

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 2nd DECEMBER 2013

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

~ Mr Zia Baig	* Mr Neville Ransley
* Ms Mercedes Afnan	A Mrs Gill Ross
A Mr Mike Bishop	* Mrs Doreen Samuels
* Dr Julie Crow	* Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal	* Ven Sumana Sramaner
* Mr Vijay Hirani	* Mr Zafar Khalid
A Ms Varsha Dodhia	A Ananda Caitanya Das
* Councillor Asad Omar	
~ Ms Beverley Wilson	

Group B: (Church of England)

* Mrs Mary Abbott	* Rev'd Philip Barnes
	* Rev'd Matthew Stone

Group C: (Teachers' Associations)

* Mrs Manju Radia
* Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)

Group D: (Local Authority)

Councillors:	
~ Nana Asante	* Camilla Bath
~ James Bond	A Sasikala Suresh

Officer

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

Clerk

*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

Visitors

Paul Williams, Head Teacher and Deborah Stone, RE Co-ordinator of Shaftesbury High School
Andrea Kahn, Head of RE at Avanti House School

** denotes presence*

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

1. Welcome and introductions: the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially visitors Paul Williams, Head Teacher and Deborah Stone, RE Co-ordinator of Shaftesbury High School and Andrea Kahn, Head of RE at Avanti House School who were giving presentations this evening.

2. Apologies for absence:

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Cllr Sasi Suresh, Mr Mike Bishop, Ms Varsha Dodhia, Mrs Gill Ross and Ananda Caitanya Das.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Mr Zia Baig and Ms Beverley Wilson

Group D: Cllr Nana Asante and Cllr James Bond

Rachel Bowerman is seeking a temporary replacement for Ananda Caitanya Das. Ms Angela Clapham has resigned from the committee.

It was noted that Cllr Asad Omar's name label should include his title of councillor.

Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship

3. SACRE's Monitoring of Quality of RE: receiving school self evaluation reports

Rachel Bowerman set the context for this presentation from Paul Williams and Deborah Stone. She recapitulated the process by which primary headteachers had agreed to report annually to SACRE using the HSIP SEF proforma. She expressed her pleasure that both the Head Teacher and RE Co-ordinator from Shaftesbury High School were in attendance to present the school's RE SEF, which members of the committee had already received with their papers (pp.1-16.) Copies of the Shaftesbury School prospectus were tabled. Copies of the slide presentation which accompanied the talk will be circulated with the minutes.

Background

Paul Williams introduced himself and explained that Shaftesbury School is both a High School and a Special School. It is part of the family of Harrow High Schools. At Shaftesbury, RE underpins the ethos of the school which emphasises harmony and respect. The school is a place of rich cultural diversity. Currently there are 160 pupils: this has grown from 100 in 2008 and will increase to 200 within the next ten years. The students have a wide range of complex needs and these include behavioural and social needs. The number of autistic children has doubled.

The school has 70 staff and this includes subject specialists as well as support staff, counsellors and learning mentors. The school follows the national curriculum.

More information can be found on the school's website: www.shaftesbury.harrow.sch.uk/

The school is outstanding both in Ofsted terms and in what it offers to its pupils.

RE at Shaftesbury – the vision

Paul Williams regards the SEF as a tool for self-improvement and Deborah Stone then continued the presentation to show how it worked in practice. Deborah Stone is a member of the Jewish community. She taught RE at Whitchurch Primary School before moving to Shaftesbury. She has visited many sites of pilgrimage and religious institutions of different faiths. This is her second year as RE co-ordinator at Shaftesbury.

When Deborah Stone arrived at Shaftesbury, RE was timetabled as a discrete subject and taught by a subject specialist. She found that students, with their increasingly complex special needs and the growing number on the autistic spectrum, were not engaging with the subject. She began to look for ways of providing pupils' RE entitlement which would be meaningful to them: RE that was experiential and reflected the diversity of the community both in the school itself and in the wider context of Harrow. Her vision was to build pupils' respect, knowledge of and respect for different faiths. She also wished to involve parents and community groups.

She emphasised that the SEF circulated to members is very much a work in progress. From the SEF, the school developed its action plan.

RE at Shaftesbury – in practice

The key points of the action plan are

- Annual calendar listing the major celebrations of as many different faiths as possible (p.16 of papers).
- Themed weekly assemblies based on these celebrations, often led by representatives of local faith communities
- Students actively involved in the assemblies through dance, music, performance
- Class teachers don't teach RE but there are follow-ups to these festival assemblies, and other themes, across the curriculum

Pictures in the slide presentation showed how students became involved in the assemblies, dressing up, dancing, singing, sharing food, handling artefacts and gaining in confidence and trust. Both Paul Williams and Deborah Stone believed that the assemblies were proving instrumental in fostering an atmosphere of

mutual respect and tolerance for the faith of others and a deepening understanding of their own. She reported that staff have also shown new willingness to be involved in assembly presentations. As a result, RE had a higher profile in the school.

She gave examples of the sort of questions that children asked and demonstrated that children were learning about their own beliefs as well as those of others. A Muslim girl had affirmed that she now understood why she wore a hijab, and she'd gained this insight from the answers a Muslim visitor had given to her question.

Questions and discussion

How can SACRE help? The school would welcome members of SACRE to come along and contribute to or observe their assemblies. SACRE members could also be instrumental in inviting groups of children to visit local places of worship. Some of the trips already undertaken had been very much enjoyed by the children.

SACRE has also helped by producing the SEF; this is an important monitoring tool: it outlines the key issues and how to take them forward.

The Rev'd Philip Barnes asked how Shaftesbury addresses the lack of specialist teachers, and the related issue of non specialist teachers' lack of confidence in the subject. (This was a finding of the 2013 Ofsted Report 'RE: Realising the Potential', discussed by SACRE at their last meeting). Paul Williams felt that teaching of RE had in the past been quite didactic but that, because of the active learning which had been introduced, pupils had a better understanding that religion is something that believers 'live,'

Doreen Samuels asked if contact with faith communities was planned or ad hoc. Deborah Stone replied that it depends on her contacts and it takes time to build up a comprehensive list. This also might be an area where SACRE could help. Paul Williams mentioned the value of pupils visiting places of worship. The visit to Neasden temple, for instance, had been "awesome" – in the true sense of the word! Visible and tangible experience is very meaningful for Shaftesbury students.

It was agreed that SACRE members should be sharing their large body of experience. Manju Radia draws upon members of SACRE as guest speakers for Newton Farm's annual RE week.

The Rev'd Matthew Stone expressed his pleasure that RE has such a high profile at Shaftesbury. He asked if parents were supportive of the school's inclusive approach. Paul Williams informed SACRE that here had been no withdrawals from RE recently; parents are very supportive. For those who do not follow a religious faith, the school also celebrates internationalism; this involves sharing food which is always a very popular activity!

A humanist member asked about how the school looks after children who are atheists. Deborah Stone replied that the school is very open and accepting of those who have no religious faith. They are welcomed and encouraged to join in the activities. The humanist member picked up on a task on p.6 where children of a faith background could chose to focus on their own religion, but atheist children were asked to chose a religion that was new to them. Deborah Stone was able to reassure her that this has now been changed.

Rachel Bowerman thanked Paul Williams and Deborah Stone for setting the SEF in context. She reflected on Deborah's success in raising the profile of RE, with pupils, parents and staff, and asked whether the time might now be ripe for returning to some class based RE teaching and learning. She explained that in assemblies it is not possible to differentiate to meet children's different learning needs and that assemblies also did not offer opportunities for pupils to apply their core skills of reading and writing, speaking and listening to consolidate their learning in RE.

Rachel expressed a hope that senior leaders would audit RE provision and outcomes again and share the new SEF and action plan with SACRE in the future.

Paul Williams and Deborah Stone then left the meeting.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 24th October 2013 (pages 17-22)

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

5. Matters arising from the minutes

p.18. Minute 4: Matters arising from the minutes

p.2. Minute 1: election of Vice-Chair

Cllr Camilla Bath had agreed to stand again as Vice-Chair.

The Rev'd Matthew Stone, seconded by Mr Neville Ransley proposed Cllr Camilla Bath as Vice- Chair.
Cllr Camilla Bath was elected unanimously as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

p.4. Minute 6: RE examination paper

These have been circulated with the papers for the meeting (*Appendix 1*) and Angela Kahn is here to explain to the committee how RE in Y10 and Y11 helps pupils prepare for GCSE RE examination (*see 6 below*)

p. 5. Rachel Bowerman to attend meetings of Harrow Head Teachers to raise the profile of RE: A template of a generic SEF, which primary schools had agreed to use to report to SACRE, is included in the papers for the meeting (pp.23-32). *See also 3 above.* There were no further questions or comments on this.

p.19. Minute 6. School Attendance and Absence for religious observance: reviewing SACRE guidance

Rachel Bowerman thanked those members of the committee who have already sent in their dates for the revised guidance. She stressed the need for rigor and to include only those dates where pupils need to take a day off school in order to fulfill their religious observance. She has not included dates which fall on weekends or during the school holidays. The guidance must be completed by the end of term, so any outstanding dates should be sent as soon as possible.

Action: members who have not already done so, to send dates of religious observance to Rachel Bowerman without delay

p.21. Minute 8. RE Council Report

A link to the report has been provided under item 8 of the agenda.

p.22. Minute 10. Any other business

- **Complaint to SACRE:** this has now been resolved by the school with advice from Patrick O'Dwyer and Rachel Bowerman. Rachel was kept informed on its progress and resolution throughout.

There were no further matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda

6. Presentation on RE Examination papers

Andrea Kahn was present at the meeting to make a presentation on the GSCE examination papers included in the documents for the meeting (*Appendix 1*). She tabled two additional papers:

Specification at a glance and *Qualification content*.

Specification at a glance sets out the options for schools who can choose either a full length or a short RE course. Some schools offer one or the other; some offer a combination of both.

Syllabus and content of examination papers

Candidates are required to study "Christianity and at least one other religion." Frequently schools choose Islam in addition to Christianity, as there is a good set of standard resources. This is easier for non-specialist teachers.

In Unit 8: Religion and Society teachers could choose up to 3 religions in addition to Christianity, but pupils seldom have a sufficient knowledge base for that many religions.

Andrea emphasised the importance of building a sound knowledge and understanding of religious traditions in Key Stage 3. This is also the time when teachers should engender in students a passion

and enthusiasm for RE – because coverage of the GCSE syllabus and preparation for the exam could be formulaic and dry.

Andrea Kahn analysed one of the examination questions: what is the environment? (*penultimate page of Appendix 1*). She showed how students would be required to demonstrate knowledge of religious beliefs and key vocabulary but also analytical ability and skills in presenting both sides of an argument that anticipate the “A” level examinations. GCSE is a path to “A” level. Students are prepared for these types of question and should not be taken by surprise.

Representation of smaller religions

In response to a question, Andrea Kahn confirmed that it was undoubtedly the case that it is the principal world religions that are represented on GCSE courses rather than what a member referred to as ‘smaller’ religions. It was therefore all the more important that students received a good grounding in all the religions included in the Harrow Agreed Syllabus in KS 1 to KS 3. Rachel Bowerman reminded members of the legislation governing the agreed syllabus which also covers the examination boards: Section 375(3) of the Education Act 1996 requires the syllabus to reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

Recommendation 3 in the RE council report urges an improvement in coherence and progression between KS 1 – 3 and 14 – 19 public examinations.

Philosophy and Ethics or RE?

A member asked why, if RE is an entitlement of all registered pupils at school and an expectation of the basic curriculum, why in many schools it was being replaced with ‘Philosophy and Ethics.’ Andrea Kahn explained that at Avanti House, and many other schools, this title more fully described the broad reach of the subject and the way it encompasses many contemporary issues. A member asked if parents might perceive this as trying to disguise RE as something else. Andrea Kahn felt that this was not the case: at a recent parents’ evening (where there was a very high turn out of parents), parents were delighted to see their children fully engaged with the subject. Rachel Bowerman wondered why, if parents and pupils are supportive of RE / RS in the curriculum, the subject was called something else. Andrea Kahn felt that philosophy and ethics allows for an issues based approach that was more contemporary. Rachel Bowerman begged to differ on this point as she felt that RE at its best did explore big questions about meaning and purpose in life and issues of right and wrong. There was some further discussion about this during which the following points were made:

- Religion centres on the family
- RE is not always perceived in a positive light, the term “philosophy and ethics” can give it a more modern perspective and get round the problem that some people have with the term “religion”
- Philosophy in the phrase “philosophy and ethics” refers to the philosophy of religion
- The examination questions encourage children to think for themselves.
- The exam based syllabus is helpful in the way it applies religion to everyday issues.

The Chair thanked everyone for their views and thanked Andrea Kahn for her illuminating presentation. It has given the members much to reflect upon.

7. Harrow SACRE Annual report 2012-13

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item. Members are still awaiting some items for the report.

- a) To receive the analysis of the published RS examination data and entry patterns. Rachel has not yet received this data. She will email it out to members when it is available. Thanks to Andrea Kahn’s presentation, members will be able to examine it with more knowledge and understanding.
- b) To receive the LA/HSIP statement of the SACRE budget and how it has been deployed in 2012-13. This information is also awaited and will be sent out as soon as it is available.
- c) To agree the Annual report. This was deferred from the last meeting which was not quorate. Members agreed to delegate this to the Chairs group at the beginning of the Spring Term.

Any comments should be mailed to Rachel Bowerman. Manju Radia (Group C) and Vijay Hirani (Group A) volunteered to fill the vacancies in the Chair's group.

**Action: members to email any comments on the Annual Report to Rachel Bowerman
Chairs group to meet in the New Year**

8. SACRE's commissioned programme of RE CPD to improve the quality of teaching and effectiveness of subject leadership

The Chair reported on a seminar for RE leaders she had attended. Mary Abbott was also there. About 20-25 primary schools were represented. The purpose of the seminar was to review the HMI report, "RE: realising the potential" and the RE Council's "Review of RE in England and its National Curriculum Framework for RE". The framework (*Appendix 3 in the papers circulated to members*) includes a definition of the purpose and aims of studying RE and programmes of study, organised into 3 attainment targets, for each key stage. Those attending the seminar were divided into groups and scrutinised the document and recorded their responses. Rachel Bowerman will collate these responses. This seminar constituted the first round of consultation for the review of the Agreed Syllabus.

There are two more sessions scheduled: one for the spring term (linked to the Jewish Way of Life exhibition) and one for the summer term, where it is hoped to hold the seminar at the Swaminarayan temple. The Chair commented that those attending the seminar were very focussed and excited about this opportunity to be involved in the consultation.

Information Items: improving SACRE's effectiveness

9. RE Council: a curriculum framework for Religious Education in England, October 2013

(Section of the report contained in Appendix 3 of papers circulated for the meeting)

The Chair and Rachel Bowerman had attended one of the launch events for this and members have received part of the report with their papers (*Appendix 3*). This will be the subject of much discussion and debate. Its recommendations are not statutory. Rachel felt that the discussions earlier in the meeting about the nature of RE would form a valuable basis for future debate. This document will assist the debate.

The main thrust of the RE council review of the National Framework is to instigate the same agreed syllabus for every LA. While Rachel Bowerman has reservations about this, she welcomes the chance to define RE and its place in the curriculum. The report also includes recommendations to strengthen RE. It expresses the view that an overemphasis on how religion applies to moral and ethical questions can lead to a superficial and distorted understanding of religion. This is relevant to the previous discussion of GCSE RS.

10. Reports from SACRE partners locally and nationally

Harrow Interfaith Council

- The HIFC celebrated National Interfaith Week (17th-23rd November) with very successful and well-attended events at the Bessborough Road Synagogue. Doreen Samuels has sent her Power Point presentation to Rachel Bowerman.
- The HIFC also participated in the Remembrance Sunday commemorations. Paramjit Singh-Kohli reported that Sikhs laid wreaths on behalf of the Sikh Community and the Indian Army.

11. AOB

a) Holocaust Days:

- **Holocaust Memorial Day 27th January 2014**
- **Sunday 27th April: Yom HaShoah Evening at Pinner Synagogue**

Doreen Samuels explained that there are two dates because one is a commemoration on the Jewish calendar and the other is a national memorial day. These commemorations are always very illuminating and emotional.

b) The Rev'd Philip Barnes has been appointed Dean of Harrow

c) Hanukah and Diwali

Earlier in the meeting, Doreen Samuels and Manju Radia shared festive foods to celebrate these two festivals. Doreen Samuels now lit her Hannukiah and explained its significance.

12. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

Thursday 6th March.

The Meeting closed at 9.50 pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)