



SACRE

Annual Report 2016-2017

Message from the Chair

It is a pleasure to introduce the annual report of the Bedford Borough Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) for 2016 -17. The aim of this report is to update readers about the work of the members of SACRE. Our function is to advise the Local Authority (LA) on matters relating to collective worship in community schools and on religious education delivered in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus.

On the subject of the agreed syllabus, this has been a very busy year with all of the organisation of the tendering process, scrutiny of the bids received and appointment of the preferred consultancy company to undertake the update process. The successful company was RE Today and in the very capable hands of Lat Blaylock, one of the most well respected and experienced RE consultants nationally, we have engaged with both SACRE members and local RE teachers to look at what is required for a high quality syllabus to take us over the next five years. SACRE is extremely grateful and indebted both to Colin Foster, Director of Children's Services, from Bedford Borough and David Morton, the St Alban's Diocesan Director of Education, for ensuring that there are sufficient funds in place, together with our colleagues in Luton and Central Bedfordshire, to produce a syllabus of which we can all be proud. The 'Teachers' Consultation Meeting' held at Woodland Academy in Central Bedfordshire during the summer term of 2017 was a very lively affair, with teachers confidently putting forward their views on current units of work and suggestions for areas which required updating or inclusion into the new syllabus. Another meeting with teachers is planned for the end of January 2018. Lat has produced a draft syllabus, which SACRE members discussed at our November meeting in 2017. Suggestions and comments were collated to send to Lat for consideration.

We have welcomed a new Clerk to SACRE this year, Natalie Billington (nee Gandy). She has impressed us all with her enthusiasm and efficiency in this role. In her very capable hands we are kept very well on track in terms of agendas and accurate, well-written and extremely prompt minutes post meetings.

A lot of information and suggestions for agenda items comes from the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE). The organisation produces very helpful briefing papers which enable us to become aware of relevant nationally commissioned reports such as the 'Tell MAMA' report (see separate article) and the 'Commission on Religious Education Interim Report 2017' and the associated consultation survey. Each year, in May, a representative from SACRE attends the NASACRE AGM and produces a report for members to consider at a subsequent meeting. In 2017, two SACRE members kindly agreed to represent us at this event and both produced interesting reports, which were discussed at the June 2017 meeting. (See report in main text).

We have been very pleased to welcome new SACRE members, both full and co-opted members over the past year. At our February meeting we welcomed Mrs Jane Chipperton as a representative of the Church of England and Mr Charles Bailey, from Bedford Humanists as a co-opted member. In June we welcomed Councillor Masud as a representative of the LA. At the November meeting, we welcomed Ruth Broomhall as the Free Church representative, Victoria Morrall as the primary Headteacher representative and Ruth Wilkes as the secondary school representative. We are delighted to have all of these new members on our Council and very much look forward to their contributions over the coming years.

We also had to say 'farewell' to two very long serving SACRE members. Robin Rice represented the secondary sector for many years and made a significant and valuable contribution to discussions through his knowledge and passion for RE. Bill Speed, a Free Church representative also retired from SACRE after many years of committed service. We wish both of these a very happy and healthy retirement. They go with our gratitude and respect for all their time commitment and faithful service to SACRE. In addition, the Reverend Richard Howlett left SACRE as he moved parish to one in Hertfordshire. He represented the Church of England with great wisdom and understanding. Gilly Riach, who represented the primary headteachers also left us as she moved on to new career paths. She was one of the attendees at the NASACRE Conference and wrote the report included in the main text. Ann Parish, who represented the primary headteachers also retired from her post at Shackleton Primary and subsequently left SACRE. We wish all of these colleagues well in the future.

During the maternity leave of Carrie Traill (LA Adviser to SACRE), we have been very ably supported by Kevin Morris, Senior School Improvement Adviser and Paul Harpin (LA Adviser to SACRE in Central Bedfordshire). I and other SACRE members have been most grateful for their contributions and support in terms of paperwork for meetings.

By the time SACRE produces its next annual report we shall be in possession of our brand new agreed syllabus for RE. This will be launched in September 2018, followed by training opportunities provided for teachers on how to make it as successful and effective as possible in their schools. I look forward with great excitement at the prospect of what promises to be an excellent resource for our pupils and students across all phases and school types in the Bedford Borough. It will enable us to inspire our children to see the potential and importance of RE in our modern, global communities.

I am pleased to commend this report to you.

Judy Ruff
(Chair of the Bedford SACRE, January 2018)

Bedford Borough RE Examination Results in 2017

Religious Studies: Exam: GCSE

All eight of the Borough's Upper and Secondary schools and one middle school entered students for this examination. 1461 students were entered across the Borough.

Numbers entered from each school varied significantly, with some schools entering the majority of students in Year 11 for the examination. Other schools entered considerably smaller numbers.

Outcomes at grades A* to C varied considerably from 21% to 85%. Schools contacted have explained why their outcomes are as they are. This will be followed up further when SACRE representatives visit each secondary school in the summer term of 2018 to talk over issues with the staff member responsible for leading on RE. Overall, 55.6% of students entered gained grades A* to C. This compares to 70.3% nationally.

360 boys out of 759 students entered gained A* to C (47% compared to 62.9% nationally).

Girls performed better than boys. 803 girls were entered in the Borough, of which 508 students gained an A* to C. This was 63.3% compared to 76.6% nationally.

Comparison to 2016

40 fewer students were entered for the GCSE examination than in 2016.

The percentage of students gaining an A* - C dropped to 55.6% from the 58.6% achieved in 2016.

End of Key Stage 5 outcomes:

Religious Studies: Exam: AS Levels.

Only one school in the Borough entered students for this examination. Bedford Academy entered 13 students, of whom 23% gained a grade A to C.

Religious Studies: Exam A Level (A2)

Four of the eight secondary schools in the Borough entered students for the A level examination. In total of 79 students across the Borough sat the examination. Outcomes at grades A to C varied from 33.3% to 100%. The average pass at grades A to C in 2017 was 70.2%.

Comparison to 2016

The number of students entered in 2017 increased slightly from the previous year, up from 67 in 2016.

Additional comments

SACRE members are very grateful for the positive response from heads of RE in all eight of the Borough secondary schools to meet with representatives from SACRE to discuss the issues around RE provision within the school and how the subject is organised and taught. The intention is to gain as full a picture as we can of RE provision across the Borough. The outcomes from the summer term visits will be collated and presented to all members of the Council at the autumn term meeting in November. We now have the names and contact emails of all of the secondary RE leaders and we are looking forward to meeting each leader and celebrating the work being done, as well as discussing the potential for SACRE to support their work in schools.

Judy Ruff (Chair of SACRE)

Briefing summary of NASACRE AGM May 2017

This is a precis of the report received by SACRE members following the attendance of two SACRE Council members to the NASACRE AGM in York.

It was a most enjoyable, thought provoking day. We joined colleagues from the Eastern region, along with those from SACREs nationwide.

The first keynote speaker was Professor Joyce Miller, Commissioner of the RE Council. Her presentation traced a historical perspective commencing from the 1988 Education Act where, enshrined in law, based on good practice, was the introduction of the LA Agreed Syllabuses. She considered the role of RE in the past, present and future. Her advice was to;

- Avoid generalisations and stereotypes
- Avoid seeing religions as beliefs in silos
- Address the need to explore conflict between and within religions
- Examine perception and misperceptions
- Focus on commonalities as well as differences
- Don't delude children
- RE must promote inter-faith and inter-culture

Professor Miller suggested that SACREs should be working towards a clear understanding of purpose for RE and articulate this meaningfully.

The second keynote speaker was Aaqil Ahmed, whose roles have included 'Head of RE and Ethics' for the BBC and Channel 4. He stressed the importance of religions and beliefs in the world today. He spoke about the substantial demographic change in the UK, 40% of the population now come from ethnic minorities, spanning

over a couple of generations. He believes that there is potentially a failure to grasp religion, leading to a chronic lack of 'religious literacy'. He felt that difficulties arise where there is a 'vacuum' and prejudice kicks in. He believes that a 'Religious Literacy Strategy' should be held by all organisations. Teaching just about belief is not enough. Aaqil feels that there should be true understanding of communities, community cohesion, inclusion and what it means to be in a 'safe' workplace. He pleaded for RE teaching to be inspirational and to be high profile and visible within schools.

Gilly Riach and Rachel Gleeson (SACRE members)

SACRE visits to schools to observe RE and talk to RE Subject Leaders and Senior School Leaders

SACRE Council members really enjoy the opportunities to visit schools in all phases within the Borough to talk to RE subject leaders and to see RE being taught in classes. It is always a pleasure to see the work that the children are doing and to find out how much they are learning about a range of faiths and beliefs. This year, we have carried out three visits, all in the primary sector and involving in total five different SACRE members.

In one of our large multi-cultural schools we were privileged to be part of a lesson on the Sikh baptism ceremony of Amrit. What was particularly lovely was that the school had sent a message to the local gurdwara for some artefacts to enhance the learning experience and that a Sikh member of staff was able to read to the pupils a verse from the Mool Mantra. This is just one example of our pupils benefitting from the rich, diverse religious traditions and cultural heritage within the town of Bedford.

The schools visited commented that they found these visits very encouraging and valued the external perspective on the work that they were doing in RE. A wide range of visits are undertaken throughout the year by the schools. The 'Queens Park Faith Tour' is on the doorstep, so provides a really good first-hand visit experience of three contrasting faith buildings. Other places of visit include the 'Barn Nativity' at Clapham, the Bunyan Church to admire the 'Pilgrim's Progress' windows and local churches and chapels.

After each visit a short report is written, which the school receives a copy of, and this is discussed at the next SACRE meeting. We are always keen to visit schools which have not yet hosted a visit. If you would like us to visit your school, please contact our clerk, Natalie Gandy at Borough Hall.

Queens Park Faith Tour

Each year, as part of the SACRE Development Plan, we agree to subsidise by £50 each Bedford Borough community school's visit to the Queens Park Faith Tour.

We are very fortunate to have such a well-established faith tour in the town, which promotes racial harmony,

develops understanding between faiths and builds excellent community cohesion, all of which is very apparent to any tour recipient. Over the academic year 2016 – 17 a total of 45 Bedford Borough schools have taken part in the tour, of which 40 were lower /primary, 4 middle and 1 upper school. Amongst this number were a number of academy schools. SACRE members were pleased to welcome Jonathan Ogilvie, the newly appointed Communities Project Manager in Queens Park to our November meeting. Jonathan has replaced Neslyn Pearson, who has relocated abroad. Jonathan told members that each week approximately 100 pupils take part in the tour. Some of these pupils come from other neighbouring local authorities as the reputation of the tour spreads across the eastern region.

Each year our records show that more schools in Bedford Borough undertake the tour for the first time. For example, since 2015, fifteen additional schools have participated. Some small schools like to bring their whole school population as this is more economic when considering coach costs. Other larger schools visit over a number of days, bringing different cohorts of pupils. It was good to hear from Jonathan that feedback from evaluation forms completed at the end of visits was overwhelmingly positive.

Tell MAMA report (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attack)

At our November meeting in 2016, SACRE members considered the latest report from the national project which measures anti-Muslim attacks in the UK.

According to the reports, 11% of such incidents took place in schools. Members discussed whether there was any evidence to suggest that hate crime against Muslims had increased in Borough schools. It was noted that schools were required to report incidents of racism to Bedford Borough Council and there had not been an increase. The Muslim representative on SACRE gave evidence of reports that had come to her attention of Muslim girls wearing the hijab being attacked, but that victims were often afraid to report these incidents. SACRE members decided to invite a representative from Bedfordshire Police to the February 2017 meeting to discuss this issue and to find out whether hate crimes against Muslims had increased.

PS James Hart (Hate Crime Police Sergeant of Bedfordshire Police) attended the February meeting. Although he said that there was evidence that, following the Brexit vote, there had been a national increase in anti-Muslim discrimination, this did not include Bedford, where there was not a high reporting rate. In fact, Bedford had seen an 11% decrease in the reporting of hate crimes. He spoke about his work with schools through workshops and specific events, such as working in partnership with the Anne Frank Association. He believed that pupil voice and the use of initiatives such as an 'ambassador' approach would be most effective in tackling hate crime. He wanted to ensure that pupils had the appropriate skills to tackle any potential incidents.

Westhill NASACRE Award 2016 -17

Despite the successful bid to NASACRE for a grant of £2900 to run a 'Faith Ambassadors' project in some of the Bedford Borough schools, we were unable to generate sufficient interest amongst selected schools to run this project through to a successful conclusion. This was a great sadness to SACRE members as we could all see the benefits of 'faith ambassadors' from our secondary schools going into primary schools, particularly those who serve predominantly White British populations, to speak about how their faith and religious practices shape their daily lives. The money was returned to NASACRE and a key learning point from this is that we need to ensure that there is sufficient capacity built within the project bid to ensure that communication systems are effective and efficient. Hopefully, this experience will not place us in a negative position should we wish to apply for another project bid.

John Bunyan Project: A Pilgrim's Progress

Ruth Broomhall, the author of this resource attended our February 2017 meeting to talk to SACRE members about the final copy, which is now available for schools to access. Ruth and others within Bedford town and beyond, passionately believe that the profile of John Bunyan needs to be raised and celebrated as an important part of the local history of the area. The resource is universal, timeless and easy to use, as well as making children more theologically aware, increase discussion opportunities by selecting key texts and linking the text to other cultures. Some schools within the Borough are already using this resource, either as part of the RE curriculum or as part of a local project focusing on significant and important local people. Further details on Ruth's resource can be found at www.palacebeautiful.co.uk


An additional piece of good news is that Ruth has just been appointed as the Free Church representative on SACRE and attended her first meeting in that role in November 2017.

Support for SACRE

SACRE wishes to express its appreciation for the support given by Bedford Borough in terms of funding for SACRE's work and for enabling the Council to benefit from the services of Natalie Billington from Members' Services.

Your comments on any aspects of SACREs work and areas of interest are welcomed.
Please contact:

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Bedford Borough SACRE Members 2016-2017

Group (A) representing Christian and other Major Faiths

- Mary O’Sullivan, Roman Catholic
- Sister Aidan Richards, Roman Catholic
- Ruth Broomhall, Free Churches
- Rev. Chris Damp, Free Churches
- Susanne Combe, Judaism
- Virendra Soni, Hinduism
- Tirath Singh Bhavra, Sikhism
- Rubina Shaikh, Islam
- Venerable Akurula Samitha, Buddhism

Group (B) representing the Church of England

- Ryan Parker
- Jane Chipperton
- Petra Yates

Group (C) representing Teachers’ Associations

- Victoria Morrall, Head teachers
- Amy Perrett, Primary Schools
- Ruth Wilkes, Secondary Schools
- Rachel Francis, Special School

Group (D) representing the Local Authority (LA)

- Deputy Mayor Borough Councillor Charles Royden
- Judy Ruff, Chair of Bedfordshire RE Society
- Borough Councillor Pat Olney
- Borough Councillor Mohammad Masud

Group (E) Others on SACRE (No voting powers)

- The Rev. Cassandra Howes, Co-opted (Higher Education & Bedford Council of Faiths)
- Dr. Graham McFarlane, Co-opted
- Rachel Gleeson, Co-opted (Independent Schools)
- Charles Baily, Co-opted (Bedfordshire Humanists)
- Kevin Morris, LA Adviser
- Natalie Billington (nee Gandy) Clerk to SACRE

