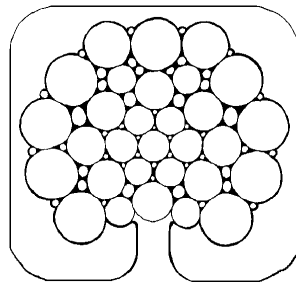


The Effective SACRE

A survey of good practice

by Jill Maybury



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The Effective SACRE: setting the agenda and providing support

Interim Report Spring 2003

This project has been made possible owing to the generosity of the Westhill Trustees. Its many strands include: maintaining a database of current SACRE information; publishing a regular, professionally produced and informative newsletter; creating an interactive NASACRE website and producing a report disseminating good practice in SACREs. The purpose of this interim report is to give an account of the work relating to the last point. It will comprise a description of the intentions, the procedure being followed, some early findings and suggestions about future developments.

The goal of the report is to identify and disseminate good practice happening in SACREs. This requires a reminder of the purpose of SACREs, and the role they were set up to fulfil, and a notion of what might constitute 'good practice': what procedures, systems and initiatives are helping SACREs to fulfil, or even exceed, their expectations? Finally, which of the latter may prove useful to SACREs round the country in their role of supporting the provision of religious education and collective worship in schools?

What is the remit of the SACRE?

SACRE's main function as set out in the Education Act 1988 is:-

"To advise the local education authority upon such matters connected with religious worship in county schools and the religious education to be given in accordance with the agreed syllabus as the authority may refer to the council, or as the council may see fit."

Further duties as reported in SACREs: their Formation, Composition, Operation and Role on RE and Collective Worship (Taylor, 1991) are as follows:

- "to require a review of the local AS for RE by an Agreed Syllabus Committee to be set up by the LEA;
- to consider applications by the headteacher and governing body of any county school as to *'whether it is appropriate for the requirement for Christian collective worship to apply in the case of that school orany class or description of pupils at that school'*;
- to consider and advise on particular methods of teaching, the choice of materials and the provision of training for teachers;
- to publish an annual report on its functions and action particularly specifying any advice, its nature and reasons for giving the advice and reasons for giving the advice to the LEA." (p.1)

What methodology is being used?

Each SACRE has been invited to submit a short questionnaire, asking for basic information about personnel, correct address for correspondence, number of meetings per year, and activities and concerns of the SACRE and any self-nominated 'good practice', to be completed and returned with the latest annual report. As these arrive, the factual data is being transferred to the database, the activities, concerns, and suggested good practice of the SACRE are being noted, and

the annual report is read to see whether any additional items of good practice can be discerned. There are currently, therefore, two ways of identifying good practice: nomination by the person completing the questionnaire and location in the annual report. At the moment, the data gathering is purely documentary. Procedures, systems and initiatives which further the work of SACREs have only been located by reading that which each SACRE professes. It may well be true that there are other things that are undertaken by SACREs that are not included in the annual report.

So far communications have been received from 93 SACREs, with 58 not yet returning either the questionnaire or an annual report. For complete lists, see the appendix. Some SACREs have been kind enough to submit annual reports from more than one year. It is acknowledged that there is something of a time lag between some of the events mentioned and their appearance in this report. This is due to fact that SACRE annual reports are all retrospective, usually being completed some time into the year following the one under review. There may also have been an interlude between the publishing of the annual report, and its arrival here. Therefore SACREs may have undertaken new initiatives since the writing of their annual report, news of which has not yet reached us.

Here it should be mentioned that, although the methodology requires a trawl through SACRE reports, this project is not intending to replicate the rigorous annual QCA analysis of SACRE reports (cf. QCA 2002 Religious Education and Collective Worship: an analysis of 2001 SACRE reports QCA). The remit of that survey is much wider, addressing a whole range of issues upon which SACREs are required to comment in their reports. The focus of this project is to consider a notion of 'good practice' or aspects of custom or initiative that could be worth sharing with other SACREs for their consideration and possible implementation.

What are the findings at this stage?

Reading through the good practice identified by the SACREs themselves or seen within the annual report sent there seem to be several different categories emerging, which are being coded. Each will be illustrated by examples from SACREs. It should be noted that a vibrant and active SACRE might potentially embody practice which could appear in *each* category. For the purposes of this interim report, however, only one example of their work has been chosen as a means of illustrating the wide range of activities that comprise the category. It should not be concluded that this is a reflection of their total activity. Nor should it be assumed that the SACRE mentioned is the only one following this practice.

How have features of the work of SACRE been nominated as 'good practice'? The legal requirement is that SACREs advise the LEA on matters connected with the religious education to be given in accordance with the agreed syllabus and to consider and give advice on particular methods of teaching, the choice of materials and the provision of training for teachers. No particular guidance is given about the form that this advice might take. Examples below show how SACREs offer advice and information. Yet many SACREs go much further than this and provide support to schools for the teaching of RE. This may be material support in terms of resources, either small or large scale. Resources may be physical (or virtual!) or financial. Support for RE may be via promotion of particular events relevant to RE from which schools may benefit. It may be by supporting teachers' personal and professional development via training or through the encouragement of support networks. Some aspects of SACREs' activity seemed to go beyond 'support', but

seemed, rather, to be about affirming or celebrating RE, in order to raise the profile of RE in the local area, often by providing incentives for pupils and schools to raise their standards.

To continue with the notion of raising standards, many SACREs are active in sending communications to schools. These include communication with schools about RE (inspections etc) and advice on reporting RE. Sometimes SACREs wish the communication process to be two-way and so seek to find out more about the way that RE is taught in schools and have sought this information in a variety of ways. Additionally, some SACREs have felt the need to seek greater understanding of the some of the subject matter of RE, and so have planned ways of learning about the religious traditions represented in the local area and of the SACRE members themselves. Some SACREs, considering that RE is not an island, are keen to explore and exploit links with other areas of the curriculum.

The other major area that is part of the remit of the SACRE is advising the LEA about matters connected with religious worship in county schools. This, in most cases gains less attention than RE for many reasons, but there are still a host of initiatives from SACREs round the country. To complement the support offered to both of these areas of school life, many SACREs have produced publications which are circulated to schools, or which can be purchased.

As a result of the expertise on SACREs advice is often provided on other areas of school life including treatment of particular pupil groups. This goes beyond what could be expected of SACREs, but in many cases they are ideally equipped to offer such advice.

The final category that seemed to emerge was concerned with the ways in which SACREs seek to improve their own organisational efficiency.

The categories of good practice and illustrative examples are described as follows:

1. Supporting RE - ways in which SACRE supports RE in schools

1a. Advice

This could be theoretical support in terms of advice, or information

- Oldham is beginning to give specific 'lesson plan' ideas
- North Somerset is updating and expanding its list of resources: lists of speakers and members of faith communities willing to visit schools for RE and Collective Worship
- Slough has developed a website with information about places of worship in the town.
- Lancashire has produced curriculum units to help staff understand more about the religion being taught.
- Kingston upon Thames has a website which includes: the Agreed Syllabus; database; annual lecture; access to agenda and minutes of meetings; information sheets; annual reports; CW determination scheme.

1b. Resources

This may be support in terms of resources, either small or large scale.

- Sefton supported the LEA's involvement in production of CD ROM 'Journey through Faith'
- Windsor and Maidenhead has created a database of faith communities and local visits and have established a picture collection which has been distributed to schools electronically
- Production of a video relaying aspects of different faiths of Croydon residents
- Hampshire publishes a list of SACRE members willing to visit schools to support teachers and work with pupils
- Poole SACRE representatives work in schools taking lessons on aspects of their belief and practice
- Northamptonshire produced a CD Rom – with exemplification of standards in RE to show examples of pupils' work across levels 1-8 and exceptional performance in AT1 and AT2
- Newcastle upon Tyne provides financial support for mono-cultural schools to visit local faith communities
- Luton SACRE recommended to the education committee that 50% of costs of transport should be provided for schools to visits sites of spiritual and cultural interest and has successful in securing a commitment to offer financial support to those sites most frequently visited by schools.
- "Multifaith Calderdale" photopack and video have been produced for use in schools
- Plymouth supports the coordinator of the city's Religious and Cultural Resource Centre which is used to support schools with artefacts and faith speakers.
- In North East Lincolnshire, the introduction of new Agreed Syllabus has been supported by one half day's training, with plans for more and specific teacher and pupil support materials for purchase or loan from the School Library Loan Service
- Milton Keynes plans to extend an existing loan collection of religious artefacts
- Durham has a bridging project between secondary and primary schools

1c. Events

It may be promotion of particular events from which schools might benefit.

- Sunderland has an Annual Faith Community exhibition for KS1&2: 1998 – Judaism: a way of life (synagogue), 1999 – Christianity: Yesterday and Today (CoE), 2000 – Following Jesus in the 21st Century (Bethany), 2001 – Salvation Army
- In Dudley "Faith City" is an annual event involving interactive opportunities for primary pupils to learn about 6 faith traditions.
- Coventry hosts 6th form conferences.

1d. Teachers' professional development

Another way is through supporting the professional development of teachers via the setting up of support networks and training.

- Wolverhampton has set forums for primary and for secondary teachers of RE
- Northumberland arranged a schools conference to consider the implications of the QCA schemes of work and non-statutory guidance on RE
- South Gloucestershire held a day Conference on Active learning and target setting for Secondary Heads of RE
- Gloucestershire holds termly meetings each for primary co-ordinators and secondary co-ordinators for training, discussion of needs and sharing of good practice
- Oxfordshire holds an annual reception with buffet and speakers for teachers – at the end of the Spring term SACRE meeting
- In Bristol a KS3 Initiative Group has been set up, led by the curriculum support teacher
- Termly meetings of RE Coordinators and Heads of Department in Bracknell Forest are held to keep them up to date with developments – with input from experts.

2. Raising the profile of RE

Different means of encouraging more enthusiasm for, and higher standards in, RE include the following:

- Somerset held a conference with teachers to review SCORE (Somerset Certificate of RE)
- Kent offers three Annual awards of £250 for RE projects in the county
- The Isle of Wight holds an Annual spring festival (*Get REAL: RE And Life*) including visits to schools, pupils' performances, and an RE in the Expressive Arts Competition (involving pre-school – 6th form)
- Bromley awards SACRE certificates to recognise schools' involvement with religious communities for the development of RE (and most schools now have these)

3. Communications to schools about RE

- Guidance on status of QCA schemes of work was distributed to schools (Bolton, Brent, North Tyneside, Bristol, Bromley, Staffordshire, Bradford, Bury, Calderdale, Stoke on Trent, Cumbria, Devon, Hounslow, Tameside, Northamptonshire, North Somerset, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, Wirral, Wolverhampton, Camden) In many cases this was linked to the requirements of the respective Agreed Syllabus
- Guidance is offered to Dorset schools on reporting RE including transfer of data to new schools
- In Cumbria termly newsletters are issued to primary and secondary schools. These offer exchanges of ideas about good practice in RE. →

- Brighton and Hove's Schools' Adviser (RE) wrote to schools post OFSTED outlining SACRE's role in monitoring delivery of RE
- Brent wrote to schools post-OFSTED to congratulate them upon improvements and success

4. Gaining knowledge and understanding

Activities have been identified which show how a SACRE is seeking to learn about RE in schools, and also about the faith communities represented in the area and on the Committee.

4a. Religious education in schools

- Peterborough is developing a pattern of presentations from teachers and others at every meeting so that SACRE members are well informed about the best current practice in schools.
- Rutland had an 'awayday' on spirituality across the curriculum
- Essex undertook a survey to discover RE provision for Y10 pupils
- A presentation was made to Tameside SACRE by the RE Coordinator of a school which had received a commendation for RE. The presentation explained how RE had been improved, displayed children's work and resources, and showed a video illustrating a range of teaching and learning strategies used in the school.
- Devon holds annual training days for SACRE members e.g. inviting Heads of Department to describe examination provision. One school brought some pupils to explain why they enjoy RE.
- Bolton monitors the use of the Agreed Syllabus with an emphasis on one Key Stage per year, by sending out questionnaire followed up by a visit from the RE Adviser

4b. Faith traditions and communities

- At the start of each meeting in Warwickshire, there is a presentation of the faith background or denomination of members, and they had a special session on racism following the publication of the McPherson report.
- Derby City meetings take place in a variety of venues: schools, places of worship and the Interfaith Centre.
- Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole have a joint annual lecture
- Hounslow members joined subject leaders and Heads of RE for a visit to a faith community

5. Seeking connections

- Good practice in RE, especially in relation to literacy is disseminated on the Worcestershire website
- Wolverhampton considers it may be able to offer support to schools on the spiritual dimension and citizenship
- A working party in Manchester has been looking at links between the Agreed Syllabus and Citizenship
- Lincolnshire heard presentations from specialists in other curriculum areas to consider how RE can enhance skills teaching and key skills application across the curriculum, and how literacy skills can enhance knowledge and understanding of RE.
- In East Sussex, the PSHE teacher adviser addressed SACRE about guidelines for sex and relationships education
- Bexley held a conference on SMSC and Citizenship.

6. Supporting Collective Worship

Some aspects of SACRE discussion and activity relate to support for Collective Worship

- Wirral conducted a survey of pupils withdrawn from RE+CW
- In Barnet, a working group prepared practical advice to help schools to meet requirements for CW
- Redcar and Cleveland commissioned a theologian to assist in production of guidance for Collective Worship, which was followed by INSET to encourage staff and to allow them to share good practice.
- North Tyneside carried out a review of the Collective Worship policy and guidelines have been produced which are available through the North Tyneside Intranet. Members visit acts of worship in schools.
- Guidelines and exemplar material are being developed to support Collective Worship, particularly in secondary schools by neighbouring unitary authorities – Kingston upon Hull, East Riding, N. Lincolnshire & N.E. Lincolnshire.
- Collective Worship in schools with determinations is supported by faith tutors from the Bradford Interfaith Centre

7. Publications

- “National Expectations in RE – A standards supplement to the Suffolk AS”
- Solihull has written and published the following: Handbooks for RE in KS 1,2 &3, “Planning and assessment in primary RE”, “Thoughts for the day: tutor group collective worship”, “Take a walk around: directory of places of worship in the Solihull area”.
- “Kirklees exemplification of standards in RE” →

- “Religious education in the Foundation Stage” describing best practice and offering medium term plans for Hillingdon schools to adapt
- “Learning to be me” – spiritual opportunities at KS1 & 2 written as a result of St. Gabriels Trust money was distributed to all Cheshire schools

8. Advice offered on other matters

- Leicester’s guidance regarding Muslim pupils has been revised and circulated to schools, as has the document on Health and Safety issues and wearing of religious symbols.
- In Ealing, work started on guidance for schools about when parents took children away from school for extended periods for the celebration of religious holidays.

9. Self-Improvement

- Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin SACREs meet jointly, but each has its own set of concerns and development plan.
- Stoke on Trent has co-opted a representative from local university to enhance links with ITT, and the director of a local Christian Centre which offers activities to schools.
- There are regular meetings of Bury’s SACRE effectiveness sub-group
- Derbyshire’s annual report contains a feedback slip
- Norfolk has an Annual SACRE workshop e.g RE in Norfolk: a time to reflect – beginning to consider review of Agreed Syllabus
- A publicity leaflet about the work of SACRE is circulated to schools in Lambeth
- Herefordshire has requested that the LEA explore alternative methods of collecting and reporting data on the RE performance in individual schools in the light of the dearth of information from OFSTED short inspections.
- In Birmingham, timings of meetings alternate between afternoons and evenings and take place on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays to accommodate members
- In order to try and increase attendance, South Tyneside is using a variety of venues including a school, a community association, and an education centre. At each, displays of pupils’ work and new publications along with course information is mounted.
- Brent’s Agreed Syllabus revision was undertaken following and incorporating the results of a questionnaire for schools
- Development plans are produced and monitored by the following SACREs: Barnet; Bracknell Forest; Brent; Brighton and Hove; Calderdale; Cheshire; Easlin; Herefordshire; Kingston upon Thames; Kirklees; Lancashire; Manchester; Middlesborough, Norfolk; North Somerset; Oldham; Plymouth; Poole; Slough; Solihull; Stoke on Trent; Windsor and Maidenhead; Wirral; Wolverhampton.

Appendix 1

SACREs responding to our requests for information

Barnet	Gloucestershire	Peterborough
Bath and N. E. Somerset	Halton	Plymouth
Bedfordshire	Hammersmith and Fulham	Poole
Bexley	Hampshire	Portsmouth
Bournemouth	Herefordshire	Redcar and Cleveland
Birmingham	Hillingdon	Rutland
Blackburn and Darwen	Hounslow	Salford
Bolton	Isle of Wight	Sandwell
Bracknell Forest	Kent	Sefton
Bradford	Kingston upon Hull	Shropshire
Brent	Kingston Upon Thames	Slough
Brighton & Hove	Kirklees	Solihull
Bristol	Lambeth	Somerset
Bromley	Lancashire	South Gloucestershire
Bury	Leicester	South Tyneside
Calderdale	Lewisham	Staffordshire
Cambridgeshire	Lincolnshire	Stoke on Trent
Camden	Luton	Suffolk
Cheshire	Manchester	Sunderland
Coventry	Middlesbrough	Sutton
Croydon	Milton Keynes	Tameside
Cumbria	Newcastle Upon Tyne	Telford and Wrekin
Derby City	Norfolk	Torbay
Derbyshire	Northamptonshire	Warwickshire
Devon	North East Lincolnshire	Wakefield
Dorset	North Somerset	West Berkshire
Dudley	North Tyneside	Windsor and Maidenhead
Durham	Northumberland	Wirral
Ealing	Nottinghamshire	Wiltshire
East Sussex	Oldham	Wolverhampton
Essex	Oxfordshire	Worcestershire

Appendix 2

SACREs whose reports we did not receive

Barking and Dagenham Barnsley Blackpool Buckinghamshire Cornwall Darlington Doncaster East Riding Enfield Gateshead Greenwich Guernsey Hackney Haringey Harrow Hartlepool Havering Hertfordshire Isles of Scilly Islington	Jersey Kensington & Chelsea Knowsley Leeds Leicestershire Liverpool Medway Merton Newham North Lincolnshire North Yorkshire Nottingham Reading Redbridge Richmond upon Thames Rochdale Rotherham Service Children's Education Sheffield	Southampton Southend on Sea Southwark St Helens Stockport Stockton on Tees Surrey Swindon Thurrock Tower Hamlets Trafford Walsall Waltham Forest Wandsworth Warrington Westminster Wigan Wokingham York (City)
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This report was presented by Jill Maybury to the 10th Anniversary AGM of NASACRE, held in the Victoria Suite at Birmingham Repertory Theatre on 7 May 2003
