



Title of meeting: Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education
Date of meeting: 1 November 2023
Subject: SACRE Monitoring Group Report
Report by: Justine Ball, 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 sub-group on 11 October 2023.

The group received updates on professional RE education and monitoring the effectiveness of RE and the first national 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 11 October 2023.
Present:

Present: Pastor Chris Thomas (Group A), Revd. Samantha Duddles (Group B), Jane Kelly (Group B), Kari Laing (Group C) and Taki Jaffer, Councillors Asghar Shah and 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), and Karen Martin (SACRE Clerk).

The meeting was chaired by Justine Ball.

- 4. Inspector/Adviser Updates:**

Primary phase

In June 2023, 12 primary and special teachers visited the Mosque. This visit and the visit earlier in the year to the Portsmouth Anglican Cathedral provided CPD opportunities for the teachers involved. It was agreed that repeating the opportunity to other places of worship would be beneficial.

The Primary RE Network met online earlier in the term and the focus this year aimed to support planning good RE for the year. 13 teachers and RE leads had attended. Discussion at the meeting included the RE research review and Ofsted deep dives for RE. There have been relatively few Ofsted deep dives on RE -



approximately 5% for England in both primary and secondary (where it is also bottom of the subject list for deep dives). There was also a focus on different religions in RE and the opportunities to do light touches on these to support the delivery of Living Difference IV.

There is not a Secondary Network due to the numbers involved.

Actions:

It was agreed that an opportunity to visit a different place of worship for secondary, primary and special school teachers would be set up to include CPD opportunities by the two SACRE advisers.

5. Updates on Portsmouth 2022 GCSE Religious Studies examinations and known results:

Chris May reported that data for individual schools is not yet available, and Debbie Anderson confirmed that all data is subject to verification.

Chris May talked through the national data and information for the geographical area of Hampshire, which includes Portsmouth and Southampton. This indicates that:

- a) Since 2010 GCSE entries for RE have gone up, although short course entries are down by 92% as these do not contribute to school performance data.
- b) Nationally there is an upward trend for History and Geography entries where other humanities subjects are stable. Hampshire is 37th out of 47 counties for uptake of RE at GCSE, though in terms of grades achieved the region is ranked 22nd for grades 4-9.
- c) For A levels - Hampshire is 44th out of 47 counties for uptake of RE at A Level and is ranked 23rd for achieving grades A* for C.
- d) Where students are entered for GCSE or A Level example, the performance is in line with national trends but not enough students are entering public exams.

In discussion it was noted that the situation is the result of a number of factors including: the low number of RE teachers available and their capacity to offer RE and curriculum time given to RE; the real impact of excluding RE as an EBacc subject for assessment purposes; and the lack of Ofsted deep dives in RE.

Justine Ball reported the government had recently published a list of bursaries on 10 October and this included bursaries of £10,000 for RE teacher training from 2024-25.

6. Other sources of evidence of effectiveness of RE:

Justine Ball introduced this item, explaining that Living Difference IV was now halfway through its life having been adopted in 2021 and needing review in 2026. She added that the priority this year is to start gathering evidence on the Locally Agreed Syllabus in schools to see the training needs of teachers. She noted that in networks and on visits, teachers liked the approach of the cycle of enquiry, concepts and the pedagogy to teaching RE. Living Difference IV introduced the



idea of golden threads - belonging, community, special and love - which are revisited as different religions are studied and RE is taught at different age groups. A useful result of the golden threads approach is that teachers are reporting that it is excellent for planning the curriculum, as it provides links between units, continuity and progression and sets up building blocks in RE.

An area for future development within Living Difference IV is on pondering time - and the opportunity for self-study. Justine Ball noted that Special schools are very good at planning pondering time and many secondary schools are too, but that more could be done to help primary schools consider the different ways this could be planned in school. It is proposed to develop case studies of schools that have implemented pondering time well and these will go on the Hampshire Moodle.

Chris May commented that where the benefits of utilising golden threads to support progression has been explained to secondary school RE leaders, they are keen to adopt it. He added that the flexibility offered by Living Difference IV is embraced by teachers.

7. Ofsted Reports

Justine Ball confirmed that although there had been no deep dives in RE on recent Ofsted visits, the reports were generally positive. Links had been made between RE and British values and respect for others. Debbie Anderson explained that links to personal development and inclusivity and preparing children for the wider world had been a common theme.

8. Update on ECT and subject training offer:

Chris May reported that the biggest news is in relation to the announcement on RE bursaries. He noted that this had been campaigned for over a long period of time by AULRE, Culham St Gabriel's and others had been subject to an open letter to Gillian Keegan, Secretary of State for Education of the United Kingdom. NATRE had been represented Deborah Weston at an education Select Committee hearing on 12 September 2023 when RE had been discussed as a shortage subject. Following the announcement of the RE bursary, it is hoped that the situation relating to RE specialist teachers will improve.

Chris May reported that Winchester has already moved to offering combined humanities subjects for its PGCE courses and that History and RE is a popular combination. He reported that he was not aware of any ECT or other RE teacher appointments in Portsmouth.

9. Withdrawal from RE and Collective Worship

Withdrawal from RE and/or Collective Worship was discussed as there seemed to be some anecdotal evidence that withdrawals are happening more than previously. Justine Ball commented that the findings of the survey in Portsmouth last year indicated very low levels of withdrawal but noted that not all schools had completed the survey. It was noted by members of the Group that where withdrawal requests



are made, schools work with families to increase their understanding of the value of RE and Collective Worship and this can ensure children stay in and participate.

Actions:

Following discussion, it was agreed that the Collective Worship survey would be sent to all schools after Christmas and early in the Spring 2024 term - by Justine Ball, SACRE Advisor and Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement.

10. Other areas discussed

There was agreement that EMAS should be invited to a future meeting as their visits to schools and 1:1 work with children provides valuable information. EMAS representative/s will therefore be invited to attend the next Monitoring Group meeting by Justine Ball, SACRE Advisor.

The Revd. Sam Duddles, SACRE Chair, reported that she had recently had a meeting with Jessi Wilson of CoPS. Last year CoPS appointed their diversity representative to work with SACRE; this year the ambition is to elect a young person to sit specifically with SACRE. This individual will be tasked with a specific piece of work to present to and challenge SACRE at the Spring term meeting. Revd. Duddles reported that the long term aim is to set up a youth SACRE in the city and that she is hoping to meet with the youth parliament with a view to raising the profile of RE with them.

Revd. Sam Duddles noted that there was an outstanding action from the last meeting and that was for herself and Councillor Abdul Kadir and Councillor Asghar Shah to set up an initial meeting with Mr Ali at the Muslim Academy in Buckland with a view to further meetings with other mosques and a future full SACRE meeting being held at one of the Portsmouth mosques. Councillor Shah undertook to set this up alongside Councillor Kadir.

Councillor Asghar Shah reported that he had recently given a talk in a local school about Islam, that he was in touch with 3-4 other local schools and that he would be happy to visit other schools to talk on this subject. This was welcomed by the SACRE Chair who said that she would be able to help facilitate this.