

Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. 13 May 2024

Statement by Dr Eleanor Jackson, former senior lecturer in religious studies and council representative on SACRE

Thank you for giving me time this morning to introduce you to the issues in the Annual Report. I am assuming you have all 'done your homework' so that I do not have to discuss the content in too much detail. However, it may not be obvious to those of you who are not familiar with role religious education plays in our schools and the legal requirements laid down since the 1944 Education Act and its successors just how important the subject is, even while you welcome BANES excellence.

We flatter ourselves in this country about the degree of 'tolerance' towards and between the main faith communities and individual 'people of faith' but I think this is meaningless if it is based on ignorance and lack of understanding. Conversely, the Hebrew Scriptures Book of Psalms explain more about the Israeli attack on Gaza than any BBC news guru. Religious faith itself is meaningless if it is kept as a private hobby and does not address real life problems. For example, climate change is not just a scientific hypothesis, but for the Abrahamic faiths, the destruction of God's creation. This belief should re-inforce action to save the planet.

So where does this leave SACRE? We should thank the officer and the RE advisor for producing the Report, but it should be appreciated that more than any other council work I can think of, it is volunteers at the heart of it. We owe a special debt to Jane O'Hara, the chair, from the Bath Inter-Faith Group and the Ba'hai community. Apart from myself and Dr Pankhania who represent BANES, volunteers come from the faith communities and associated bodies such as Ammerdown.

The SACRE report is not about 'naming and shaming', though we know from the recent OFSTED Report that about a third of schools in England do not observe their legal obligations. Rather, it is to identify and commend good practice, and to encourage schools with resources and advice, as well as training, for example on the Holocaust. We subsidize visits to places of worship. We are proud of the national awards to our schools.

It is still my ambition to produce material on 'black religious experience', and utilise Fairfield House appropriately. SACRE is about opening children's eyes to a new world where they can develop their spirituality and ethics and co-operate in society, whether they believe or not.