WEST SUSSEX SACRE

AGENDA ITEM 8

7th MARCH 2011

COMMUNITY COHESION IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN WEST SUSSEX SCHOOLS

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF LEARNING

1. Introduction

1.1 At the spring term meeting 2010 SACRE considered the Non-statutory guidance on religious education from the DCFS (see Appendix 1 below).

1.2 As part of the discussion the sections on community cohesion were discussed and it was recognised that this was an important element in religious education and that further discussion was needed. At the summer meeting Mohinder Galowalia spoke to SACRE and outlined his view of community cohesion and the work that was taking place in with the Crawley Interfaith Network (Appendix 3). In June 2010 Ofsted published their long report on religious education in schools 2006-09 called “Transforming Religious Education” (Appendix 2) which also included a section on community cohesion.

1.3 An opportunity was taken to ask a Headteacher – Ms Yvonne Williams to do some further work on community cohesion and she produced a paper (Appendix 4) for SACRE that was discussed at the November meeting of SACRE. This paper looked at the issues and made some recommendations that SACRE considered. Subsequent to that meeting a paper has been received from the Church of England committee. (Appendix 5)

2. Issues for SACRE

2.1 Now SACRE has had time to consider the issue the LA would welcome advice as to whether any action needs to take place to support community cohesion in religious education or collective worship in schools.

David Sword
Director of Learning
Community Cohesion


Community cohesion

RE makes an important contribution to a school’s duty to promote community cohesion. It provides a key context to develop young people’s understanding and appreciation of diversity, to promote shared values and to challenge racism and discrimination. Effective RE will promote community cohesion at each of the four levels outlined in DCSF guidance.

The school community – RE provides a positive context within which the diversity of cultures, beliefs and values can be celebrated and explored.

- **The community within which the school is located** – RE provides opportunities to investigate patterns of diversity of religion and belief and forge links with different groups in the local area.
- **The UK community** – a major focus of RE is the study of diversity of religion and belief in the UK and how this influences national life.
- **The global community** – RE involves the study of matters of global significance recognising the diversity of religion and belief and its impact on world issues.

RE subject matter gives particular opportunities to promote an ethos of respect for others, challenge stereotypes and build understanding of other cultures and beliefs. This contributes to promoting a positive and inclusive school ethos that champions democratic values and human rights.

In summary, religious education for children and young people:

- **provokes challenging questions** about the meaning and purpose of life, beliefs, the self, issues of right and wrong, and what it means to be human. It develops pupils’ knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, and religious traditions that examine these questions, fostering personal reflection and spiritual development
- **encourages pupils to explore their own beliefs** (whether they are religious or non-religious), in the light of what they learn, as they examine issues of religious belief and faith and how these impact on personal, institutional and social ethics; and to express their responses. This also builds resilience to anti-democratic or extremist narratives
- **enables pupils to build their sense of identity and belonging**, which helps them flourish within their communities and as citizens in a diverse society
- **teaches pupils to develop respect for others**, including people with different faiths and beliefs, and helps to challenge prejudice
- **prompts pupils to consider their responsibilities** to themselves and to others, and to explore how they might contribute to their communities and to wider society. It encourages empathy, generosity and compassion.

RE has an important part to play as part of a broad, balanced and coherent curriculum to which all pupils are entitled. High quality learning experiences in RE
are designed and provided by careful planning through locally agreed syllabuses and in schools, taking into account the need to offer breadth of content, depth of learning and coherence between concepts, skills and content.

**SACREs and community cohesion**

SACREs have an important role to play in promoting community cohesion, emphasised in the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) guidelines *Face to face and side by side: A framework for partnership in our multi-faith society*: ‘Effective RE can play a key part in promoting inter-faith understanding and dialogue and can address the prejudices brought about by a shallow knowledge of world religions and provides pupils with a safe forum for the discussion of controversial issues...SACREs, where properly supported by the LA, can act as powerful vehicles for building, appreciating and managing differences in beliefs and values in schools, education more widely and the local community. They are a partnership between faith communities in each local area and with the LA and schools. SACREs are predominantly focused on education but are also a statutory group that can be consulted on inter-faith issues, act as sounding boards or work in partnership on broader initiatives.’

**Case study: A SACRE and the curriculum**

One SACRE has supported teaching and learning in RE through a project involving a course for primary, secondary and special schools, which enables schools to provide recognition of progression for children and young people, matching the colours of the rainbow with the eight levels of the locally agreed syllabus for RE. This was a way of celebrating the achievement of children and young people that could be shared with and valued by parents and employers.
Extract from: Transforming Religious education – Ofsted June 2010

**Religious education and the promotion of community cohesion**

In September 2007, the duty was placed on schools to promote community cohesion. Although the promotion of community cohesion was not formally evaluated in institutional inspections until September 2008, attention was given in survey visits to how RE contributes to this process. In just over six in 10 of the primary schools visited and eight in 10 of the secondary schools, the contribution of RE to community cohesion was good or outstanding. In most of the schools, pupils were clear that the subject was one of the main contexts in which they could develop their understanding of diversity and the importance of respect towards others, two key contributors to developing community cohesion. In some cases, pupils spoke powerfully about the way that their RE teachers were models of anti-racist attitudes in the school. This positive picture reflects the contribution that RE makes to pupils’ moral, social and cultural development. However, as other evidence from the survey shows, the level of enquiry into religions and beliefs is often superficial and uncritical. Therefore, the potential for the subject to be a cornerstone of excellent practice in relation to community cohesion is not always fully realised.

In the best cases seen, the schools had given careful thought to the way that the subject could contribute to promoting community cohesion and had audited its impact alongside that of other subjects. On rare occasions, this work linked to wider involvement with interfaith networks or initiatives organised by the local authority or the Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education. In some of the schools, the subject’s contribution to promoting community cohesion went further and included opportunities, for example:

- to explore controversial issues relating to religion in the modern world, such as misrepresentations by the media of particular faiths
- for representatives of ‘hard to reach’ or marginalised religious communities to work with the school and develop confidence that their traditions were respected
- for pupils with strong religious commitments to share their experience in a safe context and see that their faith was valued and respected
- for learning outside the classroom and providing first-hand engagement with religious diversity in the local area
- for ‘off-timetable’ theme days or assemblies, often organised in conjunction with subjects such as citizenship; for example marking Holocaust Memorial Day.

Particularly successful practice was seen where:

1. RE was a context for analysing patterns of religious diversity in an area and for forging links, for example with local mosques, that could help to extend the learning opportunities for pupils and their families
2. A school with a mainly White intake had twinned with a school with a high percentage of pupils from the Muslim tradition to extend the curriculum enrichment opportunities for RE and promote cross-cultural understanding.

3. A school in another predominantly white area had invited parents with varied experiences of a range of cultures to contribute to RE and other areas of the curriculum.

4. A school had built links with a diversity of religious communities through a local interfaith network.

The majority of the primary schools visited made only limited use of visitors and fieldwork to enrich pupils’ understanding of the local and wider communities. In some cases, links with religious communities were confined to churches and there was little contact with members of traditions other than Christianity. A similar pattern was seen in two thirds of the secondary schools visited. Often, opportunities to engage with local religious communities through activities outside the classroom were limited to pupils who were studying RE at GCSE level or optional visits open to pupils from families willing to contribute financially.

Despite this, inspectors identified schools which had developed new ways of involving representatives from those communities in pupils’ learning, as in the following example:

A school decided to invite representatives from the local faith communities to its training on RE where they were introduced to the process of enquiry-based learning. As a result, they gained a greater appreciation of their role in supporting the overall programme for RE and were therefore able to make a richer contribution to it. Instead of simply imparting information, their meetings with pupils became conversations and discussions where they shared their experiences and views and contributed to the process of research and enquiry. Pupils’ visits to local places of worship focused less on facts about the building and more on religious commitment and living.

There is scope for schools to focus further on the contribution that RE can make to promoting community cohesion. Specifically, schools could extend the opportunities for using RE to forge links with the diversity of religious and belief communities locally, regionally and nationally. They also need to find out more about the diversity of beliefs, religious or otherwise, among their pupils and their families, so that these can be acknowledged and valued through the subject and in the wider life of the school.

Some of the schools visited which had a significant number of pupils with a high level of religious involvement took care to find out about the education they were experiencing within their local religious community. This helped to inform the way the religion was studied in the school. However, other schools missed opportunities to make these links. For example, in a primary school which admitted a very large number of Muslim pupils, the teachers had assumed the pupils would have a good knowledge of stories from their tradition because they regularly attended the local mosque schools. In practice, this was not the case and many of the pupils had very limited understanding of this aspect of their faith.
Schools also need to ensure that the changing nature of religion and belief in the contemporary world is reflected more strongly in the RE curriculum. More provision needs to be made for pupils to explore areas of controversy in the world of religion and belief, while recognising the important ways in which different religions and beliefs often work in collaboration in pursuing social harmony. For example, teaching about the Muslim faith in some of the secondary schools visited made no reference to immediate questions about the place of Islam in Britain and the modern world. As a result, the teachers missed opportunities to explore diversity within the religion and to confront stereotyping in the media.
Mohinder Galowalia: Community Cohesion presentation
(Notes taken from the minutes of SACRE)

Mohinder gave his presentation on community cohesion and highlighted the definition of community cohesion, as interpreted by various different bodies (Leicester City Council, Brent Council, Home Office etc). He said that Ofsted have adopted the overall definition for its school inspections. MG also presented a theoretical model of how to make progress on community cohesion. Of four options, he felt the most effective was that with the greatest number of shared human faith values across the different faiths. He stressed that there can be no cohesion without inclusion, and no inclusion without understanding and recognition of the nature of diversity.

He is keen to raise the profile of the Crawley Inter-Faith Network, and is involving schools (representatives from two schools were present as observers at the meeting), and added that the local press is willing to promote its work.

The vice-chairman thanked MG for his presentation and added that in the guidance document, community cohesion is discussed on pp 14-17. He added that as part of the government’s strategy, community cohesion groups are to be formed, and said he sits on the Chichester Community Cohesion Group. He then invited questions from members. PG found the presentation very interesting and would like to learn more about the CIFN. He said he is trying to visit all schools in the county (189 so far) but is annoyed that Ofsted assesses a school’s performance on community cohesion against a national (ie. urban) standard. He felt expectations on a rural school were unfair in that they are measured against an urban school and the same results were expected.

MG said he felt the solution was for Ofsted to develop different approaches for rural West Sussex, and to establish what is relevant. The vice-chairman asked how other members are carrying out their community cohesion obligations. Rosemary Appleby said her school has links with Northgate School in Crawley and recently hosted a beachside event, and there are plans to visit the school in the future. The focus was on empathy, values, and awareness of other people. The school also has contact with a school in Sierra Leone. Farhang Tahzib was concerned around issues on the purpose of RE education and said it was important to recognise the difference between religion and ethnicity. He was concerned that Crawley could be used as a ‘laboratory’ and there was a danger of accentuating cultural differences, rather than looking at religious values. RA pointed out that her school also had links with schools in Tanzania and India as well as Sierra Leone, and had become involved with the Crawley school as she had links with the headteacher.

Mo Shilliday said there were three levels of community cohesion: locality, national and global awareness, and added that it was difficult to meet the agenda of what multiculturalism in the UK is all about, without being tokenist. She added that Ofsted is encouraging awareness in the UK, as it is a national issue. Susan Thompson explained that the main focus of the duty for community cohesion is across different cultures, ethnic, religious and non-religious groups it was also about socio-economic groups such as the disabled. She said this was not the sole purpose of RE. The vice-chairman said this was a good point but added that community cohesion is part of SACRE’s non-statutory guidance. Angela Smith said that in RE lessons, there are aspects designed
to develop children’s awareness and that many schools are aiming for international accreditation. She added that in secondary schools, this is across all subjects.

NB then introduced one of the observers, Yvonne Williams, who is a consultant headteacher who is working on community cohesion for SACRE. She would be happy to speak to members after the meeting and to visit them in school before the end of term. The vice-chairman then drew this discussion to a close and once again thanked MG for his presentation and for prompting further discussion.
Schools and religious communities in West Sussex working together to promote community cohesion: A report to SACRE

Legislation, Ofsted, and the core purpose of schools
The promotion of Community Cohesion is a legal duty for schools yet the Ofsted inspection judgement forms only a small part of the Leadership and Management section. The starting point for this legislation was the then governments concern following riots and terrorism as a result of which 3 fracture lines were identified ie Ethnicity, Socio-economics, and Religion. Of these three elements, schools seem to be most uneasy about addressing the third – hence SACRE’s proper focus to help if possible. SACRE has a particular responsibility for RE and Collective Worship but the duty is a wider one and whole school management is, therefore, included in this evaluation.

There may even be some question whether it is the role of schools to promote community cohesion beyond the outreach work with which they are already familiar. Community outreach/links and community cohesion are, however, separate Ofsted judgements and properly so. There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating that young people from fractured homes and communities tend to do less well than those from cohesive homes and communities. Promoting Community Cohesion, therefore, is part of the core purpose of any inclusive school.

There is also a strong evidence base that religion plays a strong role in communities – whether that be positive or negative. Religious groups provide strong communities for many of the young people in our schools and, certainly, church schools are able to call upon this context more so than other schools. Church schools can, though, by virtue of this same context, sometimes inhibit cohesion by excluding people of other faiths or none in their admissions policies, worship and -for VA schools- by adopting a RS curriculum other than that approved by SACRE.

There are now untapped sources of support for schools such as the Council Community Cohesion Committees and the Inter-faith networks. The Councils are already doing a substantial amount of work to promote community cohesion but are tending to focus on ethnicity and socio-economics. The Councils are willing to work with schools and have some capacity to fund relevant projects. The Inter-faith networks in Horsham, Crawley, and more recently in Worthing are already doing much to heal fractures between faiths and are willing to work with the schools in their community. In addition the Chichester diocese has its own inter-faith committee.

Two frustrations arise from the Ofsted inspections of Community Cohesion. One is that the focus of reports thus far available seems to be on all mono-cultural schools having a greater awareness of multi-faith communities...whereas there is supposedly as much ignorance of rural ‘christian’ communities in multicultural cities which is not being addressed. This is a major concern for West Sussex. The other is that some of the examples given to support a good judgement are outreach/links and not following the exacting demands of the criteria. The rest of this report will evaluate current practice and make recommendations based on the Ofsted criteria.

Recommendations:
1. To conduct literary research and establish strong evidence base for the importance of this work to student achievement.
2. To conduct more interviews so as to establish an accurate West Sussex perspective

3. To meet with a range of West Sussex faith leaders to see if their desire to work with schools on this agenda matches that of the inter-faith networks.

**Knowing Your Community**

Community is defined in the Ofsted criteria as: Local (catchment, town, county), National, and International. All three are challenging from the perspective of Religion. At a local level, nervousness exists as to which religious leaders to work with for fear of proselytising motives, and there is also a worry of Crawley—as the only multifaith community—becoming a ‘goldfish bowl’. Many schools have international links of which they are proud but acknowledge that any knowledge of the religion of these communities is limited to the phenomenological (festivals and worship). It is at National level where there is the biggest gap – and given that it was national cohesion that drove the legislation – there is much to be done here. There is a general reluctance to form a link with an inner city school as it smacks of a ‘tick box’ exercise yet this same hesitation doesn’t seem to limit international links.

Schools have information (SIMS data) on the religious affiliation of each student yet, in the data issued to form tutors and class teachers this is rarely included. Such information is seen as a ‘private’ thing and irrelevant to achievement which is, after all, the core purpose of such data. The categories are also somewhat confusing. Students, on the other hand, report a frustration that teachers, while respectful of their faith in as much as they perceive no negativity, do miss opportunities for understanding and/or inclusion. Four examples were given: Phone call home to report absence during a religious observance; not being asked for a different world view on an ethical issue under consideration; current affairs discussions being avoided from fear of any controversy causing offence; lessons about their faith which were descriptive and limited.

At a whole school level, schools have a generic view of the catchment’s socio-economics, ethnicity, and religion, but few have mapped the addresses of their students against the national data for each LSOA to see if there are any correlations. The community cohesion projects that do exist tend to be in response to a request eg from the Council cc grp and many things that may need to be addressed are missed because of lack of knowledge.

**Recommendations:**

1. To use the best practice of international links to inform national links

2. To provide data to all adults in the school so that experiences of all students can be drawn on

3. To offer training on teaching controversial issues

4. To accurately map the locality

5. To set up a focus group of students and/or parents of different faiths
Making appropriate interventions

Herein lies the crux of the duty and the focus of SACRE support. Any interventions are to be appropriate, i.e., appropriate to the purpose of community cohesion. Hence, the common call to links with different schools.

The quality of Religious Education in schools is crucial. The Ofsted report on the quality of RE, though based on a very small sample, is familiar and is telling. Despite, or because of the peculiar status of RE in schools, the picture is so incredibly variable. Where RE is not so good, knowledge of faith is still tending to the descriptive ‘samosas and saris’. This is particularly true of visits to places of worship. A sympathetic celebration of diversity is no bad thing and, of course, the most basic of visits can enhance such appreciation of things that are different. But so much more is possible. An attempt to understand the ‘spiritual’ element of humanity can draw upon different expressions. A subsequent exploration of how belief affects ethics can similarly draw on different perspectives. The cohesion of religions with each other and with non-religious views is far more likely if children understand why some humans express their spirituality through religion. Religion is, for many children, part of their identity, and this is recognised in the West Sussex agreed syllabus themes (such as Belonging, Family and Community, and Interfaith dialogue) but is its quality and effectiveness monitored? The Ofsted publications call for more explicit discussion of the social and political impact of religions.

Collective worship is a very effective opportunity to promote community cohesion in its manifold forms – the very essence of most assemblies being about understanding and harmony. Yet, the involvement of religious representatives can be frustrating. Schools are nervous about inadvertently inviting someone whose views might come across as proselytism rather than education. Faith leaders are equally wary of ‘cold calling’. Both perspectives are borne of collective worship being seen as a one-off.

Inter-faith networks report trying to offer their services, and even funds for artefacts, but meeting with silence. Mutual distrust may be too strong a description of the relationship but there is a mutual lack of knowledge, which – amidst all the other pressures of running a school or religious group – means that common ground can be avoided. What is particularly interesting is that there seems to be more of a willingness to engage with primary where the curiosity and celebration of diversity is the ‘safe’ focus, and with sixth form where ‘question time’ formats are fruitful. Much more difficult are the opportunities for students in the 11-16 age range to meet people of other faiths …yet this is the very age when adolescence is questioning, challenging, and in need of perspectives other than the familiar. The Horsham Inter Faith group have also tried to establish a youth membership.

For encounters to be meaningful, they need time: time for the school and faith representative to discuss the objectives; time for meaningful conversations with the students. For all age groups, finding a common project which would not be focussed on Religion, but give children the chance to meet people of other faiths would be beneficial. One school is already doing this with a small group of sixth formers meeting their peers in the link school. An arts project might be ideal for primary children, current affairs (the more controversial and multi-faceted the better!) for 11-16, and a community service project for sixth formers. In all three examples, common values and interests would bring the faiths together and follow up lessons in school could seek to extract and develop questions and ideas arising. Whatever the age group, meeting over food might result in real discussion and real understanding!
Headteachers and non RE specialists can be hesitant to make Religion explicit – perhaps because they hold the view that it is irrelevant, or for fear of offending, or in acknowledgement that a little knowledge can sometimes do more harm than good. These fears are legitimate but perhaps a decade out of date. Multi-faith awareness which recognises and celebrates distinctiveness and requires knowledge remains as important now as in the 70s but there is an appetite (and legislative duty) to be bolder and look for common ground. The different religions hold very similar moral and social mores to ‘british citizenship’ and herein lies the likely focus for work between schools and faith groups. The Crawley interfaith group have already initiated a values project with schools and SACRE have already considered the Canadian virtues programme.

Part of the school’s duty is now also to consider the needs of children in the community who do not necessarily attend the school. Community cohesion could, therefore, be an agenda for the Area networks but more so for the schools who have a more natural opportunity. Couldn’t the authority’s church schools work with ‘secular’ schools on what it means to be part of a Christian community and, in the case of C of E school, a national community? Couldn’t Crawley schools host a conference for the LA’s monocultural schools?

**Recommendations:**

1. To ensure that training and appointment of RE teachers includes the community cohesion responsibility
2. To offer training and/or publish an etiquette for all faith leaders who wish to work with schools and to keep a register of those who have attended such training
3. To support Headteachers who are driven by moral purpose to see the importance of this work but shy away from it
4. Senior staff in schools to meet with their local faith leaders to explore the contribution they can make.
5. To celebrate/acknowledge festivals and commemorations of all faiths in collective worship
6. To explore ways of making links which are quality relationships and enable real discussion of what makes us distinctive in our views and what combines us. To develop a project for each key stage to start with Interfaith week in November and end with RE week in March.
7. To review the agreed syllabus to strengthen the social and political aspects of faiths.
8. To set up interfaith student groups/facebook communities

**Evaluating Impact**

It is this section of the Ofsted criteria that scuppers many schools who can demonstrate that they do a lot, but not that it enhances cohesion, progress, or standards. SACRE could offer a great deal of support here: demonstrating the connection between cohesion of Religious groups with progress; supporting schools
willing to venture into current controversies in an attempt to explain difference, and demonstrate commonality; and in evaluating the impact of any work schools might choose to do.

Recommendations:
1. To set up a student voice in order to evaluate impact of new initiatives between schools and faith groups.
2. To liaise with other groups eg Health to ensure impact on well-being of young people in our schools

Acknowledgements
I am very grateful to the people who met with me at such a busy time of year, and was inspired by their commitment to their organisation and its role in promoting community cohesion. As only six meetings were possible, it would be wrong to identify the contributors at this point. Suffice to say that their wisdom and wit brought life to the somewhat generic coverage in the reading materials, and have convinced me that now, more than ever before, is the right time for SACRE to act.

Yvonne Williams
Associate Headteacher
August 2010
Church of England Committee response to SACRE Report on Community Cohesion.

At the SACRE meeting on 8 November 2010 a report on Community Cohesion in West Sussex was presented as agenda item 9. The Church of England committee has considered the report and written the following response.

The report seems to extend beyond the remit of SACRE in relation to RE and collective worship and makes some truly far-reaching generalisations which misrepresent schools designated as Church of England schools. This response makes the assumption that by ‘church school’ the report means schools designated as Church of England, although recognises that it could equally well refer to Roman Catholic Church schools. It may also be worth noting that while the response deals with all church schools there may be some differences between primary and secondary schools in terms of intake and setting within local communities.

Admissions
The statement “by virtue of this same context, sometimes inhibit cohesion by excluding people of other faiths or none in their admissions policies, worship and for VA schools by adopting a RS curriculum other than that approved by SACRE.” (page 1, paragraph 4) is very misleading. All church schools can use faith – based oversubscription criteria (see Schools Admission Code 2010, 2.46 and 2.53) which says “schools with a religious character are exempt and are permitted to use faith-based oversubscription criteria in order to give higher priority in admissions to children who are members of, or who practise, their faith or denomination. This only applies if a school is oversubscribed” (my italics). The words ‘their faith’ refer to the faith of the child not the school, thus meaning a school can give priority to those of any faith rather than those who have none. The Local Authority is the admission authority for Voluntary Controlled schools which, with one exception in this authority, does not include a faith element within the over-subscription criteria. In Voluntary Aided schools the admission policy is the decision of the governing body. This has to be consulted on as prescribed by the code and is open to objection through the Schools Adjudicator. In the case of Voluntary Aided schools in this diocese the vast majority reflect their primary importance as being to serve their local communities irrespective of their faith position. Their governing bodies have to be mindful of Section 2.53 which states that “admission authorities for faith schools should consider how their particular admission arrangements impact on the communities in which they are physically based and those faith communities which they serve.” The over-arching purpose of Church Schools, as set down by the National Society, is that they are there to serve the local community, as it is seen as part of the church’s responsibility. To say that church schools ‘inhibit cohesion’ is in the main misrepresentative of the situation as evidenced above and supported by that fact that there are church schools in the country who have an entirely Muslim (100%) pupil population, although this is not so in West Sussex because of demographics.

Monocultural schools
The phrase on page 2, paragraph 2 and page 5, paragraph 1 ‘all mono-cultural schools’ is a very misleading term. It would be interesting to find an example of
such a school as the majority of schools have some diversity represented in their school community. Implied implicitly in the term ‘monocultural’ is that all adherents of a particular faith are from a certain ethnic background. This is similar to the issue with the term community cohesion which in its correct context means diversity of faith/belief, ethnicity, social economic background, sexual orientation, age, gender, nationality and so on, a ‘mono-cultural school’ is unlikely to exist.

Two concerns present themselves in paragraph 3, page 2 communities across West Sussex but most especially on the south coast may disagree with Crawley having the monopoly on being a ‘multi-faith community’. Furthermore the idea that links with inner-city schools are seen as tick box exercises is misrepresentative of the good work that is taking place across the county with church schools linking with other parts of the country, in some instances with non-church schools, to extend the learning opportunities for pupils.

**Religious Education**

A trawl through RE planning across the county, particularly in secondary schools, would demonstrate that controversial issues are being dealt with. Training on teaching controversial issues is being offered to secondary schools through the ‘Resilience strategy’. However, a national survey of RE teachers in 2009 demonstrated that controversial issues did cause some teachers difficulty. As a consequence to this the National Association of Teachers of RE are undertaking work to help teachers with this, hopefully this will be published during the next year or so.

The quote cited in the admissions section of this response speaks of the situation regarding the syllabus selection of schools. Voluntary Aided school governing bodies are allowed in law to adopt their own RE syllabus. This might be from another local authority, another Diocese or from another source. Many schools choose to use the local agreed syllabus and augment the provision of Christianity to reflect of their foundation and trust deed.

The final paragraph on page 3 mentions the monitoring of the quality of RE. In church schools RE is considered to be part of the core curriculum and should be treated as such. Voluntary Aided schools are inspected (section 48 inspection reports, http://newsite.diochi.org.uk/S48-wscc) on their provision of RE and Voluntary Controlled schools are inspected in the effectiveness of RE in contributing to the whole curriculum. One further point to note in relation to inspection is that all church schools are inspected on their contribution to pupils’ development to become responsible citizens and on the promotion of community cohesion (locally, nationally and globally). This demonstrates that community cohesion in church schools takes a prominent place in the education provision and environment of the school, one that goes beyond RE and reaches all corners of the life and work of a school (see Section 48 inspection reports).

**Collective Worship**

To clarify the issues raised regarding collective worship (page 4, paragraph 1), the report states that Collective Worship is ‘a very effective opportunity to promote community cohesion in its manifold forms’ this appears to extend the purpose of Collective Worship, the most recent guidance for which can be found in Circular 1/94. This states that the aims of Collective Worship are “to provide the opportunity for pupils to worship God, to consider spiritual and moral issues and to
explore their own beliefs; to encourage participation and response, whether through active involvement in the presentation of worship or through listening to and joining in the worship offered; and to develop community spirit, promote a common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes.” Furthermore, Collective Worship in community schools ... “must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character through not distinctive of any particular denomination.” (page 1 Circular 1/94). This means that the majority, but not all acts of worship must be Christian over the course of a term. These requirements mean that collective worship goes far beyond being about addressing ‘understanding and harmony’ as stated in the report.

Collective Worship is by no means seen as a ‘one-off’ in church schools. It as an integral part of the school day, as evidenced by Section 48 inspection reports. The Section 48 reports focus on the impact that collective worship has on those participating. Evidence from these reports demonstrates that when delivered effectively it has a great impact on the thinking and behaviour of children of all faiths and none.

**Visitors from faiths**
Church schools regularly have representatives of religious traditions visiting their schools and such visits are reported as making a positive impact to either collective worship or the curriculum (Section 48 inspections). There is guidance readily available on the internet, produced by professional organisations, for example [www.natre.org.uk](http://www.natre.org.uk) or other SACRE’s (e.g. Newham), designed to help schools prepare for a visit from members of faith communities to ensure that educational principles are adhered to. However, it is true to say that not all representatives of faith communities are gifted in communicating appropriately with children so careful selection and pre-event conversations are required.

**Links with other schools**
A recommendation to Church Schools is made (page 5) this represents a lack of understanding of the work of church schools across the diocese. Church primary and secondary schools are active parts of local clusters of schools as well as, in some instances, working together as a group of church schools on particular areas of focus. Additionally, many church schools have active links international links which contribute to the curriculum.

In response to the recommendations cited (p5):
- **Point 1:** Community Cohesion is not the sole responsibility of the RE teacher, it is a whole school responsibility and impacts on all areas of the curriculum. Whilst training should be given on community cohesion where necessary it should not necessarily be tied to the RE teacher.
- **Point 3:** Questions should be asked regarding the comment that headteachers are generally shy of addressing community cohesion. This is surprising especially when it has been one of the core OFSTED judgements in recent years.
- **Point 5:** this recommendation is not appropriate for church schools and has limits within the community school given points made above. ‘All faiths’ would be more accurately expressed as ‘faiths that form part of the school community.’
• Point 7: RE covers all areas of social responsibility demonstrated by faiths and, where age appropriate, the impact of faith on political views and vice versa. However, this is not the primary purpose of religious education.
• Point 8: The setting up of interfaith groups would require monitoring so that bigoted comments are not promoted.

The Church of England committee, collectively, would ask SACRE to take these points into consideration when discussing further the response to the community cohesion report.