

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION)

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 22 JUNE 2010

Attendance:

GROUP A - Religious traditions and Christian Churches

~ Mr Zia Baig	A <i>Councillor Asad Omar</i>
A <i>Mrs Martha Besser (Vice Chair)</i>	~ <i>Miss Fatema Rahemani</i>
* Mr Mike Bishop	* Mr Neville Ransley
* Dr Julie Crow	* Mrs Gill Ross
A <i>Mrs Niru Desai</i>	* Mrs Doreen Samuels
* Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal	~ <i>Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli</i>
* Mr Vijay Hirani	A <i>Ven Sumana Sramaner</i>
~ <i>Dr Vinod Kapashi</i>	A <i>Ms Beverley Wilson</i>

GROUP B - Church of England

A Mrs Mary Abbott	A Rev'd. Matthew Stone
* Rev'd. Giles Pinnock	

GROUP C – Teachers' Associations

A <i>Ms Heena Modi</i>	~ <i>Mrs Manju Radia</i>
A <i>Ms Bhavita Pandya</i>	* Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)
* <i>Ms Nancy Parsons</i>	

GROUP D – Local Authority

Councillors: *

A Nana Asante (Sasi Suresh Reserving)
~ Lurline Champagne
* Nizam Ismail
* Mrs Camilla Bath,
* Bill Phillips (Reserve)

Co-opted Members:

Seconded from the Harrow Student Advisory Board: vacancies

Also attending:

- * Ms Rachel Bowerman (Senior School Improvement Professional & Adviser to SACRE, nominated by the Director of Education)
- * Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

* denotes *presence*

A denotes *absence*

~ denotes *absence without apologies*

Visitor from Stag Lane Middle School:

Alexis Sobbel, RE Co-ordinator

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Alexis Sobbel from Stag Lane Middle School, who was attending in order to make a presentation about her school's SEF (Self Evaluation Form).

2. Apologies for Absence

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Mrs Martha Besser, Mrs Niru Desai, Ven Sumana Sramaner, Mrs Beverley Wilson, Cllr Asad Omar, Mrs Mary Abbott, Rev'd Matthew Stone, Ms Heena Modi, Cllr Nana Asante and Mrs Bhavita Pandya.

The following members were absent without apologies: Mr Zia Baig, Miss Fatema Rahemani, Mrs Manju Radia and Cllr Lurline Champagnie.

3. Membership

Cllr Sasi Suresh was reserving for Cllr Nana Asante;
Cllr Camilla Barth and Cllr Nizam Ismail have joined the committee;
Cllr Bill Philips was attending as a reserve;
Mr Shabban Saddik has resigned from the committee;
Anjana Patel is no longer on the committee as she is no longer a councillor.

It was agreed that the committee should seek to reinstate the student representatives, perhaps seeking students from the schools who were already working with the committee. The Chair would take this forward. **Action Chair.**

The committee recorded its congratulations to Cllr Asad Omar who is now Mayor of Harrow.

Some concerns were expressed that this meeting was not on the council calendar. The Clerk will liaise with Mark Doherty at the Civic Centre to ensure that future meetings are recorded.

Action: Clerk

Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal expressed concern at the high number of absences at the last meeting. There was some discussion as to whether members who frequently missed meetings should continue as members of the committee. **It**

was agreed that the Chairs Committee should look into this and report back to the full committee. Action: Chairs Committee.

4. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

No nominations had been received prior to the meeting:

Doreen Samuels, seconded by Camilla Barth proposed Alison Stowe as Chair.

Elected unanimously

Cllr Nizam Ismail seconded by Nancy Parsons proposed Camilla Barth as Vice-Chair.

Elected unanimously

5. Order of the Agenda

It was agreed to take item 7 first so that Alexis Sobell could then leave the meeting. However, for clarity, the minutes follow the original order of the agenda.

6. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2010

7. Matters arising from the minutes not included elsewhere on the agenda

5. Matters arising from the minutes

Website: very little progress has been made on the website

6. SACRE Monitoring Standards and Quality of provision for RE in Harrow Schools

a) Philosophy and Ethics review report

Nancy Parsons, who had not been present at the last meeting, expressed concern that RE at A Level was being rebranded and “philosophy and ethics”. Rachel Bowerman welcomed this comment and drew the committee’s attention to p4 of the minutes (vi. Curriculum) where she has made exactly this point. It is important that RE is promoted and shown to relevant to those who do not hold religious beliefs and taught in a way that makes it popular with students, interactive and exciting.

8. Determinations: Rachel Bowerman has written to Vaughan First and Middle School confirming its determination. She has also written to those schools that had been advised by Pat Stevens that they needed to renew their determinations, to inform them that no action was required, they should continue as they are and await new guidance from SACRE.

10. Any Other business:

a) Park High Visitors: the Chair had written a letter of thanks to the Park High visitors for their presentation.

8. SACRE Monitoring Standards and Quality of Provision for RE in Harrow Schools

Business Items: Improving standards in religious education and collective worship

8. SACRE Monitoring Standards and Quality of Provision for RE in Harrow Schools

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item explaining that this is the sort of presentation that enables SACRE to fulfil its duties to monitor the quality of RE. The report from Park High School in the Spring Term had been very informative and successful. The Committee had agreed to develop this process through consultation with schools and to invite school representatives to SACRE meetings wherever possible. This evening, Alexis Sobbel from Stag Lane Middle School was going to report using the school RE SEF. Rachel Bowerman explained that this document was, in effect, a confidential document. The Committee was privileged to share this report. She asked the committee to respect this confidentiality. Normally such a document would come to the Chairs group who would summarise it for the committee. As this was the first time the RE SEF had been used, Alison Sobell was attending the meeting to report to the full committee.

At this point (7.50pm) Phiroza Gan-Kotwal arrived.

a) Stag Lane Middle School RE Self Evaluations Form (RE SEF) (***tabled at the meeting***)

The SEF is arranged under the headings used for the general school SEF. Alexis Sobbel explained the process by which the teaching of RE was evaluated. Books of pupils in years 4,5,6 and 7 were scrutinized, and lessons were observed in these year groups. The children's work was evaluated in relation to RE level descriptors to see if they are reaching appropriate targets. There was also a meeting with children from different year groups. This element of discussion makes an important contribution to the evaluation process. She took the committee through the RE SEF, drawing attention to the following.

Pupils' achievement in RE and the extent to which they enjoy learning in RE

Pupils' achievement in RE was judged to be good.

An area for development was pupils' written work where their attainment was not as high as in core subjects.

Pupils' behaviour in RE

Pupils' behaviour in RE was outstanding. They demonstrated enthusiasm and thoroughly enjoyed the subject.

Every Child Matters and RE

Children were comfortable to talk about their beliefs and showed themselves to be confident learners.

The extent to which, through RE, pupils contribute to the school and wider community

Parent ambassadors and the Rev'd Matthew take part in assemblies. The children also visit different places of worship.

The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in RE

The children demonstrated tolerance and understanding of different religious viewpoints.

The quality of teaching in RE

Teachers enjoy teaching RE.

The extent to which the RE Curriculum delivers the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus and meets pupils' needs

The school uses a combination of the old and new schemes of work and this delivers the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in driving improvement

Various initiatives have been set up and these have contributed to the success and popularity of RE in the school.

The leadership and management of RE teaching and learning

RE enjoys the full support of the Head Teacher and senior management team and this is a crucial factor in its success.

The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being in RE

As mentioned above, the parent ambassadors have played a crucial role in improving the status of RE. In response to a question from Cllr Camilla Barth, Alexis Sobbel reported that no children had been withdrawn from RE classes and there had been no complaints or objections from parents who did not wish their children to learn about other faiths.

The effectiveness with which RE promotes equal opportunity and tackles discrimination

All pupils feel valued and demonstrate understanding and tolerance towards others.

The effectiveness with which RE promotes community cohesion

RE is seen to be very effective at promoting community cohesion.

Overall effectiveness: how good is RE

RE teaching and learning is characterized by enthusiasm on the part of pupils and teachers. It is seen to promote a climate where pupils feel valued and confident about expressing their beliefs. They also demonstrate understanding towards others.

Important actions for RE

The SIP outlines areas for development. These include using level descriptors to plan work more effectively and sharing good practice in RE teaching.

Rachel Bowerman reminded the committee that Stag Lane Middle School has been judged outstanding in its most recent Ofsted inspection. She stressed the importance of triangulating evidence by interviewing pupils, pointing out that RE is a subject where pupils often do better in discussion than in written work. This is especially true of schools where there is a high percentage of pupils with EAL. RE is relevant to their backgrounds and personal experience – it is an area where

they are experts. The importance of RE is recognized in school and in society as a whole. RE is where pupils learn respect for others' beliefs and the subject also helps them to understand their own beliefs better. Conferring with pupils is an important element in this process.

Rachel Bowerman also commented on the outstanding behaviour of pupils in RE, attributing this to the fact that children value what they are talking about. This is an important contribution to Community Cohesion. It also demonstrates that teachers have created a safe and trusting environment.

Rachel Bowerman validated the conclusions reached in the report. These included the need to make teaching more open ended and to use the level descriptors of the Agreed Syllabus to help teachers make judgments about what children know and understand.

Rachel Bowerman reflected that RE includes a considerable element of retelling of stories from various religious traditions and this, in itself, is not a high level activity. To achieve a higher level requires pupils to explore the significance of these stories for believers. There is a need to adapt tasks so that children can demonstrate understanding in writing as well as in speaking and listening.

Alexis Sobbel then described how standards in RE have been raised in the school. Measures introduced include the following:

Working with gifted and talented children in RE

Using more interactive methods of teaching which are popular with children

Two "RE days" pairing up year groups. One day looked at "Signs and symbols", the other focused on "Festivals"

Subsequently the children presented their work in assemblies and this revealed that they had learnt a tremendous amount. Feedback was very positive.

Alexis Sobbel also considered the pros and cons of using the SEF form. It gave her knowledge of how to do a SEF, criteria for scrutinizing RE work and insight into level descriptors. It enabled her to identify strengths in the school and areas for development and to provide an agenda to move forward with RE teaching. All this showed it was very useful: on the down side, it was a lot of work.

Alexis Sobbel and Rachel Bowerman invited questions on the report:

In response to a question from Cllr Nizam Ismail, Alexis Sobell said that the SEF form could be applied to other schools. Rachel Bowerman expressed the hope that this structure could be used by all schools. Using the RE SEF is not compulsory, but schools might consider it a valuable exercise. She stressed that support from senior leadership, as is the case at Stag Lane, is a crucial factor.

In response to a question from a humanist representative, Alexis Sobell was able to reassure her that children learn not only to respect other religions, but also to respect the beliefs and values of others even when they are not affiliated to a religion. It was agreed that this point should be included in the SEF.

In response to a question from a non-conformist Christian representative as to whether she would like any changes to be made to the form, Rachel Bowerman explained that the form follows the SEF headings. Alexis Sobbel added that in

some cases it is difficult to distinguish the categories identified, e.g. between the effectiveness of partnerships and the promotion of Community Cohesion. Further training in this area would be helpful.

With the new government, it is highly likely that there will be further changes to the evaluation schedule, so it would be better to wait for these before making further changes.

Rachel Bowerman informed the committee that more details are now becoming available about a RE SEF that is being trialled. This is on line and the information gained will become part of a national database. This is a different outcome altogether from the SEF that is internal to the school.

A representative from the Jewish faith spoke of the importance of accountability, but also of understanding context.

In response to a question from a representative of the Teachers' Associations, Rachel Bowerman informed the committee that the RE SEF would not be required annually. It would go out on a rolling programme and once introduced would be updated as changes occurred.

Cllr Camilla Barth asked about SACRE's relationship with the proposed academies: Rachel Bowerman deferred this question to later in the meeting.

Rachel Bowerman and the Chair warmly thanked Alexis Sobbel for her excellent and informative presentation. Alexis Sobbel then left the meeting.

Rachel Bowerman will write a letter of thanks. **Action: Rachel Bowerman**

b) Consultation on SACRE's draft RE SEF

Rachel Bowerman is taking this forward with meetings with Secondary Heads of departments on 20 July and with Primary Subject leaders in the autumn term.

9. HMI Report: Transforming Religious Education

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item, explaining that the report describes the findings of a survey carried out in a small sample of schools. The context is thematic rather than evaluative. The focus is on the creative curriculum, so this emerges as a theme. This report is based on inspections carried out between 2006-09 in 183 schools across 70 authorities.

Key findings: primary schools showed a slight improvement, but not enough outstanding grades. Secondary schools were generally not as good: there were more inadequate schools. A contributive factor may have been the impact of recent changes to the curriculum, making greater links between subjects resulting in less specific RE teaching.

Secondary schools demonstrate success in the numbers of pupils entering for GCSE especially for short courses.

Final Recommendations (p13)

Strength of Community Cohesion was an outcome for RE in most schools.

SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural) development was also an important consequence of RE teaching. Although moral, social and cultural elements were taught strongly, the spiritual element was usually weaker. The report recommended a review of statutory arrangements for the delivery of a local curriculum for RE

At this point (8.45) Cllr Bill Philips arrived

Rachel Bowerman expressed doubts that a National Curriculum for RE teaching would improve RE teaching. In her view, more resources spent on training teachers, creates greater improvement. This report was written under the previous government and may not galvanise activity as its authors may have hoped. A representative of the Teachers Associations reflected that RE is the subject with the shortest supply of specialist teachers. Cllr Camilla Barth questioned the relevance of the document in that no inner London schools were included. In outer London, only five schools were included and they were from the secondary sector. However, it was felt that the committee could use the report as a tool to convince the new government of the importance of RE especially in the context of personal Development and Community Cohesion. It would be possible to build on what was good in the report and push hard to get it noticed and to attract as much funding as it deserves. It was felt that the report surveyed a sufficient number of schools to give a flavour of what is happening with RE. It could be a useful document for identifying good practice and for making recommendations. Those writing the report had outcomes in mind so their examples of good practice might be reflective of those desired outcomes.

It was felt that the last three bullet points on p15 could well go on SACRE's agenda. This would enable SACRE to consider what it is doing to establish these three recommendations. Rachel Bowerman welcomed suggestions. These recommendations also linked to item 9 on the agenda and to Cllr Camilla Barth's earlier question about SACRE's connection with academies.

It was suggested that SACRE should write to the DfE to draw attention to this report and ask them to maintain the high profile of RE. Harrow SACRE is a strong organisation with wide representation and therefore it is in a good position to justify the importance of RE. Copies of the letter should be sent to Ofsted and NASACRE. It was important to be proactive.

It was noted that there should have been a recommendation as to whether the RE curriculum should be agreed locally or national: it would be worth commenting on this in the letter. Rachel Bowerman expressed the view that a locally agreed syllabus offers a unique experience that does not exist in other areas, and, what better vehicle could there be for community cohesion?

Should SACRE also be commenting on teacher training and the need for more teachers? There are a number of issues that SACRE members should be asking about focussing their enquiries on what goes on in schools. For example, TAs are being used more and more and SACRE needs to know if this is happening in Harrow.

Rachel Bowerman will be raising the issues identified in this report at her meetings with primary subject leaders and secondary Heads of departments.

10. SACRE's partnership with the Local Authority to raise achievement in Religious Education

The uncertainty of the present political climate posed question marks over the future of national strategies. The QCDA could either disappear or have a lower profile. In addition there was the high profile proposal for the setting up of academies.

These changes make a difference to what can be provided. Rachel Bowerman cited an example of a course, earlier this term, which was attended by subject leaders, but had no one to lead it. The landscape is changing. The LA may have to limit its School Improvement provision for schools needing help and may no longer be able to provide the advisory team. The LA will not be able to offer the kind of support available in the past.

With regard to academies, we do not yet know how many schools will become academies. Academies do not have to use the locally agreed syllabus. There will be statutory requirements regarding RE but it is not known what they will be. This will shrink SACRE's role as well as the LA's. SACRE will need to consider what it can do to enable schools to find the support they need. Teachers need subject knowledge and confidence that can only be built up over time.

It was proposed that the Chairs group prepare a bid to the Council for funding for core training for schools. This will need to be done for the Autumn Term. Although it is a time of cuts, there is a high respect for SACRE. Another suggestion was made that faith communities might be approached for funding. The Chairs group will take this proposal forward and consider the various suggestions made.

Action: Chairs group

11. Celebrating RE Month - March 2011

Information items: improving SACRE's effectiveness

12. Celebrating RE month – March 2011

March 2011 has been designated as RE month – this is a national event to publicise and raise the status of RE.

After some discussion of what SACRE might contribute to this, it was suggested that the committee should offer some training opportunities for teachers in the form of visits to places of worship such as the new central mosque in Harrow, the new Hindu temple in Alperton, the Krishna Avanti school in Stanmore and the Jewish Museum in Camden town.

It was also felt that some Christian places of worship should be included.

Any suggestions should be sent to the Clerk

SACRE could compile a leaflet detailing events taking place in Harrow.

12. Reports from SACRE Partners

a) Harrow Inter Faith Council: Martha Besser was not present to report to the committee

b) Faith Communities

- **St Mary's Church:** garden party July 8

- **Sponsored floral arrangements:** Gill Ross reported that her synagogue and Harrow Council have collaborated to provide floral arrangements along Hatch End Broadway. Local traders have been given watering cans. The synagogue also has a new part time rabbi who visits from Israel and conducts educational sessions on Skype.
- **International Humanist Day:** Julie Crow informed the meeting that International Humanist Day was celebrated yesterday. The whole of this week is International Humanist Week and the local humanists will be hosting a stall at the Zoom Leisure Centre next Sunday for the “Under one sky” festival. It was thought that perhaps SACRE should consider taking a stall another year.
- **Westminster Interfaith Pilgrimage** will visit various places of worship with special emphasis on the Synagogue in New George Street.

c) Harrow Hate Crime Forum

The Chair has received no communications from the Harrow Hate Crime Forum.

13. Any Other Business

- a) **Chairs group meeting:** Rachel Bowerman will circulate some possible dates. Items for the Chairs group agenda:

RE SEFs

Action Plan arising from the HMI report

Bid for funding from the council

Membership of the committee: recruitment and maintaining good attendance

It was felt that it would be useful if other members of the committee could contact members of the chairs’ group by email. The two members of the chairs group present at the meeting had no objection to sharing their email addresses:

Gill Ross: gross@btinternet.com

Mike Bishop: mikebishop@talktalk.net

Other members of the Chairs group would be asked if they would allow their emails to be available to members of SACRE.

- b) **A Life to the world:** Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal circulated some books for students at different stages. She invited the committee to examine these. They are resources for PHSE which had come to her attention at a Family Values meeting.

14. Dates of future SACRE Meetings

Autumn Term 2010:	Wednesday 15 September
	Tuesday 23 November

(Note: The Meeting closed at 9.30 pm).

(Signed)
Chairman