

Reading SACRE report 2016-7

Chair's Foreword

To follow

Rabbi Zvi Solomons

Chair of Reading SACRE

2016-7: The Context

The Autumn Term 2016 marked the start of the review year for the Pan-Berkshire agreed syllabus for Religious Education. The existing syllabus has been well-received by teachers who have enjoyed the challenge of teaching RE using an enquiry-based approach and are now taking this further by considering how well they can enable pupils' religious literacy to develop through their ability to question and critically evaluate. The challenge this year is to build on this in the new syllabus and make the necessary adjustments to incorporate changes in the RE landscape over the last five years.

Documents from the ongoing 'Commission on RE' and the 'REC' indicate that this is a crucial time in the RE world. Religious Education, whilst statutory, sometimes struggles to maintain its rightful status and time-allowance on the curriculum but most Reading schools recognise it as a key contributor to the anti-radicalisation and community cohesion agenda as well as the British Values and SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) development challenges. The new syllabus needs to ensure that it continues to encourage challenging, enquiry based RE that will lead not only to educational success but to the holistic development of each young person.

The Reading SACRE considers its support role in this very seriously and works closely with the Borough Council to offer support to schools, especially vital now the advisory team no longer has an RE specialist.

The SACRE continues to keep in touch with schools and to support them to fulfil their students' entitlement to high quality RE, mindful of the pressures upon teachers and school timetables. The SACRE listens to teachers through network meetings, training events and the teacher representatives on the SACRE, and the support it offers is informed by these conversations. The SACRE has continued to appreciate the support of Reading Borough Council, the funding offered enabling support for teachers and schools to continue, and notes the support of Dan Neal, who continued to support the SACRE in his senior adviser role with the Borough. Reading has a diverse community and thereby many resources on its doorstep to offer children and young people access to living religion and belief. This year has seen the Reading SACRE build on the previous year's efforts to mobilise the local community in working to benefit RE learning both in Reading and across Berkshire. The SACRE has met once each term to progress its work and liaises with Reading Borough Council, structuring its work each year through an agreed action plan. The Reading SACRE has a settled membership lead by the experienced Chair, Rabbi Zvi Solomons, aided by Michael Freeman Vice-Chair. This year has shown increased the links between the six SACREs across Berkshire and the Oxford Diocese, continuing to develop some very exciting and innovative work.

The work of the SACRE in 2016

The role of Reading Borough Council

The support of Reading Borough Council enables the SACRE to communicate directly with schools through the regular e.newsletters. Improving effective communications with RE subject leaders and head teachers, to ensure schools gain the maximum benefit from the training and support the SACRE offers remains a focus for the coming year. Councillors are pro-active members of the SACRE and we look forward to embedding SACRE's work into the 'bigger picture' education development plans of the Borough.

Represented nationally

The Reading SACRE always has representatives at the annual NASACRE (National Association of SACREs) AGM (annual general meeting) and conference.

This year its opinions and thoughts were fed into the Commission on RE, the national exploration into RE across England and Wales.

Teacher network meetings

Primary teachers have again been afforded a termly network meeting offering them updates on both national and local initiatives in RE as well as input on aspects of RE e.g. developing religious literacy and tackling controversial and sensitive issues in RE. These meetings also give opportunities to share good practice as well as to feed back to the SACRE on what support would be helpful. This year the teachers present at the network meetings have been enthusiastic and dedicated to improving children's RE learning in their schools. There is a need to reach more teachers and improve the attendance at these meetings as viability could become an issue, this would be a shame as it is essential for teachers to have the opportunity to develop links with other schools, share good practice, share concerns and find out about local and national developments. SACRE members are always welcome at these meetings and have begun to attend, thus building relationships with schools, gaining insight into their needs and sharing their successes and commitment.

Secondary teachers also have an opportunity to meet together at an after-school meeting. In this time of change, these sessions offer the chance to discuss concerns, share practice and plan training although increasing pressures mean it is becoming more difficult for secondary teachers to attend after-school meetings. With the new GCSE specifications showing a need for developing a greater depth of religious literacy this meeting has proved vital in discussing how these developments will impact on teaching and learning.

RE Subject leader training

Some primary subject leaders new to post, attended the training session for them run in partnership with Wokingham SACRE on October 12th. Each year there is a considerable turn-over in RE subject leaders in primary schools, so this annual training seems vital. New subject leaders need to understand the responsibilities of the role and to be offered support to carry it well. Leading a subject across a school is no mean feat.

The Pan-Berkshire joint SACRE conference 2016

The joint SACRE conference was held in September 2016 at the Holiday at Winnersh Triangle. The meeting involved teachers, SACRE members and members of Pan Berkshire faith and worldview communities. It also became a launch event for the Crossing the Bridges Project Phase 2.

The 'Crossing the Bridges' project was initiated during the last year to improve communication between faith communities, SACREs and schools. By meeting together communities were encouraged to create a directory of contact details and places of worship that could welcome schools in to learn about faith, worship and community events. At this conference the delegates were informed of the opportunity for teachers to visit 4 different places on a 'continuing professional development' trip in March 2017. The final details of the 'Crossing the Bridges On location' trip were being fine-tuned as the event was held. It was very gratifying to see new and closer links being developed between faith and worldview communities, SACREs and schools. The project benefited greatly from some generous funding from the Westhill Trust.

There was also the opportunity to share a buffet supper as well as a vision for future co-operation and events.

Crossing the Bridges training day

On Wednesday March 8th 2017 a coach of 28 teachers, SACRE members and Advisers visited 4 different places of worship in the Pan Berkshire area. The group visited

- the Maidenhead Synagogue,
- Slough Baptist church,
- Slough Sikh Gurdwara and the
- Stoke Poges Mosque.

At each place the group was met by volunteers, given a tour of the building and shown what groups of children would experience on a visit. Each place of worship put a great deal of time and effort into ensuring this was a valuable trip and provided answers to many questions about beliefs and practices. Photographs were taken, with permission, during the day and after the event were turned into resources for schools to use in the classroom.

The next step will be to see if the schools represented can start to bring students to the places of worship to engage with the faith communities and provide a living educational experience. SACRE will continue to encourage such visits by updating the directory and reminding schools of its availability.

The Pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub

The Hub came into being in December 2014 when, at the first meeting of all 6 Berkshire SACRE Chairs, over coffee at Rabbi Solomons' house, the commitment to share resources and expertise was evident. A successful bid on behalf of the Hub, to the Culham St Gabriel's Trust resulted in some funding allowing the 'Crossing the Bridges' Project to be born. This was the first joint project of the newly formed Hub.

As the hub developed into an excellent way for the Pan Berkshire SACREs to communicate and plan events together it seemed the natural vehicle for the Agreed Syllabus Conference meetings when reviewing the RE syllabus. The hub, with Jan Lever at the helm, has so far identified a timeline for the process, established the funding for the review and begun the consultation process.

The main issues emerging from the first round of consultation were:

- Considering moving away from a 2- attainment target process
- Offering guidance on assessment in a 'beyond levels' landscape
- Updating the early Years section in line with the updated national framework
- Exploring the effectiveness of the 'required religions' at each Key Stage structure

GCSE Examination Results: Summer 2017

The pan-Berkshire Agreed Syllabus for RE requires that "All students must follow an externally accredited course leading to a qualification in 'Religious Studies' approved under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. There is no requirement that students must sit public examinations but following such courses provides as many as possible with an opportunity to have their learning in the statutory curriculum subject of RE, accredited."

RE Examination results

The results in the table below are provisional and will be validated later in the year.

Provisional GCSE results 2017

School Name	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	Total	% A-C	% A-G
UTC	No Religious Studies Results											
Maiden Erlegh School												
WREN School												
Highdown School	17	46	57	46	20	9	6	4	2	207	80	99
Reading Girls' School	8	25	24	32	16	7	6	2	2	122	73	98
Reading School	30	53	27	7	2	0	1	0	0			
Prospect School	3	8	19	32	21	11	7	6	2	109	57	98
Blessed Hugh Faringdon Secondary School	7	20	41	26	12	11	6	6	3	132	71	98
Kendrick School	11	17	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	35	100	100
John Madejski Academy	1	0	13	18	13	10	4	1	0	60	53	100
Thames Valley School	No Religious Studies Results											
The Avenue Special School												
Phoenix College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	6	0	33
The Holy Brook School	No Religious Studies Results											

Provisional A/S level results 2017

School Name	A*	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total	% A-E
UTC	No Religious Studies Results								
Maiden Erlegh School									
WREN School									
Highdown School	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	33
Reading Girls' School	No Religious Studies Results								
Reading School									
Prospect School									

Blessed Hugh Faringdon Secondary School	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	100
Kendrick School	No Religious Studies Results								
John Madejski Academy									
Thames Valley School									
The Avenue Special School									
Phoenix College									
The Holy Brook School									

Provisional A level results 2017

School Name	A*	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total	% A-E
UTC	No Religious Studies Results								
Maiden Erlegh School									
WREN School									
Highdown School	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	6	100
Reading Girls' School	No Religious Studies Results								
Reading School									
Prospect School									
Blessed Hugh Faringdon Secondary School	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	4	100
Kendrick School	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	4	100
John Madejski Academy	No Religious Studies Results								
Thames Valley School									
The Avenue Special School									
Phoenix College									
The Holy Brook School									

David Rees

RE Adviser to Reading SACRE

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