

Dorset Humanists Schools Team Strategy

Context statement

Humanism, understood as a non-religious worldview, has been an integral part of local RE syllabuses since Dorset Humanists gained representation on local SACREs around 2005. Schools under LA control are obliged to follow the locally agreed syllabus but other schools, such as faith schools and academies, can choose whether to follow it or not. Some schools apparently are no longer teaching RE at all. Humanism is optional or recommended in the local syllabuses rather than compulsory and therefore it can get squeezed out, although non-religious perspectives become more pressing as pupils/students enter their teenage years. In the 2011 Census, 30 per cent of the local population ticked 'No Religion'. We believe that this statistic alone makes it imperative that Humanism is treated equally with the major religions.

Vision/Mission

To ensure that all pupils/students in Dorset leave school knowing that Humanism is a positive and ethical alternative to religion.

Aims

1. To ensure there is a committed Humanist representative on each of the local SACREs (Dorset and Bournemouth/Poole)
2. To ensure that Humanism is included as a mandatory element in each locally-agreed syllabus
3. To ensure that schools know about our existence and the services and high quality resources we can offer
4. To offer training on Humanism to schools (eg 'twilight' training from 4.00-6.00pm)
5. To respond to leads from Humanists UK to speak in schools
6. To proactively get invitations to visit schools in Dorset and speak to students about Humanism in lessons, assemblies, interfaith conferences etc
7. To keep abreast of developments in RE nationally

Methods

1. Mass-mailing by email (not post) plus a more targeted approach. This would entail drawing up a list of target schools and then assigning responsibility to team members with the necessary skills. Typically, they would find out who to contact, send them an introductory email saying that this will be followed up with a phone call, doing the phone call, and offering to send an information pack in the post. The assumption is that if there has been phone contact and the teacher has agreed to a pack they are not going to just bin it as soon as it arrives. We may need to agree a telephone script.
2. Contact schools previously visited.
3. Attend teacher events, SACREs etc and hand out information packs etc
4. Have information packs/leaflets available at our summer festival events
5. Ask our members with school-age children to suggest their schools to contact us.
6. Press, radio

School visitor criteria

1. Members of Dorset Humanists with teaching or training experience or demonstrated aptitude
2. Excellent knowledge of Humanism
3. Attended and/or co-presented Dorset Humanists One Life course
4. Attended Humanists UK school speaker training and any follow-up training provided by Dorset Humanists as soon as possible after joining our visitor team
5. DBS is not a requirement because visitors are never left unsupervised in schools but if you have one then it may be helpful to mention it.

Values

1. We will promote Humanism as a positive non-religious worldview
2. We will challenge religion where appropriate but we will avoid disparaging or being disrespectful toward religion
3. We will keep our skills and knowledge up to date
4. We will seek critical feedback from each other and from schools in order to improve our own materials and presentation skills

Resources

1. Experienced presenters can share their presentations and other materials
2. We will periodically ask the broader DH membership for people to join the team
3. We may design our own DH training programme to supplement Humanist UK's training, based around a supplement document (see point 5 below)
4. We can signpost teachers to Humanists UK's 'Understanding Humanism' website.
5. We may create a Dorset version of the Manchester Humanism supplement
6. We have an information pack and covering letter which can be adapted as required
7. Website – needs further development
8. Network with Christian schools workers

Constraints

1. Teaching Humanism is primarily the responsibility of teachers following locally agreed syllabuses where Humanism is a recommended non-religious worldview but we aim to support and supplement this with school visits, attending conferences etc.
2. RE teachers are under pressure to teach only what they have to.
3. Some schools appear to be nervous about inviting 'atheists' – we have to work at establishing reputation and trust.
4. Christian charities employ paid workers to target schools – we don't have the resources to match

This version of the strategy was agreed at our meeting on 29th April 2018