

### **RE and Community Cohesion: the future for SACREs**

I am very grateful for the opportunity to attend this very interesting day as a representative of our SACRE, which I was fortunate to share with Gordon Anderson. The venue in Bloomsbury was easy to find, very comfortable with good food.

The keynote speaker was Jim Knight MP, Minister of State for Schools and Learners. He began by reiterating the importance of RE with its distinctive nature that enables the reflection on philosophical ideas and ethical questions. He then went on to tell us that RE is the third fastest growing GCSE subject. He mentioned the shortage of RE specialists and told us that there is now financial help for people who want to train for RE plus a golden hello package. We were told of the secondary curriculum review, its roll out and the £1m available to support it, mainly through IT initiatives. However, his big announcement was that this month a review of Circular 1/94 will start. This is the circular that established the requirements for RE and Collective Worship (CW) in the then new National Curriculum. Now RE will be reviewed on its own in order to bring its regulations up to date in view of the national framework and to take account of its role in supporting community cohesion. He expects this review to take at least one year then they will move on to review CW. After a few questions to clarify points made he was on his way.

We then moved into coffee and group discussions. These provided a valuable opportunity to talk with members of other SACREs. I was struck by the large number of 'professional' members in the SACREs, i.e. teachers, advisers and inspectors. Perhaps they are the only ones who can get away for the day.

In my group several points were made:

- We need to have representatives from all major faiths.
- It is difficult to know what is happening in schools. Peterborough has a system of giving SACRE members half a day training then they go into the school in the term following the inspection to go through the relevant parts of the self - evaluation form with the subject leader. Is this something for us to consider?
- Language can be a barrier for some new members especially for people from other cultures. One area holds at their meetings in a variety of places alternating between a school, council offices and a place of worship.
- It is important to reach out to young people. Sue Ganter spoke about the Portsmouth Interfusion project, established with a Westhill grant. This gives young people an opportunity to meet and make friends across faiths and cultures. It is spread by word of mouth. Lewisham has a young mayor elected by its young people.

### **Curriculum Developments**

During the introduction to the new secondary curriculum we were told it aims to enable all young people to become

- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress, and achieve.
- confident individuals who are able to lead safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.
- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

Dave Francis from the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education, the group responsible for putting the new secondary curriculum into place, gave a detailed briefing on areas in which SACREs can offer advice to their local authority. I believe these points could inform our development plan and agendas over the next three years. His points for us to consider covered:

- The advice we offer to schools to ensure that RE does not miss out on the opportunities presented in the new curriculum.
- How to gather information from schools on the impact of the new curriculum on RE.
- The impact of the framework on our own agreed syllabus. *I wondered how well we each understand what 'concept-based planning' really means.*
- The direct professional support that can be offered to RE teachers especially in the contribution of the subject to community cohesion.
- Ways for the SACRE to best support young people in relation to the aims of the new curriculum.
- Ensuring that our schools are being well supported by the regional subject advisers.
- Encouraging our subject leaders to take advantage of the training opportunities offered.

Mark Chater then spoke about monitoring and evaluation. It seems that the pilot reporting scheme for the SACRE report has not really changed since the very complicated and challenging one we saw in the Spring 07. He did assure us that the primary curriculum will be reviewed once the secondary curriculum is out.

### **Community Cohesion and SACRE**

The characteristics of a cohesive community are given as:

- A common vision and sense of belonging for all
- The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

Joyce Miller, who now works for the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants, spoke about a Bradford project which she managed. They worked through several agencies, including the SACRE, to ensure a common understanding of the community and the contributions that different people can make to it. Her constant questions were:

What does it mean? What does it look like? How do we get there?

Julie Grove reported on a pilot training scheme for minority faith SACRE members. This is very limited in accessibility and it seems to me it would benefit all members of SACRE.

During the workshop it became clear that to have community cohesion we all need to be aware of the parallel experiences in our own lives such as different attitudes to the food and people of certain areas in the world, the layers of diversity within our own communities, the need to raise the profile of RE leaders.

I was left with a question for our own SACRE: *How well do the individual members of the SACRE know each other - our values and our experiences?*