



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

SACRE

Annual Report

September 2014 - July 2015

Wokingham Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

The Chairman's Foreword

These are challenging times for SACREs, with national discussions continuing as to their future in Britain. Even so, against this background of uncertainty, the Wokingham SACRE, with the stalwart and much valued support of Wokingham Borough Council, has continued to present a strong programme of CPD and events to aid the committed and talented teachers of R.E. in the Borough.

Our R.E. Adviser, Jan Lever, has organised further training sessions for teachers coming new to the teaching of R.E. or who have recently taken on a responsibility for teaching and organising the subject in their schools. These have been well received and attended. The network meetings continue. Those for primary school teachers have had high levels of attendance where teachers have been keen to learn about the latest curriculum developments, national trends and new classroom resources.

One of the secondary meetings was replaced by the second of the two planned R.E. conferences for secondary teachers. Under the auspices of the Wokingham Secondary Federation and sponsored jointly by the Wokingham and Reading SACREs, this took place on 23rd February 2015 at The Forest School. The key theme was 'Outstanding R.E.'. The lead speaker was Alan Brine, until 2014 Ofsted National Advisor for Religious Education. His ideas about developing outstanding R.E. in the rapidly changing educational context were thought provoking and challenging. He appealed to delegates to build freely on the elements of the locally agreed syllabus curriculum with their own powers of imagination! The other sessions included a presentation by Soulscape, an organisation noted for its excellent work with young people, offering Christian perspectives. Also, there was a session given by 'P4C' (Philosophy For Children - a project devised by SAPERE - The Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education.) This was fascinating and something that many delegates wanted to investigate further.

At the SACRE meeting in November 2014, members received an excellent and persuasive presentation by Soulscape about the REvive project they have undertaken with children at The Embbrook School concerning religious and moral issues. At the March 2015 meeting there was a brilliant presentation by Louise Robertson, the Regional Organiser for the Global Learning Programme, which resources and supports educational programmes in the Borough schools encouraging children to enquire and learn about world-wide issues and events. The SACRE is keen to see this programme widen its activities for the enrichment of our children in more of our schools.

In the autumn of 2014 Jan Lever led another successful faith visit to places of worship in Reading (see the text below and beautiful photographs included in this report). Hitherto these visits have focused on Reading because of the wealth and variety of faith places of worship it presents. Now that Wokingham Borough has a mosque and a gurdwara in addition to its unique heritage of Christian churches and the work of Churches Together, there will be opportunity to include Wokingham in the faith visits.

Representing their members, the chairs of the six SACREs of Berkshire (Bracknell, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead, and Wokingham) have come together to form the Berkshire Hub. Under the guidance of their Advisers, Anne Andrews, Jo Fageant and Jan Lever, a bid was successfully submitted to the Anglican Trust of Culham St. Gabriel's for funds to mount a programme to provide training for faith hosts at places of worship to better receive school visits, and to provide educational materials to support teachers and their pupils on their visits. This programme was launched at the Pan-Berkshire SACREs Conference at Easthampstead

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Park in May 2015, which this year was opened to teachers right across Berkshire. It was a great success and created a 'buzz' of enthusiasm that augurs well for the Hub Project. The Conference was followed up with the first training sessions for faith hosts, one sited in Reading and the other in Slough.

There are exciting challenges ahead: the need to revise the locally agreed R.E. Syllabus will appear in the near future. This will involve the Hub as well as the individual SACREs and will entail detailed discussions and work with R.E. teachers across the Borough. Prior to this there are changes to assessment, and new GCSE and 'A' level syllabi that the SACRE must consider and evaluate.

The Wokingham SACRE remains committed to supporting the fine standard of R.E. teaching which is a hallmark of our Borough schools. Religious Education is so important in what it teaches of knowledge, understanding and mutual trust in different faiths and cultures. For centuries our country has enriched its Christian heritage in welcoming people of different faiths and cultures. This openness continues to strengthen and increase both tolerance and social integration in a unique and world-leading culture that is ours today.



Teachers at the Gurdwara

Michael Freeman, Chairman, Wokingham SACRE

2014-2015: The context

The autumn term 2014 marked the start of the third academic year in the lifespan of the Pan-Berkshire agreed syllabus for Religious Education. This syllabus is well-received by teachers who are enjoying the challenge of teaching RE using an enquiry-based approach. The structure and key questions of the agreed syllabus help teachers order their planning, and focus children and young people on the beliefs that underpin practice in the religions studied. Teachers appreciate the underpinning 3 Bs of the syllabus: Believing, Behaving and Belonging. The beliefs that underpin practice are given great attention. This approach is gaining credence in the RE world, with the Church of England leading the way, encouraging the teaching of 'concepts' and theological literacy.

In an education landscape of more autonomy, but increasing pressure to deliver examination results and higher standards in numeracy and literacy, Religious Education, whilst statutory, sometimes struggles to maintain its rightful status and time-allowance on the curriculum. Wokingham 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, and the support it offers is informed by these conversations.

January 2015 saw Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, write to SACREs reinforcing the important role they have in supporting the ongoing development of high quality, meaningful and appropriate RE in the schools in their areas. The letter reminded SACREs of their statutory duties and thanked members for their dedication in serving the pupils in their areas. The Wokingham SACRE welcomed Lord Nash's correspondence and felt reassured that the importance the SACRE gives to its work, and the nature of the support it offers to schools, is in line with Lord Nash's expectations. Events on the global stage have continued to bring attention to religion and its related conflicts, and education is being charged with



Teachers at Carey Baptist Church in Reading



The Salvation Army

helping to prevent radicalisation and extremism.

RE has a major role to play in this process. The SACRE endeavours to see Religious Education in its widest sense and to explore how it contributes to broader curriculum aims like Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development, Global Citizenship, British Values and the prevention of radicalisation. In this regard the SACRE continues to invite speakers to its meetings to engender this understanding, one of the most interesting being an introduction to Global Citizenship through the government funded national Global Learning Programme. Many schools in Wokingham are involved with this exciting initiative which reinforces RE learning, as well as RE contributing to its outcomes.

The SACRE has continued to appreciate the support of Wokingham Borough Council, the funding offered enabling support for teachers and schools to continue. Councillors are pro-active members of the SACRE and the LA Link Officer highly supportive, advocating for the SACRE and for RE within the Borough Council.

The SACRE has met once each term to progress its work and liaises closely with Wokingham Borough Council, structuring its work each year through an agreed development plan. Its membership is consistent and it is well-served by very dedicated Chair and Vice-Chair as well as by its exceptional clerk and its professional RE adviser.

The Wokingham SACRE continues to be committed to progressing RE across the Borough, believing this subject to have major significance to children and young people's development, both personal and academic.

The work of the SACRE in 2014-15

The full support of Wokingham Borough Council enables the SACRE to communicate directly with schools through items in the weekly Education News bulletin and to continue to build web page space for teachers to access.

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. teaching ideas, and assessment in the world 'beyond levels'. These meetings also give opportunities to share good practice as well as to feed back to the SACRE on what forms of support would be helpful.

Secondary teachers also have a termly opportunity to meet together at an after-school meeting run jointly with Reading. 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. Focus areas for these meetings have included: RE's contribution to the prevention of radicalisation, new examination expectations and syllabi, and the consideration of the Clarke and Woodhead Report, 'A new settlement for religion and belief in schools' (June 2015).

Secondary RE Conference

February 2015 saw the second joint Wokingham/Reading secondary RE conference. Subsidised and supported by both SACREs, and with SACRE members attending, this was a very well-received day and included a keynote speech from the ex-HMI for RE, Alan Brine, as well as workshops on philosophical pedagogy and Christian approaches to ethical issues.

The SACRE wishes to thank the RE Department at Forest School for organising and hosting the event for colleagues, and the Secondary Federation managers for their help with organising the event.



The Hindu Temple

RE Subject leader training

Responding to the need to constantly ensure teachers new to RE subject leadership are well-supported, and also mindful of Ofsted and other national reports on RE which point to a lack of training for subject leaders in RE, this year saw the roll-out of a newly-designed 2-session course offered to support teachers new to this role. It covered the roles and responsibilities of the subject leader, expectations, monitoring, curriculum planning, assessing learning etc. It was appreciatively received by the teachers attending, raising their confidence to lead this subject across their schools. This was run for Reading and Wokingham teachers together.

Continued Professional Development (CPD) 'on location'

Following last autumn's very well received RE 'on location' CPD day, a second 'on location' training day for teachers took place in November 2014, organised again jointly by the Reading and Wokingham SACREs. Teachers visited 3 Christian places of worship: Reading Minster, Carey Baptist Church and Reading Salvation Army, as well as Reading Hindu temple and Sikh gurdwara. Teachers again reported that the day had been extremely useful in developing their understanding of religions, and providing them with suggested teaching activities and contacts at the places of worship.

The Pan-Berkshire Hub/Annual joint SACRE conference 2015

The December 2014 meeting of all 6 Berkshire SACRE Chairs saw all SACREs more than willing to take the Pan-Berkshire Hub forward.



Reading Minster

The first project was a plan to extend the 'on location' training for teachers to make use of places of worship across the whole of Berkshire and to invite both teachers and SACRE members to attend the training, the aims of which are to bring consistency in booking processes for school visits to places of worship; ease communication between schools and places of worship; and maximise the learning coming out of such visits. Some areas of Berkshire are rich in the diverse range of places of worship on children's doorsteps, whilst schools in other areas need to travel to find such a range. With the 6 Berkshire SACREs working together, it was felt that much more could be achieved for children and young people's learning.

A successful bid to the Culham St Gabriel's Trust resulted in some funding for this plan, allowing the 'Crossing the Bridges' Project to be born. This was launched and the initial consultative work done at the annual SACRE Conference at Easthampstead Park on 15th June 2015. An interactive and productive evening brought teachers and SACRE members together for the first time at a SACRE conference, enabling bridges to be built and the project to begin.

'Crossing the Bridges'

Following the conference, seminars were held in the East and West regions of Berkshire bringing together teachers and hosts/ potential hosts from places of worship. These seminars resulted in booking forms, evaluation forms and teaching and learning booklets being produced and trialled.

The project continues into 2015-16 and in its early stages is showing great promise. The SACRE hopes this project will improve the learning experience children and young people have when visiting places of worship, and facilitate better communication and booking systems for teachers and hosts. The materials, when trialled and finalised, will be published nationally, allowing free access for all those delivering RE.

GCSE RE Examination Results for summer 2015 are not yet available but will be published as an appendix later in the year.



Reading Minster