

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Annual Report September 2019 - July 2020

The Chair's Foreword

In my 12 years in Education I cannot recall any occasion or global event that mirrors the current situation we find ourselves in. Like many events, meetings, up and down the country, our Spring meeting was cancelled. When we met as a SACRE virtually in the summer term, the passion, commitment and desire to support our children shone through. I reflected upon this and was reminded that the members of the Wokingham SACRE are truly special and work tirelessly to improve the provision of RE for our students. In addition, the members of the SACRE began discussing a recovery curriculum and suggestions of ways we can support children in returning to school.

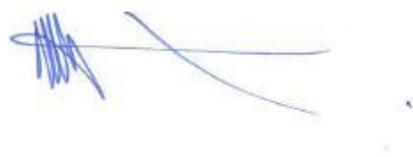
The year began with high hopes; as a team we were excited by the, 'Real People, Real Faith' project (I won't say much more, as you'll read all about it this report). A large chunk of this work has been completed and when finish - it's going to be great.

As a SACRE we've continued to strengthen our links with the Pan-Berkshire Hub; we believe working in partnership with our friends across all Berkshire SACREs allows us to be creative and collaborative.

Within Wokingham, under the guidance of our wonderful adviser, Angela Hill, we have continued to provide our basic offering (even during the pandemic) of supporting Primary colleagues with network meetings, Subject Leader Training and plan support for our Secondary colleagues.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Angela Hill, our very patient and dynamic adviser (who brings many ideas to the SACRE), Emily Waddilove for her continued support of the SACRE, Anne Coffey our administrator, who keeps us all up to date and finally Wokingham Borough for their ongoing support of the SACRE - I never underestimate how lucky and fortunate we are in Wokingham for all the support we receive.

I hope you enjoy reading this report and get a flavour of some of the work we have achieved during the on-going pandemic. Take care of yourselves!



Stephen Vegh

Chair: Wokingham SACRE

2019-20: The context

RE teaching in Wokingham schools

Inevitably, teaching this year in all disciplines has been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with lockdown and partial school closures which began in mid-March. The SACRE has continued its work, and efforts have been redoubled to ensure that teachers and pupils have been supported during these difficult times.

Having been implemented in 2018, this year saw teachers growing in familiarity with the Pan-Berkshire RE syllabus. The syllabus continues to be well-received, with the structure and flexibility to enable teachers to streamline, or enhance, the statutory content for RE. Many Wokingham primary schools are using *Discovery RE* to support the delivery of the syllabus. Teachers are also able to access a range of free syllabus support materials developed by the Pan-Berkshire Hub. These materials offer guidance from Early Years Foundation Phase up to Key Stage 3. These support materials for the Pan Berkshire Syllabus can be found here: <https://wsh.wokingham.gov.uk/learning-and-teaching/religious-education/re-syllabus/>

The Pan Berkshire Hub has continued to review and add to the guidance materials to further support teachers and finalise assessment processes. Teacher networks and professional learning opportunities for teachers also offer further support in the development of approaches to the agreed syllabus.

The Wokingham SACRE

The Wokingham SACRE meets once each term to progress its work, structuring its work through an agreed action plan. Our spring term meeting, due to take place on the 16th March, was cancelled due to the evolving concerns about the pandemic. The meeting in June was the SACRE's first virtual meeting, and went very well. The SACRE continues to take very seriously its commitment to support schools and teachers in providing high quality RE and collective worship.

The SACRE works closely with the Borough Council and continues to appreciate the Council's support. The funding provided enables support for teachers and schools to continue. The SACRE is indebted to Emily Waddilove, WBC link officer (Teaching and Learning Advisor) for her continued support and overseer role. The SACRE is also grateful to have an exceptionally dedicated and very able clerk, Anne Coffey, who continues to be an asset to the SACRE, in advancing its work, often going beyond the call of duty. Angela Hill, appointed as RE advisor to the SACRE in March 2019, has continued to provide excellent professional support to the SACRE this year. The SACRE benefits from the national perspective Angela brings to the work, from her role as a national RE advisor for RE Today. Two elected councillors, Cllr David

Hare and Cllr Graham Howe - are pro-active members of the SACRE, and whole-heartedly support the SACRE's work in relation to the wider Council purpose. The support of Wokingham Borough Council continues to enable the SACRE to communicate directly with schools through the regular schools' e-newsletter and channels of correspondence. This facilitates excellent attendance at training events and network meetings. The Wokingham Schools' Hub website has an RE area which is kept regularly updated with guidance and resources from network meetings, SACRE members and projects. Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning, Achievement & Partnerships, attended the SACRE meeting in June and updated members on Borough actions to support schools during the pandemic.

The SACRE's dedicated Chair, Stephen Vegh, an experienced teacher and leader of Religious Education, and equally committed Vice Chair, Beth Rowland, led the SACRE admirably through this productive, but exceptionally challenging year. The SACRE has welcomed two new members this year: Philippa Chan and Louisa Gurney, both Primary Head Teachers. The SACRE is currently actively seeking to recruit two new members for Group C – Teachers, teaching unions and educationalists – and a member for Group A from a Christian denomination other than the Church of England. The SACRE also has an ongoing vacancy for a Buddhist member in Group A, which it has been unable to fill to date, despite much effort. The SACRE has made concerted efforts to co-opt a Humanist onto the SACRE, but without success.

Throughout the year, including the months of partial school closures due to the pandemic, SACRE has continued to keep in touch with schools and to support them to fulfil their students' entitlement to high quality RE, mindful of the pressures upon teachers and school timetables, particularly in these challenging and unprecedented times. The SACRE listens to teachers and provides targeted professional learning based on teachers' needs through termly network meetings, and training events. Teachers are also representatives on the SACRE, and the support it offers is informed by their input. Some SACRE members were in the process of making arrangements to visit schools, in order to develop their knowledge of RE in Wokingham schools, when the lockdown was introduced. It is hoped that these visits will be able to take place at some time during the coming academic year.

Wokingham has continued to be a core member of the Pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub, with the termly hub meetings attended by our Chair, Vice Chair and Adviser. SACRE meetings continue to be synchronised across all 6 SACREs, with Hub meetings in-between, allowing six meeting points each year with a flow of information and dialogue between the Hub and the SACREs. This continues to be important in allowing discussion and feedback around the development of practice based on the locally agreed syllabus across the unitary authorities.

The Wokingham SACRE always has representatives at the annual NASACRE (National Association of SACREs) AGM (annual general meeting) and conference. This year's AGM was

cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but SACRE has continued to engage with updates from NASACRE. Angela Hill, our RE advisor, provides comprehensive national updates for members at each SACRE meeting, and for primary teachers at each network meeting. These updates are shared in Education News so that all Wokingham school staff are kept up to date with the national picture.

The SACRE is now a supporting organisation for the Stop Ecocide campaign; this is led by a group of international lawyers, researchers and diplomats who are working to make ecocide (damage or destruction of ecosystems) an international crime.

This year the pandemic presented numerous challenges for the work of SACRE, but also new opportunities. In these challenging and unprecedented circumstances, Wokingham SACRE continued to support teachers of RE, providing them with updates on resources for distance learning, and socially distanced RE teaching, from a range of trusted providers, and enabling primary teachers to attend their summer term network meeting online.

The work of the SACRE to support schools in 2019-20

Teacher network meetings

Primary teachers have continued to attend termly network meetings, with an online meeting offered during the partial school closures. The meetings offer updates on both national and local developments in RE, as well as providing a training focus for teachers based on their present needs and priorities. Teachers greatly appreciate the network meetings and meetings continue to be well attended. Primary teachers have been kept up to date with the Pan-Berkshire Hub's *Real People, Real Faith* project and have been invited to take part with filming, or observing filming, in places of worship. This year, network meetings have featured a focused training element, helping teachers to further embed the locally agreed syllabus and to prepare for inspection of RE. The training focus for each meeting continues to be decided democratically by the teachers attending the previous network meeting. During the autumn meeting, the training focus was on assessing RE, and the spring meeting focussed on Ofsted inspections and the '3 I's' in RE.

The third meeting of the year was held virtually due to the pandemic, and followed the provision of a resource pack for teachers which contained a wide range of materials to enable pupils and teachers to continue with RE learning and collective worship whilst at home or in a socially distanced classroom. During the virtual meeting, teachers reflected very positively about these resources, particularly the virtual tours of places of worship. Catherine Jinkerson, a SACRE member and primary teacher from Nine Mile Ride School, spoke about an approach she has developed for RE and which has been helpful for developing pupils' thinking and engagement around four areas of belief: prayer, worship, celebration and community. As well as supporting RE learning over the lockdown, ideas were discussed around how such an approach can also help as a re-introduction to RE when

pupils return to school, and encourage pupils to think about the significance of collective worship. During this virtual meeting, teachers discussed in depth how RE and collective worship might look in the 'new normal' context at their schools and considered the important part that RE and collective worship will play as part of the 'recovery curriculum'.

The first two network meetings this academic year were hosted at All Saints Voluntary Aided Primary School. The autumn meeting was well-attended with 15 participants from 14 schools, but the February meeting showed a dip in attendance with only 6 participants. Those present advised that they had a number of colleagues who were unwell with a viral illness, and suggested this was a likely reason for the small number of attendees on that occasion. 17 delegates from 15 schools attended the online meeting in July. During the course of the year, 14 schools attended just one network, 6 attended on 2 occasions and 3 schools came to all 3 meetings.

These meetings are valuable to teachers in providing time and space to connect with one another professionally, and to feed back to the SACRE and the Hub on matters relating to teaching RE according to the agreed syllabus, and to collective worship. Teachers attending the network meetings are always enthusiastic. They openly share good practice with one another as well as exchanging ideas and discussing concerns. Teachers of varying experience continue to be represented at network meetings, which provide a constructive and supportive forum for teachers to develop their practice in the teaching of RE and engagement with collective worship. All of this is also true in respect of the online meeting held in July.

Primary RE Subject leader training

Training for Primary RE subject leaders was attended by 6 teachers and received very positive feedback. Teachers reported that the training was of a high standard and equipped them with useful information and resources for embarking upon or developing their role as RE subject leader at their school.

Secondary teachers

Network meetings are not considered the best means of support for secondary RE teachers. This year, SACRE conducted a survey of secondary heads of RE to determine how best to support them. Overwhelmingly, the survey showed that heads of RE wished to engage in CPD around improving outcomes in GCSE Religious Studies. Again, based upon the results of the survey, a twilight CPD was arranged for the summer term (2020), but subsequently cancelled due to the pandemic. This has been re-scheduled as an online session to take place in the autumn term 2020.

The Pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub

The Hub continues to thrive, with meetings held each school term; these have continued online during the pandemic. The hub meetings support joint working across the SACREs.

The Hub has now finalised its development of support materials for the agreed syllabus. These support materials can be found here:

<https://wsh.wokingham.gov.uk/learning-and-teaching/religious-education/re-syllabus/>

The main work of the Hub this year has been developing the 'Real People, Real Faith' project. The project involves teachers interviewing faith representative across Berkshire in their places of worship; short films are then produced of these interviews to be used as learning resources in classrooms across the unitary authorities, and perhaps more widely, to enhance pupils' understanding of the rich diversity of lived faith in these areas. The questions for the interviews are inspired by the Pan-Berkshire Locally Agreed Syllabus 2018-2023.

To enable this work, the Hub won the £4,000 Westhill/NASACRE award. These awards are for local projects involving schools, and are funded by grants from the Westhill Foundation, managed and coordinated by NASACRE.

Despite difficulties arising from the lockdown, the Hub has continued to work on the project, although the completion date has been delayed. Also postponed until further notice are the plans for a launch conference, originally scheduled to take place in the summer of 2020. Filming and editing is well underway and the hub is looking forward to being able to hold a launch event to share and celebrate the project.

Wokingham SACRE Projects

'Crossing the Bridges' Update

Work continues on updating and expanding the Crossing the Bridges Directory; a project regularly discussed at SACRE meetings throughout the year. The Directory of places of worship is used regularly by Wokingham teachers, and comments from visits or contacts is fed back through teacher networks.

SACRE is particularly grateful to SACRE member, Catherine Jinkerson, for her continuing hard work, not only on updating and expanding the directory, but also in reaching out to her contacts from this project to encourage visitors from faith communities to contribute to assemblies in schools. This could be an effective way to increase compliance with the statutory requirement for an act of daily collective worship in schools.

From September 2019 to July 2020, there were a total of 60 educational visits connected to RE. Of these, 52 had RE as the main purpose and 8 as the secondary purpose. These figures are not comparable with previous years as the pandemic made it impossible for educational visits to take place for a large portion of the academic year, but they are still encouragingly high under these circumstances.

Previous years' figures are as follows:

2018-2019: 89 visits (83 RE main purpose, 6 secondary purpose)

2017-2018: 104 trips (94 RE main purpose, 10 secondary purpose)

2016-2017: 76 trips (64 RE main purpose, 12 secondary purpose).

The figures relate to both primary and secondary school visits and cover over 40 different venues/destinations.

Ofsted report quotes to be interspersed throughout the report – inside text boxes:

'The school's religious ethos is deep rooted, with all pupils feeling included within it. Through discussion and assemblies, staff promote the importance of being humble and caring for others. Pupils understand that these values are celebrated across many cultures and traditions.'

– Primary school inspection report, February 2020

'In religious studies, teachers use probing and often very challenging questions to make sure pupils know and remember what has been taught. For example, in Year 7 religion and philosophy, pupils used specific subject terminology accurately to discuss and debate the question posed by their teacher, 'Does God really exist?'... Leaders have made sure that pupils receive an expansive range of opportunities to develop their spiritual and moral understanding. The philosophical questions posed by teachers, such as 'Is there life after death?', alongside weekly tutor-led sessions on Fridays build pupils' spiritual and moral awareness very effectively.'

– Secondary school inspection report, February 2020