

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

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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)