

Barnet SACRE Newsletter – Summer 2015

Westhill Bid

The joint bid that the Barnet & Enfield SACREs made was successful & the project will involve young people being trained to be Faith Ambassadors in Schools. This is a pilot project & it is hoped that it will be extended after the evaluation.

Parliamentary Briefing Paper

A briefing paper was published by Parliament on 12 May 2015, number 7167. The report looked at three key areas:

- What is taught in RE
- Inspection & teaching
- Other issues including the right to withdraw a child from RE, Collective worship, RE in performance tables & the English Baccalaureate & the teaching of Creationism.

This is the summary:

RE must be taught by all state-funded schools. However, it has an unusual position in the curriculum: it is part of the basic curriculum but not the National Curriculum, and is one of two subjects (along with sex & relationships) where parents have a legal right to withdraw children.

This briefing introduces the rules around RE in state-funded schools, whether they are academies or free schools, or maintained by a local authority. It also introduces concerns that have been raised about the quality of RE teaching, including the number of RE teachers with qualifications relevant to the subject. It also provides information on other related issues, such as the parental right of withdrawal from R, and the rules on collective worship in schools.

As school policy devolved topic, this briefing provides information on the position in England.

The full version can be downloaded www.parliament.uk/commons-library

Dilwyn Hunt Article

Dilwyn Hunt, the chair of AREIAC, has written the following article about GCSE Religious Studies:

Across the UK the number of young people entered Religious Studies GCSE full course is up again. In 2014 282,099 candidates were entered for the exam, that's up by some 18,000 on 2013. In fact since 2011 the total number entered for the full course has increased by around 60,000. This is a significant rise which we should welcome. On the down side however the total number entered for the RS short course has dropped again. In 2014 the total figure for the UK was down by over 50,000. In 2013 174,664 were entered for the short course but in 2014 it dropped to 123,993. There was a similar alarming decrease in numbers - over 61,000, in the previous year. In the last four years the numbers taking RS GCSE short course have halved dropping from 257,798 in 2011 to 123,393 in 2014. To put a balance on the figures we have to take into account the impressive increase in numbers entered for the full course which over the same four year period has increased by around 60,000. That's impressive but it doesn't come close to matching the 134,000 decline in the short course. The dramatic drop in short course numbers and the increase in full course numbers seems to me to have

little to do with the eBacc. My guess is that mainly driving these changes is the new secondary accountability system which was two headline measures - Attainment 8 and Progress 8.

Although EBacc subjects are given a privileged status in this system, Progress 8 involves measuring performance across 8 qualifications. In the 'Open group' RS GCSE (full course) could feature although in many schools it's likely that it would be competing with other subjects. However, it must be the full course. An RS GCSE short course would not earn any points and so would not improve a school's Progress 8 rating. In anticipation of Progress 8 it is not surprising that perhaps Subject Leaders, or more likely SMTs are, pulling the plug on the short course. The consequence of Progress 8 some RE departments has been catastrophic and demoralising. Some RE departments after years of entering the vast majority of their year Y11 cohort and achieving outstanding A*- C results, have been simply told to drop their short course programmes and provide instead an option blocked RS full course. In some cases they find themselves now teaching the RS full course to a class of less than 15 students. In other schools they are being expected to teach the full course but with only a single 50-60 minute lesson being timetabled in which to do so. In an attempt to cover the content teachers are effectively beginning the exam course in Y9.

One wonders what further impact the new RS GCSE criteria will have. Personally to me the Study of Religions section in the new criteria looks desperately dry, formal, pre-occupied with technical religious terminology, uninspiring and lacking the edginess which makes engaging with religion for many young people interesting and rewarding. If I was a 14 year old boy, given other choices, would I opt to plod my way through all that formal Study of Religions stuff? I don't think I would.

Making a difference? A review of Religious Education in Church of England Schools - September 2014

This is a review of the report by Diocesan advisers Jane Chipperton & Lizzie McWhirter 'Making a Difference?' was an independent review of RE, commissioned by The National Society, Church House, Westminster and carried out by a team of experienced church school inspectors, led by Alan Brine HMI. Thirty secondary and thirty primary Church of England VA and VC schools and CE academies were identified for the review from across the country.

The findings were that *"in the majority of secondary schools the effectiveness of RE was good or outstanding. A key strength was the high quality of subject expertise amongst the teachers."*

In primary schools the report describes a conundrum because:

"in several primary schools, despite the recognition that high priority should be given to the subject, this was not being translated into practice. There was confusion about the underlying purpose of the subject, coupled with a lack of clarity about what constitutes high quality and how to lead and manage the subject effectively. The survey has highlighted that in some regards this was compounded by uncertainty about the distinctive role which RE should play within a Church school setting."

The survey found that:

"In 18 of the 30 primary schools (60%) RE was not good enough. The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good or better in just 12 schools (40% of the sample). It was judged to be outstanding in one but was inadequate in five schools. There was little difference in the findings between voluntary aided and controlled schools. These findings match the findings in the 2013 Ofsted survey of RE in primary schools."

In identifying priorities for the improvement of the teaching & learning in RE in all Church schools the following four areas were identified:

- *There is a need to clarify how the distinctive place of RE in Church schools should be translated into high quality teaching & learning*
- *Schools need more support to improve the quality of the design of the RE curriculum*
- *A more coherent & strategic approach is needed towards continuing professional development with a stronger focus on improving the quality of planning, teaching & assessment.*
- *Greater emphasis should be placed on thinking theologically & the art of theological enquiry as a distinctive Anglican contribution to the improvement of RE nationally.*

The following recommendations were made:

- *All schools need to review their RE curriculum to ensure it provides a more coherent, challenging approach to the teaching of Christianity*
- *Explore ways of extending pupils' ability to think theologically & engage in theological enquiry as part of their learning in RE*
- *Wide access to full range of CPD is needed, with a stronger focus on planning, teaching & assessment.*

Free RE Conference

3 to 4 October, 2015, Wokefield Park, Reading

This is an excellent opportunity for teachers to receive high quality training. I encourage any teachers who have not participated to apply; preference will be given to teachers who are applying for the first time. This is the information:

- This has been a busy year of achievement for RE nationally. Somewhere near every RE teacher, there is a Teachmeet, a regional hub focused on improving RE, a school with an RE Quality Mark award, a NATRE branch, a university offering Masters programmes specially subsidised for RE teachers, and a school developing the new GCSE and A level courses. Somewhere near ... But in some cases, not yet near enough.
- RE is energising itself. That's exciting, and it contributes significantly to school improvement and raising standards, as well as challenging narrow attitudes and promoting values. Yet we have much more work still to do. How can we build on our successes, learn from our setbacks, and network with each other more smartly – to ensure that all our national RE activity is coherent, effective and more widely known?
- This conference is free. It is for RE teachers, primary, secondary and special, who are looking for ways to lead research and support RE development. Priority will be given to those who have not attended before. In return for giving up part of your weekend, you will receive practical wisdom for the classroom and a wider, longer view of where RE is going – and a chance to shape it. We are seeking delegates who would like to contribute to the growth of RE locally and/or nationally, for example through networks, sharing of research or resources, working with other schools, secondary/primary liaison, social media, or curriculum innovation.

Aims:

- Informing good practice: Using research to deepen understanding of how religion and belief are changing in the UK, and the impact of this on RE
- Building strong strategies: Understanding how RE is developing and where its future could lie
- Sharing good work: Strengthening collaborative networks focused on improving standards in RE.

Register

Complete our online registration form to apply. Priority will be given to people who have not previously attended a Wokefield RE Conference.

All good wishes

Anna Sallnow