



NOTICE OF MEETING

**Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
Wednesday, 9 July 2008, 5.00 pm
Bedford Room, Education Centre, Easthampstead Park Mansion**

To: The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

ALISON SANDERS
Director of Corporate Services

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**Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
Wednesday, 9 July 2008, 5.00 pm
Education Centre, Easthampstead Park Mansion**

AGENDA

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Agenda Item 2

**STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
04 MARCH 2008
(5.00 pm- 7.00 pm)**

Present:

The Free Churches:
Rev M. Bentley
Mrs I. Robinson
Mrs P. Ridgway

Roman Catholic Churches
Ms L. Birley
Mrs A. Gibbons

Other Religions:
Mrs K. Trikha (Hindu Faith)

The Church of England:
Mr G. Anderson (Chairman)
Mrs M. Beadsley

Associations representing Teachers:
Mrs S. Hunt
Mr C. Hickson
Mrs F. Allen

Bracknell Forest Borough Council:
Councillor Blatchford
Councillor Burrows

Co-opted Members:
Dr K. Hadfield (Baha'i)
Ms G. Ledsham (Quaker)

Observers:
Mr A. Rashid
Mr D. Fawcett

In Attendance: Mrs J. Fageant, SACRE's Associate Adviser
Mr R. Welch, Principal Adviser Education, Children's Services and Libraries
Mrs P. Patel (Democratic Services Officer)
Mr B. Allison (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for absence were received from:

Kathleen Nugent, Julie Mintern, Martin Surrell, and Councillors Thompson, Kensall and Mrs Hayes.

42. **Welcome [prayer to be led by Colin Hickson]**

The Chairman, Gordon Anderson, welcomed all those present to the meeting.

43. **Minutes of the Meeting Held on 13 November 2007**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 13 November 2007 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44. **Matters Arising**

Members were advised that the SACRE Annual Report 2006/07 had been finalised and copies were available on request.

45. **The New SACRE Constitution and Membership (attached)**

It was noted that the proposed Constitution had been agreed by the Executive Member for Education and Libraries and was now the official constitution of Bracknell Forest SACRE.

The SACRE clerk had written to all other major religious groups as outlined in the Agreed Syllabus and members were advised that a formal response had been received from the Board of Deputies of British Jews who had nominated Marcia Purnell from Reading Hebrew Congregation as their representative to attend SACRE meetings. No response had been received from the Muslim or Buddhist groups. The Chairman stated that he was using contacts in Slough to attempt to find an appropriate Sikh representative, but added that he would welcome the ideas of other members on the matter.

It was noted that one vacancy remained for the Church of England group, but it was hoped that David Fawcett would be nominated.

In the Teacher's Union group it was reported that neither PAT nor SHA had proposed a representative, it was stated that the SACRE clerk would continue to work on this.

The Chairman reported that he had assured Kathy Hadfield that she could remain as a co-opted member representing the Baha'i faith, but that it should not be taken as a permanent Baha'i slot, as it was possible that SACRE might wish to appoint another minority group representative sometime in the future. SACRE supported the chairman's action.

46. **Budget Report for 2007/08 and Expected Budget for 2008/09 (verbal)**

The Principal Adviser (Education and Libraries) reminded Members that SACRE had been allocated a budget of £3356 and that if any further sum was added this would be noted in the next Annual Report and discussed at the next SACRE meeting.

It was reported that last year the most significant source of expenditure had been the purchase of artefacts and the costs involved with attending the joint SACRE conference. It was noted that next year the update of the artefacts catalogue would also be a source of expenditure and would need to be considered. The Chairman stated that he had been assured that because SACRE had under-spent during the last financial year, its future budget would not be reduced in future years.

(Action: Bob Welch)

47. **Artefacts Update and Review (verbal)**

Mrs Sam Hunt reported that SACRE had spent £900 on new religious artefacts – concentrating on Hindu, Jewish and Sikh collections as these had the greatest demand. The Chairman declared that he had authorised an additional £400 to be allocated for the purchase of artefacts which he asked the meeting to ratify, this was agreed by members. In addition Mrs Hunt asked if SACRE would consider an additional allocation of funds – as an imminent school trip to Israel would present a good opportunity to purchase Christian artefacts which were difficult to obtain in the UK. The Chairman felt that money should be spent cautiously; as a result the meeting agreed that an allocation of up to £500 be made for Mrs Hunt to spend.

It was reported that over the summer term Mrs Hunt would photograph all current artefacts and update their descriptions over the course of a day. It was then proposed that SACRE reprint this updated Artefacts catalogue in the autumn term and send it to all local schools and NQTS. The possibility of publishing the catalogue in an electronic form was also debated and the Principal Adviser was asked to investigate the costs involved in each case. The meeting decided to approve the reprinting of the catalogue in principle, depending on the costs involved as reported by the Principal Adviser.

On the issue of the loaning of religious artefacts it was reported that this had been erratic; while Primary schools had often utilised the service, secondary schools had been less keen to do so. One of the problems which discouraged schools from using this service was reported to be confusion over the loaning of the artefacts. While the two people conducting the loaning of artefacts were hard-working, it was reported that they lacked an in-depth knowledge of the artefacts and could only use the artefact catalogue which caused problems in communications with schools. It was suggested that the Education Centre would benefit from a person dedicated to the loaning of artefacts.

It was felt that the fact that two people were working on this task was positive – since this offered a continuity of service if either individual left the Council's service. It was noted that an in-depth knowledge of the artefacts was beyond the remit of these individuals and that the teachers and religious specialists in schools should be supplying this knowledge.

It was reported that in-service training sessions (illustrating the correct handling and proper uses of religious artefacts) continued to be run for primary school teachers. It was hoped that attendance would be good as this might allow the knowledge imparted to be cascaded through course attendees to other staff at their schools.

Finally, Mrs Hunt reported problems surrounding discontinuity in the artefact catalogue. Originally she had worked closely with the individual who had catalogued every artefact and stored this information electronically. Subsequently, this person had left the employment of the Education Centre and after several different people had filled the vacant position - the whereabouts of these records within the ICT system was lost. The Chairman expressed concern over this issue and asked Mrs Hunt to continue to pursue this matter.

(Action: Sam Hunt and Bob Welch)

48. Brakenhale School - RE Inspection Report Update (verbal)

It was reported that a recent subject-focussed Ofsted survey inspection programme at Brakenhale School had revealed all aspects of the school's Religious Education to be inadequate. The Principal Adviser reported an update from Martin Surrell who had discussed the school's issues with the head of RE. It was reported that long term measures in response to the issues would include; a review of the provision of Key Stage 4 and the implementation of a new approach to raise the profile of the subject in the eyes of pupils.

It was noted that Brakenhale's problems highlighted the need for a greater awareness of the new syllabus since the secondary curriculum would be revised by September 2008. Furthermore, it was pointed out that this could present an opportunity to look at the implementation of the syllabus. The Associate Adviser to SACRE commented that national studies showed that schools were in general slow to respond to new syllabuses.

The Principal Adviser reported that three teachers had benefited from retraining at Brakenhale and would cascade this knowledge back into their departments. It was also announced that the Associate Adviser to SACRE had looked into a meeting with the heads of RE from local schools to discuss and analyse common problems and share ideas. This was reported to be necessary as Ofsted reports no longer gave the level of detail on specific subjects that they used to. Members enquired about the viability of requesting help from the governing body of the school. The Chairman reported that this might be problematic given his experiences of requesting decisions or help from governing bodies. The Principal Adviser said that he could take this request to the governor support team.

A Member commented that many governing bodies often felt that it was important to have a governor who had a level of expertise in a subject area, before they offered their assistance.

(Action: Bob Welch)

49. QCA/NASACRE National Conference 17 January 2008 - RE and Community Cohesion: the future for SACREs (attached)

Louise Birley reported that this had been an informative conference which had focussed on community cohesion.

SACRE's Associate Adviser advised members that the speaker at the conference had asserted that his model of practice had worked best where he had worked with schools to complete a self-evaluation form for RE. The Associate Adviser reported that a similar measure – an independent four year programme organised by West Berkshire SACRE had received a positive outcome although it had not been universally popular. It was reported that this programme had been funded by the LA from the SACRE's budget. It was suggested that a similar programme could be looked into by Bracknell. The Associate Adviser said that she would report back after the West Berkshire SACRE meeting.

On the issue of how well SACRE members knew each other the Chairman pointed out that while some members might feel that they would like a chance to get to know other members better, others had known each other for a long time. These members

had been SACRE members for much of its existence and this continuity of experience was one of the Bracknell SACRE's strengths. Members acknowledged this but also felt that while Bracknell SACRE had a diverse membership it did have a Christian dominance and wondered how other faith groups felt about this. The Chairman felt that this was SACRE's purpose – each member brought his or her opinion on a specific issue – rather than every member being aware of each other's views. Also he pointed out that Bracknell SACRE had given a considerable amount of training to its members as well as opportunities to meet religious counterparts in informal situations. Members noted the various occasions in which Bracknell SACRE had met members of other religions in Hindu temples, Jewish Synagogues and also at specific lunch meetings.

The Associate Adviser to SACRE reported that at the last meeting of the Reading SACRE she had been part of a wide ranging debate of the different perspectives of the members. Each member had briefly explained why they had an interest in attending the Reading SACRE – and this prompted much debate. Admittedly Reading SACRE had far fewer members than Bracknell Forest which had facilitated their discussion but it was suggested that members of Bracknell Forest SACRE might be able to bring in a written explanation of their interests and motivations which could be circulated. It was agreed that this could be discussed again at a future meeting.

(Action: Jo Fageant)

50. Bracknell Forest SACRE Prizes to Pupils for Achievement in RE - Discussion (verbal)

The proposal that there should be a prize for achievement in religious education was unanimously agreed, but it was felt that there should be differentiation between primary and secondary levels and also that there should be different prizes for the different key stages – 1, 2,3,4 and 5. Members highlighted the need to broaden the scope of the prizes beyond the academic so that they would reward other merits like social mindedness or acts towards community cohesion. A working party of three volunteers (Samantha Hunt, Paula Ridgway and Kusum Trikha) was set up to consider this issue, liaise with the Principal Adviser for Education, Children's Services and Libraries and put together some draft proposals for the next SACRE meeting.

(Action: Samantha Hunt, Paula Ridgway, Kusum Trikha and Bob Welch)

51. NASACRE /Westhill Awards 2009/10 for Young Inter-faith Projects (attached)

Members felt that Bracknell Forest SACRE should submit a project for this award – but that it was important that it was professionally presented. It was agreed that the target should be to submit a project for next year's award (2009/10), which was likely to have a deadline of March 2009.

An idea was put forward that the project centre upon a totem pole of how pupils feel about their faith with an image or symbol to represent every faith in Bracknell Forest. This could include an exhibition from each school, with pupils expressing how they feel about their faith through a series of visual images. This idea was welcomed and supported by members. A working group to oversee and develop this project was set up, and comprised: Kathy Hadfield, Felicity Allen and Gill Ledsham.

The Chairman stated that he looked forward to receiving a progress report from the working group at the next meeting.

(Action: Kathy Hadfield, Felicity Allen and Gill Ledsham)

52. **NASACRE AGM - 8 May 2008 (verbal)**

It was reported that this meeting would take place in London on Tuesday 8 May 2008. Anne Gibbons was appointed to attend this meeting on behalf of Bracknell Forest SACRE.

(Action: Anne Gibbons)

53. **Berkshire SACREs' Conference - June 2008 (verbal)**

It was reported that this Conference would take place in Easthampstead Park Conference Centre from 6- 9 pm on 18 June 2008. The Keynote speaker would be Allen Brine (Senior HMI for R.E) on the Role of RE in the promotion of Community Cohesion. SACRE members were asked to inform the Chairman if they wished to attend this function, but were requested not to apply unless they were sure they could make the date, as every cancellation would incur a cost to SACRE.

(Action: All)

54. **Self Evaluation of Bracknell Forest SACRE (parts 1 and 2) (attached)**

Members agreed that they had met all their responsibilities in terms of those outlined on page 22 of the report.

Members undertook the self evaluation exercise and agreed the following:

Part 1: STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF PROVISION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1a Compliance and Time Allocation for RE:	DEVELOPING/ESTABLISHED
1b Public Examination Entries in RE:	ESTABLISHED
1c Standards and Achievement: including standards at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, GCSE, AS and A2 level:	DEVELOPING/ESTABLISHED
1d Quality of Teaching:	ESTABLISHED
1e Quality of Leadership and management:	DEVELOPING
1f Recruitment and Retention Issues: Level of Specialist Provision:	DEVELOPING
1g Resources:	ADVANCED

Part 2: MANAGEMENT OF THE SACRE AND PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LA AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS

2a SACRE meetings:	ESTABLISHED
2b Membership and Training:	ADVANCED

2c Improvement/ Development Planning:	ADVANCED
2d Professional and Financial Support:	ADVANCED
2e Information and Advice:	DEVELOPING
2f Partnerships with Other Key Stakeholders:	DEVELOPING

With regards to key areas 1d, 1e and 1f, it was felt that some of the requirements involved in the higher criteria were not compatible with the role of SACRE or appropriate to its setting in Bracknell Forest.

55. **Dates of Future Meetings**

Wednesday 9 July 2008 – at Easthampstead Park Conference Centre.
Thursday 6 November 2008

CHAIRMAN

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REPORT ON NASACRE AGM Thursday 8th May 2008

Notes from Anne Gibbons

I was grateful to be given the opportunity to attend the AGM as representative for Bracknell Forest SACRE. It was a most interesting day.

Keynote Address by Karen Armstrong: *The Great Transformation.*

Karen Armstrong is a historian of religion and an original thinker on the role of religion in the modern world. She has written many books, the latest of which, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* informed the main theme of her talk. She refers to herself as a 'freelance monotheist'.

Religion is often cited as a cause of violence and terrorism – but the reasons for violence are not religious, but political. Violence happens when people are under attack. It is important to go back to the origins of religion – to what she terms the *axial period*, from 900 – 200 BCE, during which all the major religions have their roots. She included Buddhism/Hinduism, Monotheism in Israel, Confucianism/Daoism. All developed an awareness of a transcendent reality (to Christians, God.). She thinks we need to discover common ancient values.

In essence, religion is not just about belief. The word *credo*, in its original form, meant 'I give my heart'. Religion is about doing things. The first essential is to get rid of egotism. Among the examples she used was the characteristic posture of prostration in Islam – a symbol of surrender of self to the divine. And Jesus (Paul's letter to the Philippians) "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave". The basis of Christianity, she thinks, is ethical, not doctrinal. Christians are led to put other people first.

Religion is a catalyst for change, a revulsion against violence, which is a way of defending the ego. Buddhism is about non-harm, no cross word or impatient gesture. Jesus told his followers to turn the other cheek. Mohammed sought to make peace from a warring, tribal society. *Jihad* essentially means struggle – not holy war. Rabbi Hillel emphasised the Torah teachings about behaviour to one's neighbour. All are about compassion and concern for *everyone*. Jesus' command to 'love your enemies' does not mean sentimental love but looking out for the interests of others. In Leviticus, the priestly strand of Jewish law, there is a constant emphasis on reconciliation and love for neighbour and the stranger. And when Abraham (Genesis 18) offered the three strangers hospitality, there was a divine presence. Even the Greeks, long before the axial age, used Greek tragedy to show shared grief and a common humanity.

The thread running through all religions is the **Golden Rule**: *Do not do unto others that which you would not have done to yourself.* This is the kind of religion we need to teach our children. We must teach them to venerate the faith of the other.

A short 'buzz' discussion in pairs was followed by Question Time with Karen Armstrong. There were many questions and comments from the delegates, including

a discussion about the contrasting accounts of Adam's creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Karen's view is that Adam represents humanity and from 'made in God's image' we might understand that to hurt or slander another person is to desecrate the name of God. She sees the main challenge for educators as that of building a global community. Among the concerns expressed were how to put the teaching of the golden rule into practice in the classroom and how to deal with the lack of respect for all religions shown by some secularists. A lot of food for thought!

The Business Meeting took place after lunch.

The Chair's report:

- The Executive has responded to the new reporting format for SACRES from QCA and the Ofsted long report *Making sense of Religion*.
- Members of the Executive attended the launch of Islam Awareness week and contributed to conferences organised by Teachers' TV.
- The Executive also works with Partners such as the Religious Education Council for England and Wales, QCA and DCSF and the Community Cohesion Unit.
- It is important to keep in touch using the NASACRE website. It gives suggestions for agenda items for SACREs and helps to keep up with current debates. It is the *only* means of accessing SACRE News.
- NASACRE administration is now being supported at the South London Multifaith and Multicultural Resources Centre, Lewisham, by Yvonne Cameron, the Centre Administrator.
- A database has now been set up for SACRE information, including contact details and vacancy information. All SACRE clerks/administrators are asked to inform NASACRE of any changes to local SACRES.

The Treasurer's Report:

- Budget planning has been affected by the sudden move from Westhill RE Centre, now part of Birmingham University, the need to find a new base, and the interim arrangements with the Lewisham Centre. This has made it necessary to suspend the hard copy printing of SACRE News.
- Some invoices for the 2007 AGM have still not been paid by SACRES. In spite of the unclear future, however, the finances appear to be in a sound state. As in recent years, funding from the Westhill trustees enabled NASACRE to award grants for Young People's Interfaith Projects. **The Secretary's Report: The main focus was on recruitment and training for SACRE members.**
- The funding allocated (£50k pa for two years) is only sufficient to target potential new SACRE members. Two regions will be grouped together into a training cohort. Two cohorts will be trained in each year, one cohort to be inclusive across Group A and the other to be confined to minority faith recruitment. A database of current vacancies in all SACRES will be used to target recruitment. The training roll-out will start from April 2008 to March 2009, the first phase to cover LAs in the South West and a joint cohort of the East of England and the South East regions. The programme will be managed by NASACRE with reference to the RE Council. There will be face to face training on the two conference days and field work between them to include an accompanied visit to school to observe an RE lesson.

Elections Julie Groves was re-appointed Honorary Secretary. Jo Fageant and Tricia Martin were elected to the Executive Committee, all for a period of 3 years.

Update from HMI (Alan Brine):

- NASACRE's welcome contribution to Ofsted's 2007 report '*Making Sense of Religion*', is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.
- Ofsted is developing guidance about the inclusion of community cohesion in inspections.
- The 2008 HMI RE Conference (20th May) will focus on pedagogy in RE. It will bring together the RSAs supporting the roll-out of the secondary curriculum. QCA will be represented. It is hoped to provide ideas about extending guidance linked to the non-statutory national framework.
- Among issues raised around the country are how SACREs can monitor the provision for RE/CW and the effectiveness of their Agreed Syllabus; and the implications for RE and SACREs of the new requirement to promote community cohesion – to be inspected from Sept 2008. Worries are expressed about how Ofsted can evaluate CC in a short inspection. The SEF is a trigger for inspection.
- The focus for the coming year is on creative thinking in RE (Section 5).

Update from QCA (Mark Chater):

- The Rose Review of the Primary Curriculum will be supported by QCA. The aim is to take the national framework for RE into the new primary curriculum on a NS basis.
- RE will be included in the new Humanities Diploma.
- Two new documents on the QCA website are <http://www.qca.org.uk/qca15623.aspx> (new SACRE reporting format for annual reports) and <http://www.qca.org.uk/qca15608.aspx> (guidance for agreed syllabus conferences on making effective use of the NSNF).
- The SACRE SEF will move from the Ofsted site to the QCA site later this year.
- The 2008 analysis of SACRE annual reports will focus specifically on the contribution and capacity of SACREs to promote community cohesion.
- As well as the HMI Conference on 20th May 2008, there will be a second event later in 2008, inviting academics in RE to move the pedagogy debate forward.
- The new GCSE RE criteria reflect the NSNF by creating two evenly-balanced outcomes, corresponding to 'learning about' and 'learning from'. Awarding bodies are submitting specification. First teaching cohorts will start in Sept 2009.
- QCA will support the steering and writing groups to draw up proposals to update the RE and SACRE elements of Circular 1/94.

Progress on the RE Strategy: Professor Brian Gates, Chair of the Religious Education Council

REC Strategic Developments include

- Determination to support the RE Action Plan (Jim Knight's talk on website)
- Continuing Re Partnership at national level between DCSF and REC
- Updating guidance on RE in place of 1/94 (RE and SACRES – CW to come)

- Supporting primary and secondary RE teachers. Helping NATRE
- Supporting the effectiveness of local SACRES (roll-out of training)
- Supporting the development of a CPD handbook for RE teachers
- Commissioning an external view of the nature of materials used in RE teaching

The process for developing new guidance will be managed by the REC. The steering and writing groups will be serviced by John Keast (Partnership Adviser) and Sarah Smalley. The steering group will include representatives of different faith groups. The process will start in May-December 2008. Steering and writing will run from January-March 2009 and the guidance will be launched in October 2009.

Young People's Faith Forum Projects:

- **Reports**
 1. Guernsey: The objective was to give young people from Guernsey, where there is very little diversity, experience of other ethnic and religious groups. Year 9 students went to Birmingham and visited different places of worship. The visit was tied in with an art and cultural experience. The young people acted as journalists and recorded the visit electronically.
 2. Hampshire: The focus of this project was pluralism, social and community cohesion, on living together and dealing with difference, not just RE. Schools in Hampshire were twinned with schools in Leicester. It was noticed that some parents in Hampshire withdrew their consent for the mosque visit.
- **Announcement of successful bids for 2008**

Unfortunately the meeting, which was scheduled to end at 3.30pm, ran over time. I left at 3.45pm, so I missed this announcement.

SACRE TOTEM POLE PROJECT

AIMS

To promote inter-faith discussion; find out about each other's faiths on a personal and practical level. What do the students feel is important about their faith?

What images? Why? Any image at all? Muslims may find the idea of any image of a living thing uncomfortable – though the Muslims at TWBS do life drawing without question. However, when I ran a similar event at the Girls' School the Muslims did not participate although the model was draped and female. The Muslim tradition of exquisite calligraphy and abstract mosaic patterns and their traditional, magnificent architecture could provide a basis for their contribution.

An opportunity to work together to produce a final, unified piece.

To promote an exhibition of the final works in an accessible and public venue to be opened by a multi-faith group of local 'grandeers' and perhaps someone nationally known as a promoter of interfaith cooperation.

COMPETITION

Should this event be competitive? If a good prize were to be offered it would spur people on. Would the grant allow this? It would have to be something good; something the students will enjoy, not necessarily something for the school, useful but remote.

AGE GROUP

I suggest year 9/10 as they have acquired some skills and experience and are not yet in the maelstrom of choosing subjects and public exams.

WHEN?

Spring Term as the Autumn is always full of Christmas, Divali etc and the Summer has sports etc. Post Christmas is often a 'down' time.

PRACTICAL NEEDS

A leaflet stating aims, details – time scale, age group/s, prize, exhibition etc. To include photos of some totem poles; suggestions of methods of making a pole; where you can get materials – e.g. cardboard cylinders from carpet suppliers and curtain makers; how to stand it up – sandbags.

Can this be colour printed in house at the Council Offices? Cost? I think 2xA4 sheets stapled as a booklet would be adequate. Cost of postage?

Booking a venue for the exhibition/celebration/ Cost?

I could probably get leave-of-absence from TWBS to go to schools to help if needed.

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Making Sense of Religion – An Agenda for RE

Easthampstead Park

18 June 2008

Sandra Wylie, Chair of the West Berkshire SACRE, opened and Chaired the conference. She introduced Alan Brine who is the subject specialist adviser for RE at Ofsted.

Alan started by explaining what Ofsted does in relation to RE. He pointed out that where school inspection reports used to include paragraphs about each subject, since the new inspection arrangements were introduced in 2005 this is not the case.

Ofsted now does subject focused inspections - 30 per year in both primary and secondary sectors. Although this does not give rise to a huge evidence base it provides some information about trends.

Ofsted is also still looking at Section 5 reports for information about RE in terms of compliance and any contribution RE makes to the success of the schools inspected. There are references to RE in about 7% of reports.

It was explained that subject inspections have particular areas of focus. Recently the following have been included:

- Impact and effectiveness of agreed syllabuses
- Primary teachers' subject knowledge – evidence suggests that where this is limited it is probably one of the most significant barriers to the improvement of RE in schools.
- Community cohesion. Alan reminded us that from next year the way schools deal with the promotion of community cohesion (CoCo) will be included as an area of focus in school inspections. Subject inspections of RE have revealed that the promotion of community cohesion is one of the most consistent strengths of RE and this is what most pupils understand the purpose of RE to be. As a consequence Alan suspects that more than 7% of inspection reports may, in future, make reference to RE, because of its role in CoCo. Pupils identify visits and visitors as some of the best features of RE but there is huge variability in this across schools. Alan sees this as something that needs to be developed.
- Creative thinking in RE – this year's focus. There are two dimensions to this: a) does the subject promote creative thinking in the way its taught AND b) are schools thinking creatively about RE within the curriculum as a whole eg blocking teaching sessions, cross curricular work etc.
- Teaching of Christianity. Ofsted is also looking at this at present because there is a suspicion that thinking about how and why we teach Christianity lacks clarity.

Alan then went on to talk about what is known about the quality of RE. He said this is easily summarised in the phrase: Improving but could do better.

Unpacking that a bit he said:

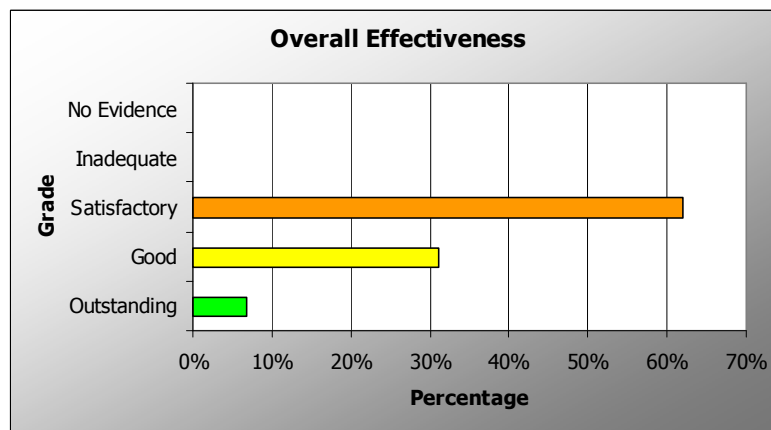
- There is some outstanding RE (especially in the secondary sector)
- Much less poor provision
- Secondary – GCSE numbers up and up and the widespread take up of the short course GCSE has not reduced take up of the full course
- Renewed relevance politically (in relation to CoCo) and in eyes of pupils – not sure why but it is suggested that religion is so often in the news now that pupils can see why they need to learn about it
- Initial Teacher Training (ITT) – good provision and improving secondary teacher supply. RE in ITT for primary is not so good

He also observed that RE in schools which are in special measures often proves to be the schools' strongest subject. This seems to occur more often than one might expect.

HOWEVER:

- Sixth form RE continues to be a problem with statutory requirements very often not met. Alan suggests maybe there needs to be a change in the law especially as it only applies to schools with sixth forms and not college contexts.
- There is too much that is only mediocre
- Too much variability:
 - within schools (eg in primary schools where quality depends to a large extent on the subject knowledge and enthusiasm of individual teachers; in secondary schools there is the on going problem of non-specialist teachers who do not get the chance to develop their knowledge and enthusiasm)
 - between schools (there is a question about how secondary schools build on primary school experiences)
 - across local authorities - Ofsted has raised questions about the wisdom of 151 different SACREs which have different levels of capacity to support RE. In some authorities there is almost no support for the SACRE and no professional support for RE. As a consequence there is some support for a single RE syllabus but lots of resistance also.
- Subject still lacks secure, shared understanding of purpose and progression

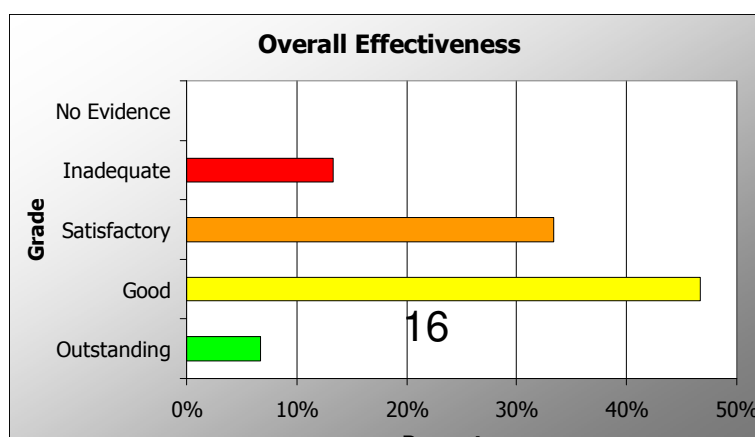
Alan shared the following information about RE in primary schools, pointing out that it is based on only 90 subject inspections over three years:



It is important to be aware that no failing schools or voluntary aided faith schools come into subject inspection programme.

The big question is how to shift from satisfactory to good and outstanding. 60% satisfactory puts RE into an uncomfortable position because most other subjects have less as they have more which are better than satisfactory. Alan talked briefly about the characteristics of satisfactory RE : lessons which do little more than share accurate information but do not challenge pupils, capture their interest or inspire them. Although satisfactory is OK we are now in a time when we are aiming for good.

The graph illustrating the secondary situation shows that there is inadequate provision but also a greater proportion of good RE than satisfactory.



The question in relation to the secondary situation then is how to put a stop to the inadequate provision.

During subject inspections Alan always speaks with pupils. He often asks them to grade their RE on a 10 point scale. When grading on in relation to being interesting/dull the usual response is around a positive 7. When grading in relation to how hard/easy the subject is, the usual response is about 5. Pupils know they are rarely really challenged.

Other things pupils say about RE include:

- It's engaging – we do a lot of active things
- We enjoy RE – its fun
- Pupils behave well, attitudes are positive
- RE helps us understand other peoples' beliefs (Alan sometimes challenges them by asking what, in this context, is not 'other'. It is interesting to consider how pupils identify themselves with religious faith. Alan suggested that Muslim, Sikh etc pupils are likely to place their religious affiliation quite high up a list of things that identify them, whereas young people who understand themselves to be Christian rarely do so)
- Lessons are orderly – we feel secure

Alan highlighted that it often seems senior school leaders, especially in secondary schools, don't ask too many difficult/challenging questions about RE. If there are no obvious problems, they are happy and don't put too much emphasis on how things could be better/more effective. The degree to which governors are interested in RE varies a lot.

Alan went on to explore some of the issues that are found beneath the surface of the current RE situation:

- Good progress in individual lessons is not translating into good achievement over time
- The lack of continuity and progression in the curriculum from Key Stage 2 – 4. Secondary schools' failure to acknowledge the prior learning that takes place in primary schools continues to be a problem. It can also be true that GCSE courses don't seem appropriately challenging after really good KS3 provision.
- Problems defining progression in planning and assessment are becoming intractable – many teachers have not got to grips with using levels to inform planning and assessment remains a continuing weakness in RE
- Over emphasis on content – there is a need to have a greater focus on skills and key concepts. There are too many lessons in which pupils find out information and write it down without doing anything with it. This is often because teachers have insufficient subject knowledge.
- In primary schools in particular, RE is still taught in isolation from other subjects. Obvious links with literacy and the development of thinking skills are not made.
- Tasks are not challenging enough
- Structure of learning is often not secure – pupils not clear about the purpose of their work, what they have learnt or how things link together ie how one lesson is related to another.
- Limited use of higher order thinking skills
- Pupils are unclear what it means to make progress in RE though they are often clear about what it means to make progress in other subjects

- And therefore achievement is modest.

In contrast, Alan raised everyone's spirits by describing three outstanding lessons:

Yr8: average mixed ability class had done some work on Buddhism. In the lesson observed, the teacher said she was going to introduce pupils to Ninian Smart. He had analysed religion into dimensions. Pupils were organised into groups and asked to think about what they'd learned about Buddhism then map what they'd learned against Smart's dimensions. Following this they had to decide which of the dimensions was the most important and be able to justify it. This was a challenging task and led to a fantastic debate.

Yr5: Noah and the Nativity. High performing school but lots of learning difficulties. Dynamic teacher. Quickly retold the nativity story with which pupils were familiar. Then went on to investigate it by looking at another story and pupils had to work out what the connections were. The teacher quickly told pupils the story of Noah which again they already knew. With careful questioning pupils worked out the links. Both stories were about new beginnings and covenant. Each was set at a time when everything had gone wrong and God did something to put it right.

Yr 2 were looking at what it is about stories that make them important to us. Then they looked at stories of particular significance to a Christian child and a Jewish child - looking at the value and power of story. Then the teacher introduced a letter from government about the story stealer. Pupils were told the story stealer was coming to steal stories because they were no longer allowed. Some children cried at this point. Children set up a protest group and wrote letters to explain why stories are so important to them and the children they had learned about. Pupils were involved in evaluating.

Alan went on to analyse why RE is good where it is so:

- Coherent structure to the learning
- Clear focus on key concepts within which to locate content
- Strong emphasis on developing skills of enquiry, evaluation, application, communication etc.
- Interesting activities which engage and challenge
- Pupils know what they are doing and why

So what of the future?

Alan suggested RE needs to focus more on

- process and pedagogy – on the 'how' as well as the 'what'
- the bigger curriculum picture which is emphasising the need to make young people
 - Successful learners
 - Confident individuals
 - Responsible citizens
- flexible, creative approaches to planning and delivery but without losing sight of the heart of RE (disciplined innovation is the term being used in training for the revised secondary curriculum)

All this might mean:

- More innovative models of curriculum delivery – blocking/integrating/linking
- Stronger emphasis on first hand experience, fieldwork in context of community cohesion
- Focusing on the contribution the subject can make to wider learning skills

- Agreeing on a more structured approach to learning – should we be more specific about the 'how' of RE?

Alan asked us all to think about whether our syllabus supports these innovations. *(Jo's note: the first three are no problem but the last one is a particularly interesting challenge in relation to the syllabus shared by the 'Berkshire' unitaries and SACREs might want to consider issuing advice on the 'how' of RE to supplement the syllabus).* He also pointed out that the five year review cycle of a syllabus doesn't fit with the timing of innovation in big curriculum developments.

Alan stressed that it is unlikely the government will undertake a review of the structures of RE and probably not engage with legislative change. Without this the following questions and thoughts arise:

- SACREs do good work but are Agreed Syllabus Conferences the best way of getting a new RE syllabus?
- With no information available in Ofsted reports for SACREs to find out what is happening in RE and how well the Locally Agreed Syllabus (LAS) is working, how can we find out about the effectiveness of the LAS?
- A SACRE can be a key player in the promotion of community cohesion because it brings together people from different communities.
- Government is now clear that religion and faith are important factors in CoCo BUT politically it is too difficult for government to institute any significant change with RE that would help the subject move forward in support of it.

The final slides in Alan's presentation posed questions which groups considered in discussion over their buffet meal:

- How do we balance compulsion with flexibility and innovation?
- How do we overcome isolation and secure right of withdrawal?
- How do we balance depth of learning with breadth of coverage?
- Should we say more about how the subject should/could be taught? i.e. offer a model of good teaching and learning?
- Do we honestly know how effective the local agreed syllabus is in promoting improvement?
- Is the AS:
 - A barrier?
 - A stranger?
 - A helpful support?
 - A driver of improvement?

And in relation to the national context:

- Increasing diversity in provision
- Ambiguity about non-statutory framework
- 151 SACRES of varying effectiveness
- Levels of LA support
- Monitoring arrangements
- Political pragmatism of the DCSF
- Review of 1/94
- Is the NSNF having the impact intended? Reality and rhetoric.
- 151 LAs developing and implementing their own AS - is this efficient/effective?
- In an age of self-evaluation and light touch inspection, do the monitoring arrangements - at all levels (school/SACRE/QCA/Ofsted) – provide what we need?

- Should SACREs have a wider CoCo role?
- Are we garnering OR protecting the little we have?

Plenary: Feedback from group discussions raised the following points:

- Important to encourage flexibility in the curriculum. Blocking was seen as a good strategy.
- SACREs need to provide support material to go with the LAS. There was some support for the idea of a national syllabus with localised guidance on interpretation together with localised support material.
- If RE in schools is about teaching understanding of religious concepts, how does this sit alongside the experiences of some pupils of unquestioning teaching within faith communities? Some parents might therefore not like open RE in schools.
- Good to think that creative teaching and learning could arise from almost any syllabus but it was realised that for inspiring RE we need inspiring teachers.
- Members of SACREs need a better idea of what best practice looks like,
- Withdrawal from RE will be difficult in the context of more creative and integrated curriculum developments. Ideally the law needs to be changed and no withdrawal from RE allowed.
- CoCo – link with interfaith forums is a good idea. Perhaps develop youth SACREs. There is a need for SACREs to work with LAs for a more cohesive approach to CoCo training in/for schools
- Question was raised about how we monitor what's going on and a recognition that most people on SACREs are not in a position to make judgements about lessons etc.
- Levels of LA support often present difficulties in small unitary authorities
- Keen to listen to teachers' views about the effectiveness of the LAS but we struggle to know how we can best support RE teachers in their work
- West Berkshire has funded a self evaluation programme which has had some success.
- All SACRE members are volunteers and can't easily take time off from work to get involved in RE in schools.
- Important to ask teachers good questions to find out about effectiveness of LAS.

At the end of the evening Alan remarked that there is an initiative now to make GCSE specifications more in line with the level descriptions. Introducing GCSE shortcourse to give RE status in KS4 may have made us lose the point of RE at that age which had been a concern about RE contributing to pupils' personal development. BUT where teaching is just focused on the exam, this is unlikely to be the direction and motivation for RE in KS4. Alan asks, is the requirement to have statutory RE in KS4 now outdated? With more creativity and college based vocational courses it is increasingly difficult for all schools to meet their duties.

Monitoring: probably best to have a 5 year cycle of support to coincide with syllabus development.

Making Sense of Religion – An Agenda for RE
Easthampstead Park, June 18 2008
Summary Evaluation

Once again participants were overwhelmingly positive about the evening. Everyone who commented said the speaker was excellent and had given everyone lots to think about. As usual people were also positive about meeting and talking with people from other SACREs.

Quite a number could identify issues they felt should be discussed further by their SACREs eg:

- The effectiveness of the RE syllabus – what questions to ask in order to find out and how to support schools as necessary
- How to engage with community cohesion
- Methodology in RE

There was also a very positive response to the idea of continuing with the joint SACREs conference next year.

Suggested areas of focus for future conferences included:

- Philosophy for children as a methodology
- How thinking skills can be embedded in RE
- Give Mustafa Chaudhary an opportunity to talk about his work with Reading Muslims against Extremism
- Community Cohesion
- Examples of good RE practice – maybe presentations from teachers
- Explore the idea of a youth SACRE
- Update on national initiatives and thinking in RE

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SACRE monitoring of RE in West Berkshire Schools

A report for the Bracknell Forest SACRE

Building on ideas of good practice shared by Dave Francis at the 2006 Joint SACREs Conference, the West Berkshire SACRE agreed a strategy of supported school self evaluation designed both to support RE in schools and gather information in line with its monitoring role.

Funding was obtained which enabled supply cover to be provided for all RE subject leaders to spend an afternoon, once in a four year cycle, with the RE consultant. These sessions were to provide an opportunity for each RE subject leader to have time to evaluate the provision and quality of RE in their schools in order to contribute to the whole school self-evaluation process. Working with groups of between three and six each afternoon, the consultant would have time to provide whatever support was needed.

Reflecting the close working partnership with the Anglican Diocese of Oxford, the plan generously provided support, in its first year, primarily for voluntary aided Church of England schools which have their RE inspected and reported upon in Section 48 inspections.

It was agreed that a modified version of the self-evaluation toolkit devised by the Association of RE Advisers, Inspectors and Consultants (AREIAC) would be used because it so closely matches the whole school self evaluation form (SEF). An example of a completed document (pdf format) and a blank Word version were emailed to teachers scheduled to attend the sessions when they accepted their place in response to an initial invitation letter.

For a variety of reasons not all schools invited to participate in the first year of the programme made use of this opportunity. With very few exceptions those who did attend the sessions found them valuable. Initially some headteachers expressed disquiet about the initiative interpreting it to be an added pressure and a request to do something extra and unnecessary. Some questioned whether this was the first step to asking schools to evaluate all subjects in a similar way. To avoid a reoccurrence of the same problem in the second year, the invitation letter was reworded to emphasise the benefits of the funded afternoon and the generosity of this SACRE provided opportunity. All schools invited to take part in the second year accepted the invitation with gratitude.

The sessions concentrated on evaluation of three sections of the toolkit (though some subject leaders went on to complete the whole document):

- Personal development and well-being
- Quality of provision
- Leadership and management.

From the documents and discussions the RE consultant was able to identify a number of very positive features of RE in West Berkshire schools together with areas with which schools need support. This information was then used to inform planning for CPD provision for the coming year.

Costs:

4 half days of consultant time for the sessions
4 half days, with refreshments, venue costs

JEF June 2008

1 half day supply cover for each of the schools participating
1 half day of consultant time to analyse the self evaluation documentation and write a report on key issues for SACRE's consideration.
(The Diocesan charge for my time as a consultant is £200 per half day)

3. The effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus

How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LA, monitor the impact of the agreed syllabus in raising standards, use national guidance (e.g. the non-statutory national framework) and evaluate the effectiveness of the previous agreed syllabus?

Key area	Developing	Established	Advanced	Exemplar of good practice
<p>3a Review of the agreed syllabus</p> <p>25</p>	<p>Little opportunity to review the effectiveness of the previous agreed syllabus. Teachers' views are not known and there has been no external evaluation of strengths/weaknesses of the existing version. There is little budget for agreed syllabus development and no clear action plan to structure the review process.</p>	<p>The SACRE has a good idea of the strengths/weaknesses of the previous agreed syllabus. Teachers' views and some external evaluation are carefully taken into consideration and there is a clear action plan and sufficient budget for the agreed syllabus review.</p>	<p>The SACRE has a clear and systematic process for reviewing the agreed syllabus including full consultation with schools and other key stakeholders, particularly faith communities. The budget is clearly allocated including consultation meetings, external evaluation and printing/distribution costs. There is strong sense of ownership of the agreed syllabus review, with clear targets for what needs to be achieved.</p>	<p>The SACRE reviews all available evaluation data about the effectiveness of the existing agreed syllabus. It consults local teachers through meetings and a questionnaire to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the agreed syllabus. It invites participation of an external consultant to provide a more objective view of the quality of the existing syllabus.</p>

<p>3b Using the National Framework for Religious Education</p>	<p>The SACRE has a limited view of the role and significance of the National Framework in relation to the agreed syllabus review process and does not use the Framework in a coherent way.</p>	<p>The SACRE is aware of the National Framework and uses it in their agreed syllabus review but does not extend the Framework to reflect local circumstances.</p>	<p>The SACRE fully uses the National Framework in the construction of the revised agreed syllabus, understanding fully the importance of retaining the coherence and integrity of the Framework. It uses and extends the Framework in a coherent way to reflect local circumstances.</p>	<p>The SACRE undertakes a careful cost-benefit analysis of the value of using the National Framework for Religious Education as a basis for its revision of the existing agreed syllabus. As a result, it establishes a clear view of the way its revision of the agreed syllabus will build on the National Framework.</p>
<p>3c Developing the revised agreed syllabus. See Annex 1 for the characteristics of an effective agreed syllabus.</p>	<p>The SACRE has no clear structure for developing a revised agreed syllabus. It does not undertake a thorough revision, tending to add material rather haphazardly to the existing syllabus, leading to lack of coherence in the final outcome. There is little or no consultation during the development of a new agreed syllabus.</p>	<p>The SACRE has clear objectives for the revision and involves a wide range of local expertise in its construction. The SACRE ensures that strong direction is provided to design an agreed syllabus which is coherent, clear and accessible. The SACRE, in partnership with the LA, holds consultation meetings which are reasonably supported.</p>	<p>The SACRE ensures that high quality advice is sought to review and advise on the revisions as they develop. The SACRE, in partnership with the LA, holds very well attended consultation meetings and briefings to ensure teachers are fully involved in, and have a sense of ownership of, the revision process.</p>	<p>The SACRE produces a regular newsletter circulated to all schools outlining the progress with the revision of the agreed syllabus.</p>

<p>3d Consultation / launch / implementation of the agreed syllabus</p>	<p>No special launch is planned and schools are not aware of the significance of the revisions for their teaching and learning in RE. There is little training provision for implementing the revised syllabus.</p>	<p>A launch event is organised and other forms of communication (for example the LA website) are used to promote the launch. There are clear arrangements for training teachers on implementing the syllabus; this training is well supported and managed.</p>	<p>A successful launch, involving the wider community and strong media coverage, gives the agreed syllabus a high profile as an important development in the work of the LA and SACRE. Effective training on implementing the agreed syllabus, which is supported by all schools, leads to teachers being clear about standards and expectations in the agreed syllabus and the implications for teaching and learning.</p>	<p>The SACRE provides clear guidance about ways in which schools might begin the process of reviewing their own provision for RE in the light of the revised syllabus.</p> <p>The launch event includes high quality presentations from a range of local religious communities and schools.</p>
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<p>3e Additional guidance / monitoring and evaluating the agreed syllabus</p>	<p>A shortage of financial and human resources prevent the SACRE from providing any significant additional guidance on using the agreed syllabus. It has limited arrangements in place to monitor the impact of the agreed syllabus, particularly in raising standards.</p>	<p>The SACRE, through its costed development plan, has arrangements in place to develop additional guidance. The SACRE is able to monitor the impact of the agreed syllabus, particularly in raising standards.</p>	<p>The SACRE has fully costed precise plans for further guidance and support and has consulted extensively with schools on what these should be. Teachers are actively involved in the development of support materials ensuring the process provides a strong professional development opportunity. There are clear arrangements in place to monitor the impact of the new agreed syllabus and to measure its effectiveness in raising standards.</p>	<p>The SACRE builds a process of monitoring the effectiveness of the agreed syllabus into its development plan. It identifies a series of specific and phased activities which will be undertaken to provide evidence of the impact of the syllabus leading through to the next five-year revision.</p>
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4. Collective worship

How effectively does the SACRE fulfil its responsibilities for the provision and practice of collective worship?

Key area	Developing	Established	Advanced	Exemplar of good practice
<p>4a Practice and provision for collective worship</p> <p style="text-align: center;">20</p>	<p>The SACRE has not provided guidance to schools on collective worship and arrangements for determinations are not in place. Issues regarding collective worship have not featured as part of the SACRE's agenda and national developments are not known. There is no training provision for collective worship.</p>	<p>The SACRE has not provided guidance to schools on collective worship which focuses on good practice. Meetings of the SACRE regularly focus on provision and practice in collective worship, and schools consider they are well supported by their SACRE on matters related to collective worship. The SACRE is aware of national developments in collective worship. Training is provided for schools and is reasonably supported.</p>	<p>The SACRE provides high quality advice and support on collective worship, sharing best practice, which leads to improvements in the quality of children's learning experiences. The SACRE regularly focuses on collective worship in its meetings and updates schools on new resources. The SACRE is actively involved in national developments in collective worship. High quality, well-supported training enhances provision.</p>	<p>Through its website the SACRE regularly provides exemplar acts of worship for schools to use. These are frequently updated. Members of SACRE visit schools to observe and/or lead collective worship and share their findings. Feedback from schools indicates high-level usage of the exemplar acts of worship.</p>

<p>4b Monitoring the provision of collective worship and tackling issues of non-compliance</p>	<p>The SACRE does not monitor provision of collective worship. Members are unaware of the issues facing schools and do not provide advice on how issues of non-compliance can be addressed.</p>	<p>The SACRE monitors provision of collective worship and is aware of non-compliance issues and the demands collective worship places on schools. As a result of monitoring, further advice is provided to schools but members of the SACRE have limited 'hands-on' experience of collective worship in schools.</p>	<p>The SACRE closely monitors provision for collective worship, and provides guidance and support for schools, particularly on non-compliance. Members of the SACRE have direct experience of collective worship in schools through first-hand observation. They discuss key issues with staff and pupils and provide further advice in the light of their findings.</p>	<p>The SACRE, in partnership with the LA and the local secondary heads association, arranges for all its members to visit local secondary schools to observe acts of worship and discuss issues with staff and pupils. Following the visits a report is published, highlighting best practice and ways in which non-compliance might be tackled.</p>
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