



Annual Report 2013

Wokingham Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education



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The Wokingham SACRE is a responsive body, fully engaged to support teachers in the Borough who are involved in delivering the RE curriculum. The Annual Report is being presented for the first time in a new colourful and more accessible format to reflect the varied aspects of the SACRE's work and to place it in the context of the current curriculum issues.

The Teacher Network groups set up to aid the embedding of the New Revised Syllabus have proved both effective and popular. These look set to continue autonomously far beyond their immediate remit. RE teachers in Wokingham are enthusiastic and dedicated, ever seeking to extend and develop the skills of their pupils. The new Directory of Speakers and the CPD Day Visit are two further initiatives to support creative teaching. Thus, this Report reflects the ways in which SACRE and Wokingham teachers are working and progressing together.

Michael Freeman, Chairman, Wokingham SACRE



Teachers at the Gurdwara

What has happened this year?

Last year saw a number of developments in education policy making a difficult impact on RE: the situation with the English Baccalaureate and the reduction in teacher training places specialising in RE, being examples. RE does remain statutory, however, and the renewed Ofsted emphasis on SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural) development does give RE additional curriculum significance. Last year also saw the requirement for the Pan-Berkshire Agreed Syllabus to be fully implemented in schools from September 2012. This led to 26 primary schools buying into the Discovery RE Scheme of Work to help them deliver an enquiry-based model that translates the Agreed Syllabus into practice. The Wokingham SACRE has listened to teachers and has considered the national developments, and has made every effort to tailor its development plan to address the needs and requirements of the national picture and the local schools.

This year has seen several very significant national reports on RE:

1. 'RE: The Truth Unmasked; the supply of and support for Religious Education teachers', was published in March 2013, commissioned by The All Party Parliamentary Group on RE.

Key Issues:

- In 25% of the primary schools in the inquiry, RE was taught by teaching assistants. The SACRE discussed this and recognised that whilst TAs reliably teach RE every week (not allowing it to drop off the edge of a pressured timetable) and some are excellent, there is a concern about the level of training available for TAs for teaching such a complex subject.

At the teacher network meetings this situation was reflected in some Wokingham schools.

- In about 50% of the primary schools in the inquiry, teachers said they lacked confidence in RE teaching. This was reflected in some Wokingham schools where some teachers feel insecure in their RE subject knowledge but are keen to teach well, being respectful to each religion considered.
- About 50% of primary RE subject leaders reported a lack of experience or expertise to undertake their role. Subject leaders in Wokingham reported that using the Discovery RE Scheme of Work supports them to bring consistency in RE across their schools, to monitor RE and most importantly to ensure assessment is being done effectively.
- Secondary RE has to deal with issues of non-specialist teachers (50% with no qualification in RE), fewer specialist places in initial teacher training and a lack of CPD. However, the picture in Wokingham is not so bleak, although it is varied with some schools having a team of specialists and others staffed by a non-specialist team with a head of department.
- The inquiry also pointed out that the ability of SACREs to provide support for RE at a local level has been dramatically reduced by LA funding decisions. This is not so in Wokingham where the SACRE continues to appreciate LA support with a budget of £9000 for the second year running to support the implementation of the agreed syllabus. This allows teacher network meetings and some level of support to be provided eg CPD trip and resources.



2. 'Religious Education: realising the potential', the long report on RE from Ofsted (October 2013)

The key findings of this report were alluded to by HMI Alan Brine in his presentation at the SACRE conference at Easthampstead Park in the summer term.

Two of the main findings:

- a. 'The teaching of RE in primary schools was not good enough because of weaknesses in teachers' understanding of the subject, a lack of emphasis on subject knowledge, poor and fragmented curriculum planning, very weak assessment, ineffective monitoring and teachers' limited access to effective training'

Having discussed these issues at the teacher network meetings it is recognised that these are real issues that most schools grapple with to some level. However, teachers report that using the Discovery RE Scheme of Work gives them a progressive and well-planned programme for the whole school. The assessment process is straightforward and comprehensive, even providing exemplification of the marking criteria and ready-made assessment tasks.

- b. 'Most of the GCSE teaching seen failed to secure the core aim of the examination specifications: that is, to enable pupils to' adopt an enquiring, critical and reflective approach to the study of religion'

This refers to the lack of time given in some schools to GCSE teaching, which often leads to teaching to the examination syllabi with little time for wider teaching which would better develop critical and reflective thinking.

The secondary teachers in Wokingham understand this situation but are confident that they deliver their lessons to enable these wider skills to develop.

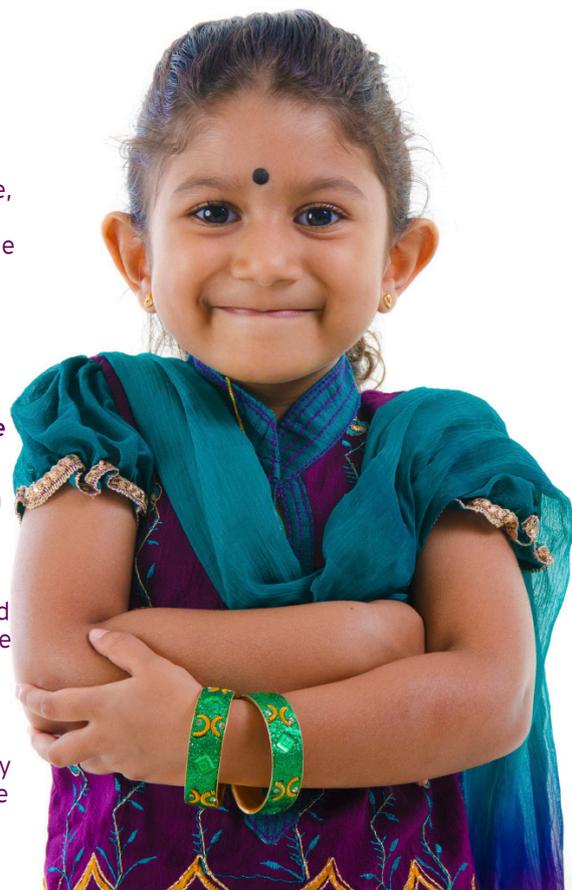
3. 'A Curriculum Framework for Religious Education in England', the culmination of the review commissioned by the RE Council of England and Wales (October 2013)

The RE review, commissioned by the RE Council, formed part of its wider strategic plan for developing the subject, alongside the DfE national curriculum review. The review of RE has resulted in the design of a non-statutory national curriculum framework for RE (NCFRE) which was published in October 2013.

The aims of RE are arranged under 3 headings:

- Know about and understand a range of religions and worldviews
- Express ideas and insights about the nature, significance and impact of religions and worldviews
- Gain and deploy the skills needed to engage seriously with religions and worldviews

Wokingham SACRE and teachers will be keen to consider how the Pan-Berkshire Agreed Syllabus reflects the new Programmes of Study, and indeed if there are any discrepancies. Initial consideration is favourable showing that the local agreed syllabus is in line with the NCFRE.



The SACRE and its work 2013

2013. In this challenging climate, the Wokingham SACRE has continued to see a stable membership and its commitment to supporting RE is secure.

The LA has supported the work of the SACRE with generous funding of £9000 for the second year to enable the effective implementation of the syllabus (2012)

The development plan has reflected the needs of the teachers as expressed at the network meetings. These termly meetings serve as a useful channel between the SACRE and teachers in the classrooms.

Training on location: CPD Day Trip in Reading

One such action this year was the organisation, November 12th, of a full day's training in places of worship in Reading. 11 Wokingham teachers and 9 Reading teachers visited a mosque, a synagogue, a gurdwara and the Buddhist Centre, enhancing their subject knowledge as well as being guided in how to teach specific themes and enquiries related to these places of worship.

'There will be a full record of this day on the SACRE webpage <http://wsh.wokingham.gov.uk/learning-and-teaching/religious-education/sacre> The labelled photographs were taken during the day.'



Teachers at the Mosque

Teacher network meetings

These termly meetings have been hosted by schools and the primary ones especially well-attended. Discussions and requests, reported back to the SACRE, are wherever possible, actioned through the SACRE development plan, often supported by the Professional Adviser to the SACRE.

SACRE meetings

The SACRE held 3 termly meetings which were generally well-attended.

The Chair and Clerk continue to do a sterling job supported by the Professional Adviser and the Diocesan Adviser.

Provision of teaching resources

The above-mentioned training also provided an excellent opportunity to take many photographs and to use them to design 9 powerpoint presentations relating to places of worship and to specific big enquiry questions.

Funding allows these resources to be distributed to every school, whether teachers were able to attend the training trip or not. These resources will also be freely accessible on the Wokingham SACRE web-page.



Directory of speakers for RE

After a delay in its production the Directory of speakers was launched in December and will be trialled by schools in 2014.



RE Quality Mark

The teachers and the SACRE have considered the RE Quality Mark and intend to encourage schools to use the criteria to audit their RE provision and the quality of it, perhaps applying for the Bronze, Silver or Gold awards in time.