Education

The Chairman asked Members to divide into two groups and for each group to discuss one of the discussion topics which were 'Teaching Assistants and Religious Education' and 'Islam in Schools'.

Councillor Brookes chaired the discussion group on 'Teaching Assistants and Religious Education'. He indicated that the Specialist Inspector for Religious Education had provided Members with some background information including the fact that Teaching Assistants often teach Religious Education when teachers have time away from the classroom to prepare and mark. Members expressed concern about the perception of Religious Education in schools as a result of this.

Members discussed if there was a difference between church schools and other schools and one Member who had worked in a church school indicated that Religious Education was not always taught by a teacher in church schools.

Various issues were discussed including a lack of specialist knowledge of Religious Education in Primary School and the perception of religion in society and the media. It was suggested that Durham Agreed Syllabus could be showed more widely to help various stake holders have a better understanding of Religious Education.

9 Discussion Item 2: Islam in Schools

Following the group discussion on 'Islam in Schools', the Chairman indicated that they had discussed the right of withdrawal from Religious Education and/or collective worship and the fact that no other subject had this right with the exception of sexual education. Members were fully aware of the legislation which is sometimes being used to withdraw pupils from aspects of Religious Education.

The group discussed organising an interfaith event for schools where pupils could meet faith members. Members suggested that the event could also be used as a model for schools to set up similar events in schools. It was felt that whilst Islamophobia is a specific problem the need for pupils to encounter members of all faiths would be more inclusive but the theme could be based around overcoming religious prejudice.

It was suggested that a working group be set up to look at organising an interfaith event.

Members asked if parental withdrawal was predominantly concerned with the teaching about Islam. The Specialist Inspector for Religious Education responded that she receives many queries from parents and schools about the right of withdrawal with wide ranging reasons given. This does include Islam but many other reasons also.

10 Date of the next meeting

The next meeting of SACRE would be held on 3 November 2016.