



Message from the Chair

It is a pleasure to introduce the annual report of the Bedford Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education for 2014 – 2015. The aim of this report is to update readers about the work of the members of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). Our function is to advise the Local Authority (LA) on matters relating to collective worship in community schools and on Religious Education (RE) given in accordance with the agreed syllabus. The SACRE monitors the effectiveness and appropriateness of the agreed syllabus, which is due to be reviewed in 2017.

I would like to start this letter by introducing myself as the new Chair of SACRE, appointed at the summer term meeting of 2015, following the resignation and departure from SACRE of Councillor Kristy Adams, whom I would like to publicly thank for her dedication and commitment in this role.

My background is in Primary education, where I both taught and led RE. Since 1996 I have inspected for a number of Anglican Dioceses using their statutory inspection framework (SIAMS). I am Chair of the Bedfordshire RE Society and a REQM assessor. I am committed to ensuring that RE teachers are well supported across the Borough. I serve on SACRE as a LA representative.

During the past year, a lot has happened in the world of RE. As a local SACRE we very much value our membership of the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (NASACRE) and find their informative and thoughtful responses to reports and the opportunity to join in debate at their national conference invaluable as a guide and start to our local discussions.

The Clarke – Woodhead proposals outlined in the report 'A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools' were discussed at our autumn term meeting. Amongst these the report recommends the removal of the requirement for daily collective worship, but to replace this with inclusive assemblies. After a significant amount of discussion, the majority of SACRE members supported this recommendation, believing that it should be for Governing Boards of individual schools to determine whether to continue to hold an act of daily collective worship.

The second main proposal was that there would be a national syllabus for RE, replacing the current requirement for individual SACREs to commission the writing of a local agreed syllabus to be reviewed every five years. There were more mixed views expressed on this, with some SACRE members arguing the case for greater consistency of RE content being taught through a national syllabus and those who believed that the current Bedfordshire agreed syllabus retains a response to RE teaching, based on the current needs and appreciation of the local faith communities. If the national syllabus goes ahead, then the role of SACRE would change as one of their current main functions is to ensure the provision and five year review of the locally agreed syllabus.

Again, using materials supplied by NASACRE through partnership working with Bishop Grosseteste University the SACRE members have discussed together a series of questions around the theme of 'What is RE for?'. This provoked good quality discussion in small groups of Council members. Although the overall findings from this questionnaire were not due to be published until the end of February 2016, it was heartening to see how members' feedback aligned with the interim results, which had been published on the NASACRE website.

The report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life chaired by The Rt. Hon. Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss GBE was published in the autumn term. The report recommends the

creation of a nationally determined RE syllabus and the removal of the requirement for daily collective worship, to be replaced by inclusive assemblies. SACREs wait to be informed as to the part that they will play in the consultation process on both the Butler-Sloss and the Clarke- Woodhead reports.

The RE for Real project has been developing at Goldsmith's, University of London, under the supervision of Professor Adam Dinham and Martha Shaw. The report emerging from this study has produced ten recommendations, including that a statutory National Framework for Religion and Belief Learning should be developed and be applicable to all schools. RE and belief learning should be a compulsory part of the curriculum to age 16, and consideration to be given to what, if anything happens in post - 16 learning. In addition to this, there should be increased investment in Initial Teacher Training for subject-specialist teachers and increased professional continuing development opportunities for non-specialist teachers of Religion and Belief.

With so much to think about and discuss through the academic year 2015 – 2016, it is very appropriate that the NASACRE Conference and AGM 2016 will have as the main speakers both Professor Adam Dinham and The Rt Hon Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss GBE. It promises to be a very lively, interesting and informative occasion, at which our own SACRE will be represented to hear the evidence and views expressed.

I would like to thank the two leaders of the RE Professional Studies Groups within Bedford Borough, Seb Sagnia from Hastingsbury Business and Enterprise College and Sharon Davis from Priory Lower School, who have diligently prepared and led training and information sharing sessions for local RE teachers and subject leaders.

Congratulations to all schools within the Borough who have gained the RE Quality Mark accreditation in the past year. This is an award that SACRE is keen to promote across schools and is part of a subsidy costing offer in our development plan for 2016 - 2017.

The Queens Park Faith Tour continues to go from strength to strength. Further details are available in the main report, but it is very encouraging that so many schools, both within and outside of the Borough, recognise the value of quality first-hand experiences by visiting three amazing faith buildings and listening to each faith community describe their worship practices.

I would like to thank Carrie Traill, LA Adviser to SACRE, and SACRE Clerk, Greg Jeffrey for their commitment and professionalism in enabling Bedford SACRE to run efficiently. Sadly Anjani Singhai, our Hindu representative passed away during the course of the year. Anjani was a very valuable and well respected member of SACRE, who always spoke with great wisdom and thought at Council meetings. We have welcomed new members to SACRE over the course of the year (please see the list of SACRE members at the end of the report). Our hope is that all five groups making up the SACRE Council members will work harmoniously together over the coming twelve months, so that we can fulfil our statutory duties to the very best of our abilities.

I am pleased to commend this report to you.

Judy Ruff

(Chair of the Bedford SACRE, November 2015)

Standards in Religious Education

Between September 2014 and July 2015, a total of fifteen Bedford Borough Schools were inspected under the Section 5 Ofsted framework. Of these, eight were lower schools, one was a primary school, three were middle schools, two were special schools and one was a pupil referral unit.

Evidence of SMSC was used to contribute to overall judgements in the four key areas on some but not all occasions:

- Leadership and Management 15 times.
- Early Years four times.
- Behaviour and Safety of Pupils twice.

This analysis is worked out on 21 comments made in 15 Bedford Borough School inspections. Four schools received SMSC comments in two areas and one schools received SMSC comments in three areas.

Bedford Borough RE Examination Results in 2014

Religious Studies: Exam: GCSE Short Course

Across the Borough there were 139 students entered for this examination. Of these 50.4% gained a grade between A* and C and 93.5% between A* to G. 'White British' students made up the majority of these entries (97) with 'Indian' and 'Any Other White Background' students in the next largest group (9). The cohort was made up of 64 girls and 66 boys. Girls outperformed the boys at grades A* - C (58.9% to 40.9%)

Comparison to 2014

The number of students entered for this examination fell by 457 students in 2015. This is the second annual drop in the numbers entered for short course as more schools enter students into the full course. The percentage gaining between A* - C rose by 4.7%. The picture regarding gender representation reverted back in 2015: as in 2014, boys outperformed girls at grades A* - C.

Religious Studies: Exam: GCSE Full Course

All eight of the Borough's Upper and Secondary schools entered students for this examination. 1188 students were entered across the Borough. One school entered considerably more students than the other four (Sharnbrook 392). The next closest was Wootton Upper School (291 students). 73.2% of students gained grades A* - C with 97.2% gained A* - G. Again, 'White British' students represented the largest group entered (783). 'Any Other White Background' students were the second largest group entered (73). The cohort was made up of 591 girls and

597 boys. Girls outperformed boys at grades A* - C (78.7% - 67.8%).

Comparison to 2014

511 more students were entered for this examination than 2014 with all schools now offering the full course. The percentage of students gaining an A* - C rose slightly on 2014 by 0.1%. Yet the percentage of students achieving A*-G fell by 1.9%, the second annual drop in a row. In 2014, girls also outperformed boys at grade A* - C however this year girls attainment at A*-C fell by 0.6%, whilst boys attainment rose by 1%.

End of Key Stage 5 outcomes

The data shown reflects those students leaving school in Year 13 and does not include the Year 12 results for the current year. These will be reported when the students are at the end of Key Stage 5.

Religious Studies: Exam: GCE AS Level

104 students completed Key Stage 5 from three different upper schools with an AS in RE with 26.0% gaining a grade A – B. Of the 104 students entered, 50 were 'White British'. The cohort was made up of 79 girls and 25 boys. Girls outperformed boys at grade A – B (27.8% compared to 20.0%)

Comparison with 2014

The numbers of entries rose for the third year running in 2015 with 67 more students being entered for this examination when compared to 2014. For the first time in three years, outcomes at grades A-B rose; results increased by 9.8% in 2015.

Religious Studies: Exam: GCE A Level

81 students were entered across four upper schools. Of these, 2.5% gained an A* in their examination, 9.9% gained between A* - A, 40.7% between A* - B and 97.5% between A* - E. 'White British' students represented the majority ethnic grouping at 37 students with the six 'Indian' students forming the second largest group. The cohort was made up of 53 girls and 28 boys. Girl outperformed boys at grades A* - B (45.3% - 32.1%)

Comparison with 2014

Entries were up in 2015 for the second year running, with five additional students taking the exam. The percentage of students attaining either a grade A* or A slightly rose in 2015 by 0.7%, but the percentage of students obtaining grade A* - B dropped by 2.7%. This is the second annual drop. For the second year running, girls outperformed boys at grades A* - B. The gap in attainment is now 13.2 in favour of girls.

Queens Park Faith Tour

Bedford Borough SACRE has funded the Faith Tours undertaken by Borough schools by reducing costs for visits by £50. This means that Borough schools pay £100 instead of the £150 charged to schools outside the Borough for the tour.

The number of schools wishing to experience the Faith Tour has increased year on year, so that it is common now to be part of a 'carousel' arrangement, whereby schools visit on the same day, but start their tours from different faith buildings. This has enabled the Faith Tour organisers to enable more schools to be part of the initiative. Schools visiting are predominantly from the Primary phase, but in this Borough it includes a number of Middle schools who also appreciate the opportunity to bring students. Some larger schools have spread their visits over a number of days to accommodate the numbers involved.

The Faith Tour trustees have in place an end of visit evaluation form. This has proved very useful in enabling the trustees to see where further improvements could be made. Out of all the tours conducted in 2015 (including schools from outside of the Borough), 65 completed evaluation forms were received. The majority were extremely complimentary and appreciative with comments such as, 'Gave children an insight into the different places of worship' and 'key words and explanations were appropriate for the age of the children'. In addition there were some considerations for future improvement, such as a focus on specific topics at individual places of worship. The booking form has been revised to allow teachers to highlight their specific focus in advance.

A request to make the Tour Day instructions clearer has also been addressed, with confirmation letters specifying whether schools are on a single tour, a carousel (where two schools visit at the same time, but go to different buildings to start), or a double carousel, (when one school with large numbers is split into two groups, each going to the places of worship in a different order). Other issues raised have been around the use of a microphone in church, more visual prompts to be used at the Mosque and more activities at the Gurdwara to lessen the period of sitting and listening. All of these suggestions will be or have been discussed at the Faith Tour Steering Group meetings.

Neslyn Pearson, of the Faith Tour Steering Group came to our summer term SACRE meeting to update Council members on the work and impact of the Tours.

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 Greg Jeffrey from Members' Services.

RE Quality Mark

In Bedford Borough to date we have four schools who have been awarded the 'gold' mark for their work in RE. Huge congratulations go to three schools in the Catholic Federation who have been part of this success story:

- St Thomas More Secondary School
- St Gregory's Middle School
- St Joseph's Lower School.

The fourth, Bromham VC Lower School is the most recent to be awarded this highest level of recognition for the quality of the RE teaching and provision.

Beauchamp Middle has worked its way through 'bronze' to receive a 'silver' award in 2015. Furthermore, Hastingsbury Business and Enterprise College and St Lawrence Lower School have both received a 'bronze' award. Very well done to all schools.

SACRE Council members have agreed to fund 10 schools within the Borough for 50% of the costs of applying for the award. Schools have already responded by putting in applications for this funding.

Advice and Support for Schools

Many schools use the support and resources provided by Jane Chipperton, Religious Education Adviser for the Diocese of St Albans, who oversees a resource base at St Mark's Church Centre, Brickhill. The resource collection and Beds RE website (www.beds-re-resources.org.uk/), support the multi faith approach of the Agreed Syllabus, which is available throughout the day and in school holidays. SACRE members wish to express their thanks to the Diocese of St Albans, St. Mark's Brickhill and Jane Chipperton for providing this service.

The RE Society for Bedfordshire has been active in publicising courses running in the area, organising visits to places of worship for different faiths and providing after-school workshops for teachers. SACRE receives copies of the RE Society's informative newsletter, which the LA sends to all schools.

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

Please contact:

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Bedford Borough SACRE Members 2014-2015

Group (A) representing Christian and other Major Faiths

- Mary O’Sullivan, Roman Catholic
- Sister Aidan Richards, Roman Catholic
- William Speed, Free Churches
- Chris Damp, Free Churches
- Susanne Combe, Judaism
- Anjani Singhal, Hinduism
- Tirath Singh Bhavra, Sikhism
- Rubina Shaikh, Islam
- Venerable Akurula Samitha, Buddhism

Group (B) representing the Church of England

- Chris Chipperton
- Rev. Richard Howlett
- Petra Yates

Group (C) representing Teachers’ Associations

- Ann Parish, Head teachers
- Gilly Donald, Lower Schools
- Robin Rice, Upper Schools
- Rachel Francis, Special School

Group (D) representing the Local Authority (LA)

- Deputy Mayor Borough Councillor Charles Royden
- Borough Councillor Kristy Adams
- Borough Councillor Pat Olney
- Borough Councillor Mohammad Masud

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

- The Rev. Cassandra Howes, Co-opted (Higher Education)
- Dr. Graham McFarlane, Co-opted
- Jonathan Hooper, Co-opted (Independent Schools)
- Judy Ruff, Chair of Bedfordshire RE Society
- Carrie Traill, LA Adviser
- Greg Jeffrey, Clerk to SACRE

