

Portsmouth  
CITY COUNCIL

**Title of meeting:** Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

**Date of meeting:** Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March

**Subject:** SACRE Monitoring Group Report

**Report by:** Patricia Hannam

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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 sub-group on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018. The group is working to support SACRE in fulfilling its duty to ensure the effectiveness of RE through the implementation of the Agreed Syllabus.

The group received an update regarding primary Ofsted reports mentioning RE or SMSC or preparing children and young people for life in modern Britain, findings of 9 visits to Portsmouth Primary schools as well as analysis of Portsmouth 2017 GCSE Religious Studies data.

**Recommendations:** (see section 4 and agenda)

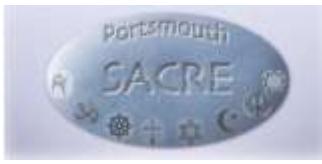
2. **Background:** The monitoring group met on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018 at 15.30.

Present:- Cllr Ryan Brent (SACRE Chair who chaired the meeting), Councillor Suzy Horton, Mike Stoneman, Sam Duddles, Jane Kelly, Patricia Hannam, Joanne Wildsmith.

Apologies :- Elizabeth Jenkerson & Sarah Sadler.

3. **Evidence considered**

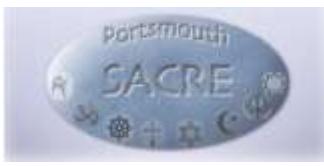
**3.1 Ofsted Visits:** the group were reminded about the different Ofsted visits and the various reports that may be written following these visits. Longer reports written after a 2 day visit are more likely to mention RE specifically or infer something about RE through mention of a schools requirement to



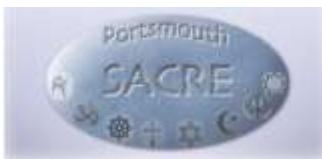
promote children's Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Development or with regard to preparing them for life in modern Britain. In the period examined no Portsmouth secondary schools had received an Ofsted visit and 1 primary school had been visited for a full (section 5) inspection (2 days). Two further primary schools had a monitoring visit, none of which mentioned RE explicitly.

### **3.2 SACRE Monitoring Visits:**

- 3.2.1** In this period, SACRE Advisers have made visits to 9 Portsmouth Primary schools together with a members of SACRE, one further visit is planned. The experience of visiting these 10 schools will give SACRE a good base-line understanding of the situation regarding RE across the City moving forward into the new period of academisation. Several SACRE members have had an opportunity to accompany one of these visits, therefore deepening SACRE's understanding of what RE looks like in Portsmouth Primary Schools. 1 visit was made to a combined Primary and Secondary school, 4 visits to through Primary schools, 2 visits to Junior schools and 3 visits to infants schools.
- 3.2.2** All schools visited, bar one, were planning and teaching RE to their children and were using the Portsmouth Locally Agreed Syllabus, *Living Difference III*. The only exception to this was a converter academy school which taught RE using *some* of the ideas from Living Difference III as well as other ideas and a different assessment model. Although, their RE was thoughtful and well planned, it did not follow the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Therefore it was advised that they should either fully adopt the Locally Agreed Syllabus or spend further time creating their own RE syllabus, which as an academy they could do.



- 3.2.3** Of the other 8 schools who were using the Locally Agreed Syllabus well, 5 had received training by attending the Portsmouth RE network meetings. The monitoring visit revealed that these 5 schools had a clearer understanding of the syllabus and contained examples of good practice. Accessing training through the initial implementation courses available to schools following the adoption of Living Difference III, as well as the on-going network groups, is clearly effective in ensuring good RE across the City.
- 3.2.4** None of the schools visited had any problems with withdrawal from RE. All of the schools had very few queries and where they did, these were from withdrawals for reasons to do with religious convictions (such as Jehovah's Witness families not wanting the school to teach their child about Christianity). There were no concerns in this area.
- 3.2.5** In all schools the RE was either wholly blocked (as recommended) or mostly blocked and teachers were teaching RE, not cover teachers or HLTA's, which is recommended.
- 3.2.6** Overall 4 of the schools were found to already have strong provision for RE. 3 of the schools visited revealed good RE with some development areas. 2 schools were giving cause for concern. One of these has been mentioned in 3.2.2 above and the other school has yet to appoint a subject lead for their primary RE work.
- 3.2.7 Conclusion:** The visits overall give a very positive endorsement of the way Living Difference III has been implemented across Portsmouth since its adoption in 2016. The profile of RE seems high in the primary schools and all schools visited were keen to meet with the SACRE members and adviser as well as being keen to discuss how to improve RE in their schools. There were no concerns with regard to withdrawal. It was evident that the better understanding and practice came from those schools attending



regular training. An LA school must use the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Academies should be advised that they are welcome to use Living Difference III in its entirety, but that they cannot partially use the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Schools should make sure they have accessed training in order to understand the working of the syllabus as well as the law regarding RE in a clear manner.

**3.3 GCSE Results: Introduction:** Data from 2017 GCSE examination series, regarding full course and short course Religious Studies (RS) entries from Portsmouth schools was considered. Although it is difficult to make clear comparisons year on year, since it is not the same group of students and not always the same teachers teaching the GCSE being compared, it is useful to consider how the subject is developing across the authority as this gives some indication of the religious education students are receiving in KS4 and how provision may be changing. However, it is also important to consider the results a year at a time.

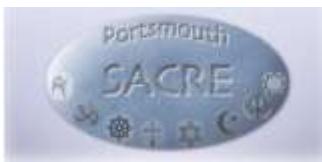
Examination of the results reveals that there has been a substantial reduction in the number of schools in Portsmouth entering young people for GCSE in 2017 over 2016. However where young people are being entered, all are achieving well including students disadvantaged students. However the reduction in GCSE RS entries reveals a concern about what the majority of young people in Portsmouth are able to access regarding RE at KS4.

### Background information

- The GCSE Full Course examination sat in 2017, and called Religious Studies (RS), is in general intended to be a 2 year course sat at the end of year 11, however some schools teach the GCSE RS over three years, beginning in year 9.
- This GCSE RS Full Course is planned to be taught in 120 hours, Ideally in three lessons per fortnight, over 2 years.



- Some schools have taught RS GCSE in one lesson per week over two or three years, occasionally with teachers are non-specialist teachers. Under these circumstances it is harder for young people to achieve well.
- Schools which have the best results for RS are those which enable students to access the full time recommendation for the GCSE and to be taught by specialist teachers. This was probably how RS was taught in Portsmouth schools entering students for GCSE in RS in 2017
- The RS GCSE sat in 2017 was first available for examination in 2011, this is the last year of this GCSE reporting grades at A\*-C. A new RS course is in place now which teachers have been teaching over the past 2 years. This will be examined for the first time in 2018 and graded 9 (highest grade) – 1 (lowest).
- Assessment Objectives for the current GCSE Religious Studies course are : AO1 Describe, explain and analyse, using knowledge and understanding 50% AO2 Use evidence and reasoned argument to express and evaluate personal responses, informed insights, and differing viewpoints 50%.
- RS GCSE tests not only knowledge but the capacity to *analyse and to use evidence and reasoned argument to express and evaluate*. Teaching must enable students to do this. RS GCSE success is about higher order thinking, not just facts. Challenging children to analyse evaluate and in other ways reason well at KS3 and KS4 is known to raise standards at GCSE.
- However, the new GCSE is more ‘knowledge heavy’ and is putting different demands upon teachers and also students. SACRE may want to be alert to a further possible reduction in entries for 2018.
- Criteria referencing has disappeared from the way the GCSE is marked and been replace by ‘norm referencing’. There are no longer any precise grade boundaries. These will only be determined after the examinations have all been marked. The grades will be distributed proportionally and grades given 9-1 (not A\*-G as previously).

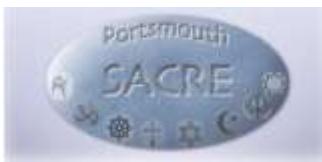


## Overall findings

- Entries for GCSE Full Course in Portsmouth reveal that out of a cohort in 2016 of 1729, 670 students sat Full course GCSE. In 2017 this was 332 entries out of a cohort of 1633. There has been a large reduction in the number of entries across the authority in 2017. This raises a concern regarding what the other students are doing whilst in KS4 to ensure they are accessing their entitlement to religious education (RE) during this key stage. A further 83 students sat the Short Course GCSE RS examination in one school in 2017.
- It is important to note that despite the reduction in numbers of entries, *overall* students undertaking Full Course RS GCSE in Portsmouth have done well compared to the national. Overall young people have achieved 75% A\*-C translating to an average points score of 5.1 (70% A\*-C and points score of 4.7 is the national figure). This is important since the mechanism for 'points scoring' has changed.

## Key points from Monitoring Group for SACRE to consider:-

- Portsmouth Schools that have achieved well in RS GCSE in 2017 should be congratulated.
- However, RE should be taught at all key stages, preferably by RE specialist teachers or teachers who have access on going CPD in religious education, in order to ensure high achievement and engagement in the subject at KS4 whether or not students are studying for the GCSE.
- Where GCSE is not taught at KS4, students should have access to a rich religious education curriculum that not only meets the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus but also ensures schools meet the OFSTED requirements for religious education as set out in the Ofsted Handbook in summer of 2016.
- The Monitoring Group recommends that SACRE's professional adviser writes to all Portsmouth secondary Head teachers to make enquiries as to what is happening for all students at KS4 in current years 10 and 11. Where there is evidence that GCSE has not been sat by all or most students they should be reminded that if they are not



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undertaking GCSE that the Agreed Syllabus is available and should be followed at KS4.

#### **4. Recommendations:**

That the report is received and in addition:

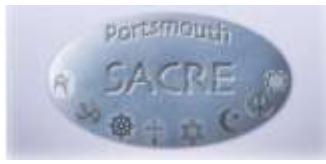
- (i) SACRE's professional adviser writes to school leaders, including in Academy Trusts, where there is concern about their primary RE
- (ii) SACRE congratulates Portsmouth Schools that have achieved well in RS GCSE in 2017.
- (iii) SACRE's professional adviser writes to all Portsmouth secondary head teachers to make enquiries as to what is happening for all students at KS4 in current years 10 and 11. Where there is evidence that GCSE has not been sat by all or most students they should be reminded that if students are not studying for RS GCSE that Agreed Syllabus is available and should be followed at KS4 to ensure the right approach to religious education at this stage of a young person's school career and to ensure an appropriate level of challenge.

#### **Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

| <b>Title of document</b> | <b>Location</b> |
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The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....



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Signed by: