

North Yorkshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE): A report to Quakers in Yorkshire by Martin Dickinson 20.1.2018

For the past three years I have represented Yorkshire General Meeting on the North Yorkshire SACRE.

‘The what?’

The acronym SACRE stands for Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. By the 1944 Education Act Local Education Authorities were empowered to set up SACREs and the Education Reform Act of 1988 made this compulsory.

The SACRE is made up of four sections each of which has one vote. These are

Group A: Christian Denominations and such other religious denominations as will, in the LEA’s opinion, appropriately reflect the principal traditions in the area.

Group B: The Church of England

Group C: Teacher Associations

Group D: The Local Authority

I represent Quakers in Group A, alongside Methodist, Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, Muslim, Roman Catholic, Buddhist, Sikh and Jewish representatives. A Muslim has been elected Chair of the SACRE throughout my three years as a member. A humanist has been co-opted as a non voting member for the last three years.

The SACRE is serviced by a Clerk provided by the LEA and advised by a member of North Yorkshire’s Children and Young People’s Service.

The Tasks of the SACRE are to

1. Draw up an Agreed Syllabus for the LEA, and monitor its implementation and effectiveness.
2. Monitor the implementation and effectiveness of Collective Worship,
3. Publish an annual report.

The SACRE may do other things as well. For example in the past three years two RE Diversity Days have been organised by SACRE members for pupils, one in Scarborough and one in Settle. However, the core tasks are as outlined.

Meetings

The SACRE currently meets three times a year, currently once in County Hall, Northallerton, once in LEA offices in Harrogate and once in a LEA school. This gives SACRE members the chance to sit in on RE lessons, to join in discussions and to hear from teachers and pupils about RE in their school. This year, for example, we visited Settle College. Members find this kind of visit extremely helpful.

The business meetings last two hours so that the SACRE has to accomplish its tasks with a total of six hours a year of meetings. Inevitably, it relies heavily on the LEA officers. Fortunately North Yorkshire is currently very well served in this regard but

in my view SACRE does need more meeting time to ensure that SACRE members can contribute meaningfully to their tasks.

Annual Report 2016/17

This is currently still being finalised but an outline of some of its provisional contents gives some idea of the work being done by the SACRE;

1. Introduction by the Chair: It is worth noting that the Chair, a member of the Scarborough Muslim community, has served on the SACRE for 16 years and has attended meetings of the National Association of SACREs.
2. Advice to Statutory Bodies: During recent years the SACRE has produced the North Yorkshire RE Agreed Syllabus together with supporting documents, and has produced guidance on Collective Worship and on organising visits to places of worship.
3. Standards and Quality of Provision of RE: details of RE examination results are given together with some information from the 'RE Schools Annual Return' including, for example, details of the teaching time allocated to RE. Reports from schools are included e.g. on visits to places of worship. The SACRE has received no complaints regarding RE provision or quality this year.
4. Agreed Syllabus: this is due to be revised in 2018.
5. Collective Worship: No complaints have been registered in 2016/17 with regard to Collective Worship and no school has been found to be failing in its statutory duties in this regard. No school has requested exemption from the legal requirement.

Future Issues?

At the SACRE meeting in November 2017 members were circulated with the Interim Report of the Commission on Religious Education. Its recommendations are far reaching and centre round a National Entitlement for Religious Education which would be statutory and apply to all state schools, including academies, free schools, and schools of a religious character. Of relevance to my report is the role envisaged for the SACREs which are seen as one possible means of implementing this entitlement. The Commission is consulting on this expanded role and its financial implications, suggesting, for example, ring fencing SACRE funding. Note the attempt to deal with all state schools. Currently the SACRE deals only with LEA schools. Note also that the time issue I mentioned earlier will become more acute. The SACREs will be unable to expand their role without more time which means more funding.

Conclusion

My view is that SACREs are a good thing. They bring together people of different faiths and none to talk about an important area of the school curriculum. They are not perfect and one can sometimes wonder if more could be achieved. However, Friends should remain committed to them and continue to respond positively to future invitations to take part in the deliberations of the North Yorkshire SACRE. Thank you for appointing me to this role three years ago.