

Reading SACRE report 2018-9

Chair and Vice Chair's Comments

We are deeply grateful to the members of the Reading SACRE and our partners in the wider Pan-Berkshire hub. 'Decisions are made by those who turn up' says the old adage. More prosaically, we might also say that much of our civil society functions because of volunteers who serve on committees like this one. It isn't glamorous; it does not look like much compared with the 'great things' surrounding us. However, we remain persuaded that RE is a small but important part of education and of the making of wiser, more whole human beings.

It is our task to support, encourage and equip those teachers whose role it is to inspire children with approaching the big questions of life (Who am I? Does my life have meaning? How should I live?). We seek to do this by bringing the resources of the religious traditions faithfully and critically to the attention of our children to help them to find fulfilling answers to these big questions. We thank our colleagues and our paid staff for their time, and we commend this report and the valuation of RE, to all who read it.

Mark Laynesmith, Chair

Fiona Murray, Vice Chair

2018-9: The Context

At the end of the previous academic year the new Pan Berkshire RE syllabus was launched. The Autumn Term 2018 marked the beginning of its use in schools. The previous syllabus had been popular as it encouraged an enquiry model whilst allowing schools to teach a reduced content which allowed a deeper study. Consultation with teachers stated that few changes should be made to the existing syllabus, however certain changes had occurred in the previous 5 years which needed to be factored into the composition of the syllabus. The new syllabus built on the old with enquiry embedded throughout and also offered a greater choice for schools to decide which religions to teach across the primary phase.

With national developments in RE pointing out the need for students to learn less in more detail, the flexible nature of the syllabus is well suited to enable extra time being spent on some issues in order to explore in the necessary depth. SACRE continues to try to look for resources locally, nationally and online which will help further improve the teaching of high-quality RE.

The guidance materials for the old syllabus are still available to be used but are in the process of being updated to be in line with the new syllabus and the shift in the RE landscape over the last 5 years. Out of date materials have been removed and updated materials are available on the Oxford diocese website. Hopefully they will be available on the Reading SACRE website at some stage.

The launch of the new syllabus coincided with a time of renewed focus in the academic world about Religious Education, how it is delivered, how content is decided, how it is assessed and indeed the very purpose of it. The Commission on RE final report gave 11 recommendations for consideration, one of which suggested the devising of a 9-point national entitlement. This naturally has stimulated debate which is healthy and continues to raise the profile of RE. Reading SACRE is kept informed of this and other national developments through its RE Adviser David Rees. Over the next few years it is important that Reading SACRE is fully aware of any developments and takes opportunities to be heard and to encourage and facilitate high quality RE in the current and future educational landscape.

The SACRE continues 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. The SACRE listens to teachers through network meetings, training events where possible and the teacher representatives on the SACRE, and the support it offers is informed by these conversations. The SACRE has continued to appreciate the support of Reading Borough Council, the funding offered enabling support for teachers and schools to develop, and notes the continuing support of Mo Galway, who facilitates the SACRE work in her senior role with the Borough.

The SACRE continues to be committed to progressing RE across the region, believing this subject to have major significance to children and young people's development, both personal and academic.

The SACRE has met once each term as required (on Thursday November 22nd, 2018 Thursday March 14th, 2019 and Thursday 13th June 2019. each meeting was held at the Civic Centre and immediately followed the teacher network meetings.

SACRE itself has undergone some personnel changes, after many years of faithful service the chair Michael Freeman stepped down and was succeeded by the Rev Mark Laynesmith. Happily, Fiona Murray agreed to continue as Vice-Chair. Special thanks must be recorded to Michael for his tireless attention to detail, dedication to SACRE and general enthusiasm especially in steering the SACRE through some challenging times and through the agreed syllabus conference.

The support of Reading Borough Council enables the SACRE to communicate directly with schools through the regular e.newsletters. SACRE is particularly grateful for this as it enables effective communications with RE subject leaders and head teachers, to ensure schools gain the maximum benefit from the training and support the SACRE offers including teacher networks. This remains a focus for the coming year. Councillors are active members of the SACRE and we look forward to embedding SACRE's work into the 'bigger picture' education development plans of the Borough.

The work of the SACRE in 2018

National events

The Reading SACRE usually has representatives at the annual NASACRE (National Association of SACREs) AGM (annual general meeting) and conference. This year the AGM was held in Manchester and was attended by the Pan Berkshire Hub leader Anne Andrews. Information was then fed back to SACRE and teachers at the following full meeting.

Teacher network meetings

Primary teachers have again been afforded a termly network meeting offering them updates on both national and local initiatives in RE as well as input on aspects of RE e.g. developing religious literacy and tackling controversial and sensitive issues in RE. A key focus this year has been discussing the implementation of the new agreed RE syllabus. Network meetings gave the opportunity for teachers to share good practice, review and update existing syllabus guidance materials and consider the implications of delivering the new key questions and learning objectives. These meetings also gave opportunities to feed back to the SACRE on what support would be helpful. This year the teachers present at the network meetings have been enthusiastic and dedicated to improving children's RE learning in their schools. Attendance at these meetings has been improving however SACRE accepts that sometimes it is simply not possible for teachers to attend due to school functions or excessive workload.

SACRE members are always welcome at these meetings if they can attend, thus building relationships with schools, gaining insight into their needs and sharing their successes and commitment. The networks are now run immediately before the full SACRE meetings at the Civic Centre enabling SACRE members to attend and make connections, this also means that the RE Adviser can directly report back verbally to SACRE about any issues faced or raised. This format is working well.

Secondary teachers' networks have not run for a couple of years but potential collaborations with secondary teachers in nearby West Berkshire are being considered

RE Subject leader training

Another possible support mechanism being considered is a relaunch of a subject leaders training session, targeting teachers new to the role of leading RE in particular but being open to all. New subject leaders need to understand the responsibilities of the role and to be offered support to carry it well. Leading a subject across a school is no mean feat. Each year there is a considerable turn-over in RE subject leaders in primary schools, so this annual training seems vital. Hopefully Reading SACRE can discuss the possible reinstatement of this training event.

The Pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub

The Hub came into being in December 2014 and soon developed into an excellent way for the Pan Berkshire SACREs to communicate and plan events together. It was the natural vehicle for the Agreed Syllabus Conference meetings when reviewing and writing the new RE syllabus. The hub, now co-chaired by Anne Andrews (Oxford diocesan officer) and David Rees (RE SACRE Adviser) continues to pursue ways of supporting teachers in the Pan Berkshire region. The focus of the previous year has been to facilitate the updating of existing agreed syllabus materials to bring them in line with the new agreed syllabus. This has resulted in Key Stage 1-3 materials being produced for the following religions and worldviews, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Humanism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. These materials were produced utilising adviser time, teacher writing groups and teacher network meetings. All schools and teachers were invited to be part of this process,

GCSE Examination Results: Summer 2019

The pan-Berkshire Agreed Syllabus for RE 2018 requires that “All pupils must receive Religious Education and should follow an externally accredited course for Religious Studies e.g. GCSE, or an alternative, well-structured and challenging programme of Religious Education. Schools are encouraged to facilitate examination entry for as many students as possible.”

And post 16

‘All students MUST receive Religious Education. Students should have the opportunity to follow a course, or modules, which lead to external accreditation e.g. A level Religious Studies’

RE Examination results

The examination results have sadly not been made available to us at this stage – they will be inserted once validated.

David Rees

RE Adviser to Reading SACRE

December 2019