

NASACRE Conference 22-05-2019

Cohesive Communities and Effective Partnerships – RE near and far.

How can SACRE'S transform schools to become beacons of HOPE?

Thank you for inviting me here to address you today.

I would like to start with two voices from young people.

"I'm more than a piece of data" - Emily (17)

"Very few of the students I speak to are optimistic about the future or their current education" - Mark (19)

These quotes are personal expressions of the breakdown of trust and how young people feel uncertain about their future.

Both Emily and Mark are high achieving students - contemporaries at primary school.

Emily's parents were shocked that after achieving all grade A* and A grades at GCSE she now saw little value in education.

She announced she was not applying to university and that "I just need time for me."

As we all know in recent years education has become driven by data and school performance.

Justin Welby suggests that:

"A focus on grades alone contributes to an inadequate sense of self-worth and does not diminish issues of mental health."

Mark was one of our top performing students at Alsop. He sent me and Damian Hinds that message via Twitter in response to a comment

I tweeted whilst listening to a speech delivered by Mr Hinds at a national education conference. Mark too seems disillusioned.

On Monday The Guardian reported that:

"Racism rising since Brexit vote, nationwide survey shows 71% of people from ethnic minorities faced discrimination, up from 58%."

Guardian 20-05-2019

"The world and education in particular, is in need of an injection of Hope" - Penny Thompson (Teaching of Virtue, 2014)

Does the new Ofsted framework provide this?? Will it inject **HOPE**?

... So indeed, our schools, our communities and the world are in desperate need of an injection of **HOPE**.

We live in turbulent, uncertain times.

We can feel the darkness of division and the fragmentation of society.

The fashionable buzzword seems to be **BROKEN**

- **POLITICS** is broken
- **SOCIETY** is broken
- **EDUCATION** is broken
- **TRUST** is broken

Society is becoming fractured and fragmenting. This is evidenced in the form of racial division and political extremism.

Social media enables people to exchange information and communication without forming a relationship.

Brexiters and Remainers form the great British divide.

This month Justin Welby suggested that:

"We are at a pivotal moment in the life of our nation on a scale we haven't seen since the end of World War Two."

During Easter I met with a retired priest friend who had based a Lent course around the TV series Broken.

I asked him how we as teachers can help to heal broken communities.

His answer was clear and simple

- AFFIRM - NURTURE
- SUPPORT - ENCOURAGE
- ALLOW PEOPLE TO REDISCOVER THEIR IDENTITY AND TASK
- PROMOTE SOCIAL JUSTICE
- ALLOW PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE
- RAISE ASPIRATIONS

..... Above all tell young people that **"YES - You can do it"**

The word YES instils HOPE

Let us consider the context of Alsop

- Alsop High School is the largest secondary school in LIVERPOOL
- 11-18
- 1550 students
- We sit in the shadows of Anfield and Goodison
- The immediate area is characterised by densely populated terraced streets consisting of privately rented and social housing.
- 64% (29% nationally) of students are disadvantaged
- Walton is the most deprived constituency in the UK
- 1/3RD of our intake attend schools situated in the Church of England parish of St Luke, Walton
- St Luke's ranks as the 21st most deprived C of E parish out of 12,508 parishes in England

Why did we plan the HOPE initiative?

As a SACRE member and Head of RE I wanted to "Think outside the box" and build the capacity for HOPE both within the school community and the neighbourhood.

We began with a genuine desire to develop strategies to challenge young people to engage with some of the positive values held by faith communities.

We chose HOPE as the title for our initiative.

- ✓ HOPE "Provokes discontent with the present and **inspires positive action** based on the belief that endless creative possibilities are open to human beings.
- ✓ HOPE **looks to a future good** and trusts that such a goal can be reached.
- ✓ HOPE offers sustenance in times of difficulty.

The late Mary Warnock stated that of all the attributes that she would like to see in her children or pupils "The attributes of hope would come high or even top of my list. To lose hope is to lose the capacity to want or desire anything, to lose in fact the wish to live."

So how did we work via Liverpool SACRE to promote HOPE in north Liverpool schools?

1. **PLANNING** - firstly, we formed a steering group. We met with local partners - teachers - secondary and partner primary schools - youth leaders - residents - faith leaders.

We shared ideas and thought about how we could bring out the best in people to reignite confidence, build character and empower them to take an active role in their communities.

We considered what type of community we wanted to build in our schools and how we could become beacons of hope and to reconcile estranged groups - young and old educated and uneducated.

Regular meetings were held over a period of six months.

2. **PARTNERSHIP** - as the vision grew so did the planning group.

From the outset we had met worked in partnership with partner primary schools and local churches.

Soon we gained the support of:

- ✓ Liverpool Diocese
- ✓ The Jewish Representative Council
- ✓ The Local Authority
- ✓ Housing Associations
- ✓ Local businesses
- ✓ Merseyside Police
- and Liverpool City Council

We chose HOPE because:

- ✓ We drew inspiration from the partnership work of the late Bishop David Sheppard and Archbishop Derek Worlock.
- ✓ Hope is the street linking our two cathedrals
- ✓ Liverpool Hope University is the institution where many of the teachers studied and trained
- ✓ Hope is at the centre of the Mersey anthem - you know the chorus "With Hope in Our Hearts!!!

3. **COLLABORATION** - we worked collaboratively with an organisation called Together for the Common Good, founded by Jenny Sinclair, daughter of the late David Sheppard.

T4CG is a movement created to bring the principle of the Common Good alive, by encouraging and equipping people of good will to work together, across their political differences, as agents of change for the Common Good.

Jenny Sinclair asserts,

"As understood within Catholic Social Teaching, schools are intermediary institutions and if their energy is directed for the Common Good their strength and vitality can give our country life. Collaborating with other institutions they have the capacity to generate 'bridging capital' and strengthen civil society."

"If rooted in place, if collaborative and genuinely outward facing, a school can be a source of energy and encouragement, ideally positioned to bridge estranged interests and promote common good thinking and participation in its neighbourhood."

So, we set out on our journey making a commitment to:

- ✓ Work together
- ✓ Root our schools in the community
- ✓ ... and for our schools to be the force of the common good

Put simply we believed:

Schools are communities

Schools build communities

Schools are community hubs

..... and often they are one of the few places which bring people together.

We set out to demonstrate that our schools acting as hubs could have a positive ripple effect upon both the schools and the neighbourhood.

We wanted our schools to act as local hubs to be the catalyst to:

- ✓ Encourage young people to take **responsibility**
- ✓ Form **character**
- ✓ Bring people **together**
- ✓ **Link** local institutions, strengthen civil society
- ✓ Generate **neighbourhood pride**
- ✓ Foster communities in which all can flourish
..... and build the **Common Good**

We worked **Together** on **HOPE 2016** and **FAITH 2017**. We are now embracing **TOGETHER 2019**.

We have sought to prepare young people for an uncertain future and move young people from the "me" culture and encourage them not only to think about others but to take responsibility.

4. **What did these initiatives look like?**

A six-month programme of activities was facilitated to foster community cohesion and highlight that "We are far more united and have far more in common with each other than the things that divide us."

The initiatives were devised to inspire young people to be compassionate, responsible citizens able to listen to others, discover common values and work together in their communities.

Alsop High School worked with different faith traditions to demonstrate how our school can be a force for the Common Good.

The initiative consisted of a series of events, talks, visits, workshops and social action projects. Hope was about drawing community members together to share ideas and dreams.

- a. We invited **inspirational speakers** into our school and community to bring stories of hope in the face of obstacles and social injustice.

They came to speak about their experiences of the holocaust, their struggles to challenge political, racial, social and judicial injustice, and their hope for peace and mutual flourishing - all with the purpose of sharing stories of hope and the coming together of the common good.

Mr Zigi Shipper delivered his Auschwitz Survivor Testimony and Mrs Margaret Aspinall spoke with passion about the fight for justice for Hillsborough families. The anti-hate crime campaigner Ms Gee Walker spoke movingly about her work with the Anthony Walker Foundation. Merseyside's Chief Constable Andy Cooke addressed students and listened to their concerns about community safety. An ex-student Mr Colin Parry spoke about the work of the Warrington Peace Centre.

... and the big names became aware of our school. They also asked if they could speak to our students.

We were approached by The Bank of England to host Mark Carney, and our students delivered an act of collective worship about social justice and the Hope Charter.

Throughout his inspirational talk Mr Carney reiterated the phrase "Yes, you can do it."

Last term we were asked to host the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu. Students were told to work together to extend their fame through their deeds. He spoke about the importance of social action.

- b. **Social Action** is now integral to the life of our school. Our weekly older residents lunch club, the Blitz Mural Project, Cabaret afternoons and the Christmas Parties have help to break down barriers of misunderstanding between young volunteers and older residents.
- c. We are delighted that we are introducing the **Archbishop of York Young Leaders Award**. This is a unique active citizenship programme which empowers young people to make a difference in their local community whilst growing in key leadership skills.
- d. As well as speakers we have held **community events**. These provide a wonderful opportunity for people of all ages to work together in a practical way for the good of the place we call "home".
- e. **Themed Collapsed Curriculum Days** enrich our school curriculum. Our **JUSTICE Day** - Year 9 participated in workshops. Students with local clergy led a Hillsborough Justice Day Service. Mrs Margaret Aspinall addressed students and released 96 red balloons.
- f. **Faith Encounter Days** - All year seven students attended workshops led by members of the Jewish, Sikh, Buddhist and Christian communities. This was followed up by visits to a mosque, synagogue and cathedrals.

- g. **#PILGRIM ED** - we worked with a cluster of small rural primary schools in Cumbria to facilitate a pilgrimage of teddies around Liverpool. They appear on a blog on the FAITH 2017 website and @FAITH17T4CG. The pilgrimage was covered by BBC Radio Merseyside.
- h. **We developed links with Liverpool Jewish Community.** We worked with Holocaust Educational Trust to host the Liverpool Premiere of Holocaust Film "84303" - this is short film about the life of a Holocaust survivor. After the film, Mr Zigi Shipper delivered his Auschwitz Survivor testimony.

After the event I asked an elderly Jewish gentleman if he had ever been to Walton. I was astounded when he said that he had never before been invited!

Yom Hashoah - Y13 students visited Auschwitz and later led HMD17 at Alsop and participated in HMD at Liverpool Town Hall. This has become an annual event for Alsop students.

We hosted the Anne Frank Trust exhibition and over 500 students from partner schools attended.

- i. **The Oddments Theatre Company** performed "Amazing Grace", the story of John Newton to over 300 students. They also performed to an audience of 120 primary school children and 90 community members.
- j. **The Great Get Together** - a community lunch celebrated the life of the late Jo Cox. Students stood alongside the Liverpool Lord Mayor to demonstrate that we do have "more in common."
- k. **"We Stand Together"** - Alsop produced a series of posters as a positive response to terrorist attacks. These posters

celebrate diversity, promote contemporary people and provide inspirational quotes.

1. **Visit of Italian Teachers** - fifteen Italian teachers visited Alsop to learn more about FAITH 2017 and the Common Good Schools toolkit.

5. **How do we know we have had an impact?**

After a recent visit to Alsop, Merseyside Chief Constable Andy Cooke commented:

"Alsop truly is an example of what can be achieved by young people when the right environment is created which encourages respect, aspiration and a high standard of education. I am proud to be associated with Alsop High School and its culture and ethos."

After his visit, Alastair Machray, Editor of the Liverpool Echo devoted his Editorial to his **"Inspiring Day at Alsop High."**

"I was privileged to be asked to speak to pupils as part of 'Hope'. I was massively impressed by the school. I was bowled over by how smart and engaged the children were and by how much the staff loved their work and relished their role."

These teachers were passionate giving Alsop pupils the best possible chance in life and their eyes lit up as they told me about children with real issues who had gone on to university or great careers. Giving up on anyone was clearly not on the agenda

Alsop is a school not just IN a community, but a school LEADING a community. This community has its share of problems. At Alsop

I saw only solutions. Alsop - the school, the staff, the pupils - inspired me. Alastair Machray - Editor, Liverpool Echo

"On behalf of Liverpool Diocese, I would like to offer congratulations Alsop for serving the needs of countless generations of young people. The school rooted in the north Liverpool community continues to be a force of the common good and shines as a beacon of hope to empower the aspirations and needs of all."

Rt. Rev. Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool

"Alsop students are actively engaged in many extra- curriculum activities and local community initiatives. The school sets a good example of cooperation between parents, teachers and the local community."

Lord Mike Storey CBE

"We believe our sons participation in community activities has enriched his life and made him a better person. Alsop is a school that reaches out to both parents and local residents. His involvement with FAITH 2017 has enriched his education and earned him a place at a Russell Group University. We are delighted that he has been involved with an initiative that has had such a great impact upon the wider community of North Liverpool."

Year 13 Parent

We at Alsop believe we are More Than A School.

I would like to finish with a short video which sums up how we have changed the culture of our school - the words are from the young people themselves.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1uIUfq9T_8

And finally ...

We have a huge task ahead of us.

The new OFSTED framework reasserts the place of RE in the curriculum for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

During our recent OFSTED the lead inspector asked specific questions about RE.

SACRE's still retain an important role to promote this new vision for RE, which is VITAL if we are to equip young people for a life in the modern world where religion and belief play such an important role.

My hope is that RE will equip young people with a determination to be world changers!!

They will be enraged by injustice and determined to "be the change they want to see."

They will not accept being "done to" and they will want to take responsibility and will be actively involved in their communities.

They will seek to live their lives for others and not just themselves
... and they will have **HOPE** in their hearts and in the future.

My final reply goes to Emily, whose words I used at the start of this presentation

Yes, she's not just a piece of data - she is my daughter and thankfully after a gap year she realises her potential to make a positive contribution to society. She is now hoping to pursue a career in architecture and has a place at university.