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| Title: The Casey Review and A Secularist Framework for an Inclusive Society | | | | |
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| Wards Affected: | **All** | | | |
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| To: | **SACRE** | | On: | **Date 1st February, 2017** |
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**1. Key points and Summary**

* 1. This report relates to the *Casey Review, A review into opportunity and integration* published in December 2016. The report was commissioned by the Prime Minister’s Office to look at the issue of integration in the United Kingdom. It highlights the isolation of some communities and looks at the role of religion within that isolation. This report also brings to the attention of SACRE members a report published by Warwick University, which looks at a Secularist response to the report Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life. What is notable about this report is its call to ‘downgrade’ religious education, although it is in line with other reports on the call to end ‘faith schools’.

**2. Introduction**

2.1 The Casey Review began in 2015 amid fears that Britain was becoming a more divided society and that cultural, social and economic isolation was growing. In part this was due to the diversification of society as a result of migration patterns and the impact that migration has had on the UK since the 1950s. The Casey Review is interesting in its recognition that British society is becoming less religious and more religious at the same time. As paragraph 1.16 of the Full Report states:

As a nation, we are getting older, more secular and more open about our sexuality, while the growing ethnic minority population is younger and more likely to identify as religious (particularly among Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups).

This is an important consideration for religious educators. It has been noted that religious education often presents white people as non-religious and people from minority ethnic backgrounds as essentially religious. The way that religious education is taught can compound that issue. It is also the case that ‘anxiety’ around Islam and Muslims can lead some schools to emphasize Islam over other non-Christian religious traditions. To this extent teachers are products of their environments where there are levels of social anxiety and RE teachers feel the need to respond to those anxieties (see the work of Conroy J. et al (2013). *Does Religious Education Work?* London, Bloomsbury). What has also been of concern is that teachers feel able to challenge and criticize Christianity to their pupils but won’t do that in relation to other religious traditions, especially Islam.

The report, though, not only highlights the issues relating to minority ethnic groups but also to the White Working Class communities, as well as groups such as Gypsy Travellers. It is clear that for some White Working Class communities there is significant social and economic exclusion, something that characterizes some areas of Torbay. The raises a number of issues for religious education. One of those is around how religions are presented to pupils from White Working Class backgrounds, given that statistically they are less likely to engage with religious traditions in their family lives. Another is how do teachers ensure that they do not cement social attitudes associated with such groups in relation to non-Christian religions, especially Islam. The report notes two interesting findings:

*People from ethnic minority groups or those expressing a religious affiliation were slightly more likely to think their area was cohesive than White people or those with no religious affiliation.  (Page 65)*

*By ethnicity, the 2008 Citizenship Survey noted that White people and people from ethnic minorities were equally likely to cite respect for the law as an important value, while White people were less likely and other ethnic groups more likely to mention equality of opportunity, respect for all faiths and respect for people from different ethnic groups. (Page 68)*

The first indicates that those who belong to religious communities have a more cohesive experience of society and the second that they are more likely to have respect for people of faith and different ethnicity. One of the key reasons given for the importance of religious education in the curriculum is that it promotes community cohesion and tolerance. If that is the case then the findings of the Casey Report pose a challenge for teachers in predominantly White Working Class schools and those key purposes do not appear to be being achieved.

The Casey Review is nearly 200 pages long and too large for a report in this context. It does, though, set interesting challenges for Local Authorities and their SACREs. For the purpose of this report the Executive Summary is attached (see Appendix 1).

2.2 The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (CORAB) reported in December 2015. Since then there have been a number of responses to the report: *Living With Difference: community, diversity and the common good*. In November 2016 Warwick University published a report, on the basis of the work of an expert panel, on a secularist response to CORAB. The report *A Secularist Response to the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life* argues that a secularist response to CORAB had not been produced up to that point. Chapter 2 of the Secularist response to CORAB focuses on Education (the full report is 25 pages long and only the Executive Summary is attached to this report: see Appendix 2). In terms of religious education the CORAB report held that RE should be given a higher status in the curriculum, and that it should include non-religious world views, but this report argues strongly that RE should not be given the status of other curriculum subjects – especially Mathematics and English.

2.3 What is of note is that both of these reports are in response to a changing Britain. Whilst the Casey Review does not really concern itself with religious education per se it does highlight the need to respond to diversity and to promote inclusion. The only place where it mentions religious education (Full report page 175) is reporting the CORAB report’s recommendation that the *A Secularist Response to the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life* challenges. As such both reports can be noted by SACRE as making an on-going contribution to understanding the continued difficulty of understanding the role of religion in public life and how that in turn impacts on the way that we as a society understand the nature and purpose of RE as a curriculum subject in schools and academies.

**3.0 Recommendation**

* 1. That SACRE note the Casey Review’s Executive Summery (Appendix 1)
  2. That SACRE note *A Secularist Response to the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life* (Appendix 2)

**Andrew Strachan**

**Chair of SACRE**

**Appendices**

Appendix 1: Casey Review’s Executive Summery

Appendix 2: *A Secularist Response to the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life*

**Documents available in members’ rooms**

None

Background Papers:

Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life: *Living With Difference: community, diversity and the common good* (2015).