

## **Draft letter for consideration at SACRE November 2016**

### **Hampshire SACRE initial response to the Commission on Religious Education**

To: [commission@religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk](mailto:commission@religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk)

From: Hampshire SACRE

Date: 1 November 2016

Dear ,

We are very pleased that an independent Commission has been established to make wide ranging recommendations to review religious education in schools. We agree that this has come at a critical time and that your work will be very important for religious education.

We would like to request that our initial views offered here are taken forward into the period of the review. We are taking the opportunity in writing at this stage to share some of the areas we consider Hampshire has to contribute to the discussion and hope you will be able to follow up with us in due course.

#### **Legal and structural arrangements:**

Hampshire has been able to give strong support to religious education at least since the late 1970's and the publishing of 'Religious Education in Hampshire Schools' (1978). This support has been widely noted in the literature (reference). The legal and structural arrangements for religious education are well in place in light of good governance, and we see no need to make amendments to this. Current research by AREIAC reveals Hampshire is not alone in being able to review its agreed syllabus in a timely fashion. In fact most local authorities are able to do so and therefore ensure a syllabus is in place which can be responsive to the needs of their communities.

Ofsted have noted in 2010 and 2013 that many teachers are not aware of the purpose of the subject. In Hampshire, since 2004 we have had a clear purpose statement for RE as part of the agreed syllabus. This is subject to review in light of educational research. However in a recent survey of Hampshire primary and secondary teachers (unpublished 2016), 74% stated that they understood the purpose of religious education. We are proud of this and acknowledge the role of continuing professional development possibilities in Hampshire and across the region to achieve it.

### **Public and professional profile:**

Hampshire is a large Authority with 446 primary institutions and 79 secondary schools. Among the primary schools there are only 13 academies. Because of the Local Authority's care for all children and young people in the county, regardless of where they go to school, our County Officers ensure there is good CPD provision open to all teachers. Currently 10 primary cluster groups are in place across the county and 3 for secondary schools. The professional profile for religious education therefore remains high in Hampshire.

Hampshire SACRE is of the view that religious education should be compulsory until the age of 16. Our experience tells us that this is reasonable based on research from schools and in addition from evidence gathered by the SACRE monitoring group. This is a group of SACRE members which meets three times a year before SACRE meetings.

Research does show us however, that there is further work to be done to convince parents and other stakeholders in education about the importance of religious education. SACRE is therefore currently looking at ways to do this and to promote further the importance of religious education. This is something we would hope the Commission will look at.

SACRE is clear that the key enabling factors which promote good religious education often lie in the hands of senior school leaders. A strong SACRE has an important part to play in helping to underpin this. The LA supports Hampshire SACRE members in undertaking visits to schools to look at religious education and liaise with the Hampshire

SACRE Officers (LA Advisers) to consider next steps for schools. All SACRE members who attend such visits have themselves received Religious Education training before going into schools and therefore have a very clear idea about the areas they are looking for.

### **Initial Teacher Education and CPD:**

Hampshire SACRE has representation from Winchester University. Our officers are also able to liaise regularly with other academics in theology, religion and philosophy and especially as well as those responsible for initial teacher education programs at Winchester and other Universities and as school based providers. As a strong SACRE we have been able to offer leadership to others in the area and run a South Central SACRE Hub for our region. Its aim is to ensure teachers have access to good quality continuing professional development especially in boosting subject knowledge for primary and secondary RE practitioners. Part of Hampshire SACRE's commitment includes facilitating a reading and research group for all school teachers as well as academics, linking classroom experience with academic research. Its aim is to engage with current initiatives in the world of RE and to host leading experts in the field to engage in discussions.

### **Withdrawal:**

Finally, we have conducted a survey on withdrawal from religious education across the area and have some clear findings on this that we would wish to share. In general the findings reveal that the request to withdraw a pupil from RE is rare and the circumstances do not indicate anything untoward taking place in the county. We therefore would be of the view that the continuing parental right to withdraw from RE should be reconsidered.

### **Proposals for change:**

Hampshire SACRE is broadly in favour of the current arrangements for religious education continuing as stated in the Education Act 1996, Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Education Act 2002.

We would suggest that religious education should continue to be taught to all children and young people other than those in nursery classes. Although we are in favour of teachers' rights being safeguarded, should

they wish to withdraw from the teaching of religious education; we would recommend that the right of parents to withdraw their children from RE should be reviewed.

We consider that religious education should be taught in all maintained schools including voluntary controlled and aided schools should be taught in accordance with an Agreed Syllabus. We would want to encourage independent schools to consider using the Agreed Syllabus.

Hampshire SACRE fully appreciates that although the religious landscape of Britain is changing an Agreed Syllabus should reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain have been the main Christian, while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions in Great Britain. We would want to add that further research should be undertaken to ensure that what it means to be religious is broadened to take into account both the Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions.

We would endorse that an Agreed Syllabus must not be designed to convert pupils, or to urge a particular religion or religious belief on pupils. Hampshire SACRE's view is that religious education should continue to be locally determined and that there is not strong argument to say that religious education provision in England would be enhanced by the adoption of a nationally determined curriculum. Our view is that such a move would be more likely to be to the detriment of the subject.

Hampshire SACRE hopes that our views may be of interest to the Commission and look forward to a further opportunity to discuss these with you in more detail.

With best wishes,

Hampshire SACRE

## References

▬ Robson, G., 1996. Religious Education, Government Policy and Professional Practice, 1985-1995. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 19(1), pp.13-23.

Hampshire, L.E.A., 1978. Religious Education in Hampshire Schools. Religion, Culture and Education.