

'Crossing the Bridges'



The Phase 2 launch conference for the 6 pan-Berkshire SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education) 28th September 2016 - Winnersh, Reading

Organised by the pan-Berkshire SACREs for teachers, SACRE members and members of faith/belief communities, and funded partly by the 6 local authorities and partly by a grant received from the Westhill/NASACRE Award, the conference was designed to inform about the first phase of the Crossing the Bridges Project (2015-16) and to seek further engagement with taking the project to the next level in the coming year.

Jan Lever, manager of the pan-Berkshire SACRE Hub, and Jo Fageant adviser to Slough and West Berkshire SACREs welcomed the delegates and set the scene by outlining the context of the project which is designed to

- strengthen links between schools and faith communities by arranging visits to places of worship and creating opportunities for dialogue.
- help teachers and students develop a deeper understanding of the significance of places of worship, faith and belief in people's lives.

Jan Lever explained the process leading up to the beginning of the project, outlining the need to enable teachers and students to aim for a greater depth of understanding and enquiry when visiting places of worship or engaging in dialogue with members of faith/belief communities.

Motivated by teachers' requests for help in facilitating visits and in providing a Directory of suitable visitors to RE lessons in schools, this project was born.

Catherine Jinkerson, SACRE member and teacher of RE has been appointed to work with the Crossing the Bridges Project to engage faith and belief communities and collate the Directory. Catherine introduced herself to the conference.

Also on 28th September, the conference was afforded the opportunity to hear about on-location days.

Two trips were organised to take teachers to places of worship in order to start this process of making connections, having dialogue, improving their own understanding and organising school visits. Teaching resources were designed and disseminated to all schools across Berkshire as a direct result, using photographic material gathered on these days by RE consultant, David Rees.

A further on-location day is planned for March 2017, supported by funding from the Westhill/NASACRE Award.

Enquiry booklet templates were designed to help students focus on a key concept/belief at each place of worship.

It was also recognised that schools and faith communities would need to agree on the learning outcomes for the school visits. As a result, booking forms were designed to be used by schools and the places of worship concerning the purpose of the visit and ensuring everyone was fully prepared, thus maximising the impact of the visits. Feedback forms were also designed. These templates are available on the SACRE websites and on www.discoveryschemeofwork.com and are free to download.

The pan-Berkshire SACREs are more than willing to share the Crossing the Bridges materials and process with other SACREs and schools across the country.



Pan-Berkshire SACRE conferences try to give teachers and SACRE members insight into each others' worlds, hence crossing the bridges. To help this, the delegates heard from Stephen Vegh, Chair of Wokingham SACRE and Head of Religious Studies at Waingels College. He talked about the need for RE to be challenging and meaningful, and gave examples of key questions and lessons he uses to encourage students to develop critical thinking skills relating to issues very relevant to religion and belief, and to seek a personal response from them to events in the world today.

Following on from Stephen, Alison Harris, RE consultant, took the delegates through a four step model to enquiry based learning. Alison used the concept of commitment to show how challenging RE could be delivered by starting in the child's world and engaging with them on a personal level about commitment, before crossing the bridge into the world of religion and examining practices which bear a similar sense of commitment.



that which could be deemed indescribable, as one delegate said 'How do you describe the transcendent?' The debate which ensued showed the faith communities and delegates trying to explain and understand different viewpoints in a real spirit of co-operation and respect, exactly what RE should be about.

The final section of the evening saw Jan Lever and Jo Fageant draw things to a close reflecting on the Crossing the Bridges Project so far and outlining the proposals for the development of the project with support from all the SACREs involved.

The evening was greeted with positivity and co-operation from teachers and all 6 SACREs, and we have high hopes of what can be achieved in the coming year to enhance children and young people's experience of RE.



RE could be delivered by starting in the child's world and engaging with them on a personal level

The 40 delegates shared a light supper and were able to develop new contacts and discuss the input so far. Also at this time several people from faith communities were keen to volunteer their place of worship for consideration on the next 'on location' day and for the Directory.

The second half of the programme began with Anne Andrews, Oxford Diocese adviser for RE facilitating a panel of representatives from local faith communities discussing some key themes and concepts focussed on text and scripture, interpretation and the difficulty in fully describing

