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Title of meeting: Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education
Date of meeting: 20 March 2024
Subject: SACRE Monitoring Group Report
Report by: Chris May, SACRE Advisor

1. Purpose of report:

The purpose of this report is to inform SACRE of the findings and discussions that took place during the meeting of the SACRE Monitoring Group on 21 February 2024.

The group received updates on professional RE education and monitoring the effectiveness of RE and an update on results from the GCSE examination series in 2023. An update on implementation of Living Difference IV, including training in RE, was received.

2. Recommendations:

That SACRE notes the findings of the Monitoring Group meeting.

3. Background: The Monitoring Group met at 4.30 pm on 21 February 2024. Present:

Present: Pastor Chris Thomas (Group A), Revd. Samantha Duddles (Group B), Jane Kelly (Group B), Kari Laing (Group C), Taki Jaffer (Group D) and Councillor Benedict Swann (Group D).

Also in attendance: Justine Ball (SACRE Professional Advisor), Debbie Anderson (Head of School Improvement), Chris May (Hampshire Secondary Teaching and Learning Adviser for RE), Karen Thomas (EMAS Manager and Lead Adviser) and Karen Martin (SACRE Clerk).

The meeting was chaired by Chris May.

4. Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS)

Karen Thomas informed those present that EMAS provides schools with Adviser support, including pupil assessments and CPD (Continuing Professional Development), Bilingual Learning Assistants to support EAL pupils in their first language and resources for teachers and pupils. She added that 20% of pupils in the city speak another language; almost 29% are from an ethnic minority background; and there are 106 languages spoken in the city - up from around 40 just 7 years ago.



Karen Thomas explained that EMAS has four main strands of work:

- a) Adviser support on working with pupils who are Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) or who have English as an additional language (EAL). The Advisory team also provides support to schools and training for staff as well as school improvement work.
- b) Bilingual Learning Assistants (BLAs) support pupils in schools and some nurseries with EAL in their first language in class and develop home school links.
- c) EMAS creates, collects, and collates resources and guidance materials in different languages which are then provided to schools.
- d) EMAS supports unaccompanied asylum seekers.

It was noted that there is a strong link between the work EMAS does in school and SACREs work including in relation to how RE is taught and how families view RE in schools.

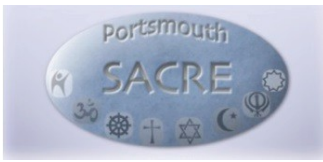
Karen Thomas explained further that EMAS is seeing increasing queries from schools about religion and belief in relation to the curriculum or collective worship which was a concern. EMAS is responding by advising schools to talk to parents and invite them into the school to observe lessons and encouraging schools to liaise with community groups. EMAS Bilingual Learning Assistants are being upskilled and this will include a session by Justine Ball on Living Difference IV and the role of RE in providing support with many of these issues.

Justine Ball suggested that it may be helpful to have religious texts in different languages and that schools could be encouraged to use the SACRE boxes more as not all schools are aware of them. She also noted that when talking about different religions in RE and Collective Worship it is important to first emphasise the similarities between religions and to also talk about "some", "many", or "a few" for example, so that there is a good understanding that there is not just one way to be a religious or non-religious person.

5. Inspector/Adviser Updates:

Justine Ball informed the Group that five primary school visits had been undertaken and that the general themes explored during the visits included emphasising the similarities and differences in different religions and non-religious beliefs and encouraging schools to look at the religious population of the school and reflect this in their teaching.

Justine Ball noted that the Jerusalem Trust may provide up to £600 per school in a grant for resources to support the teaching of Christianity and the Cullum St Gabriels Trust may also have some funding available which could be used to fund school visits to places of worship.



In response to a question about why there were no visits to secondary schools in this academic term, Chris May informed the Group that there are several factors including the education landscape in the city. There are currently only two LA Maintained secondaries in Portsmouth and Chris May noted that he is in regular contact with one of these schools.

Chris May added that secondary schools also tend to have specialist RE teachers and subject leads, and this is often not the case in primary schools. Primaries are therefore very keen to take up support as they do not have subject specialism and it is very positive that they want to take up the support offered.

6. Updates on Portsmouth 2023 GCSE Religious Studies examinations:

Chris May talked through the GCSE Results data for Portsmouth. In summary, analysis of the data shows:

- a) Exam entry numbers have increased in contrast to Hampshire and nationally and that although the numbers being entered for public exams are still small, the direction of travel is positive.
- b) Across schools in the city attainment is below national scores on average. Chris May highlighted schools where attainment is above the national average.
- c) The gap in attainment for SEN and Pupil Premium pupils is smaller than nationally.
- d) Overall, in 2023 pupils performed less well when compared to 2019 levels and when compared to national scores but does have increasing entry numbers.

7. Other sources of evidence of effectiveness of RE:

- a) Chris May noted that while there had been no Deep Dives into Secondary RE in Ofsted inspections, where reports did reference RE, these comments were positive.
- b) Justine Ball updated the group on Primary Ofsted inspection visits noting that there have been several which include reference to RE and that these generated positive comments which were set out in the report.
- c) Justine Ball added that the much awaited RE Subject report from Ofsted had still not been published. She explained that although Amanda Spielman's comments in early December about national RE had been generally gloomy, in Portsmouth, when mentioned in Ofsted inspections, RE generates positive comments.
- d) Information from other HIAS discussions with Primary & Secondary subject leaders was shared and it was noted that where HIAS had visited the school, it was more likely that staff would then attend Primary RE Network meetings, and the membership of the Network was growing.

8. Update on ECT and subject training offer:

Chris May reported that:



- a) He monitors recruitment websites and was not aware of any current vacancies for RE teachers being advertised.
- b) In terms of teacher training at Winchester only one student this year has chosen to take RE as their primary subject in the humanities PGCE course offered by the University. Others have chosen to take RE as their secondary subject, but this is of concern as it may lead to a shortage of RE specialist teachers in the area in the future.
- c) However, the bursary is now in place, and this may have a positive impact in the future.

9. Potential changes to the SACRE constitution

Justine Ball reported that this action from the last SACRE meeting is underway, and she is in touch with representatives from the SACRE groups about possible updates. She added that a report on proposed changes is likely to be presented to the SACRE at its meeting in the summer term.

The current Portsmouth SACRE Constitution can be viewed at [Portsmouth SACRE Constitution](#)