

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 22nd OCTOBER 2015

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

* Ms Mercedes Afnan

* Dr Julie Crow

*Mr Mike Bishop (until 7.45pm)

A Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal

* Mr Vijay Hirani

* Ms Varsha Dodhia

A Mr Asad Omar

~ *Ms Beverley Wilson*

~ *Mr Zia Baig*

A Mr Neville Ransley

* Ms Ciara O'Flaherty

* Mrs Gill Ross

A Mrs Doreen Samuels

A Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli

A Ven Sumana Sramaner

* Mr Zafar Khalid

Group B: (Church of England)

* Mrs Mary Abbott

* The Rev'd Philip Barnes

* The Rev'd Matthew Stone

Group C: (Teachers' Associations)

* Mrs Manju Radia

* Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)

Group D: (Local Authority)

Councillors:

* Ghazanfar Ali

A Kareema Marikar (Vice-Chair)

* Camilla Bath

Reserves:

A Chika Amadi

A Margaret Davine

A Manjibhai Kara

Officer

*Patrick O'Dwyer (Education Professional Lead & Adviser to SACRE)

Clerk

*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

Observer

*David Cryer

To say goodbye

* Rachel Bowerman, Previous Advisor to SACRE (until 7.30pm)

** denotes presence*

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting especially observer David Cryer. She explained that the earlier start time had been arranged so that Rachel Bowerman could say goodbye to her former SACRE colleagues. On behalf of the committee, the Chair expressed her gratitude to Rachel; she will be much missed and SACRE's good wishes will follow her to her new role as Senior Primary Advisor in Redbridge. Rachel read a poem which beautifully encapsulated the essence of SACRE's ethos and values.

Rachel Bowerman left the meeting at 7.30pm

2. Apologies for absence:

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal, Mr Asad Omar, Mr Neville Ransley, Mrs Doreen Samuels, Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli, Ven Sumana Sramaner, Cllr Kareema Marikar and Cllr Manjibhai Kara.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Mr Zia Baig and Ms Beverley Wilson

The Clerk was asked to check on Ms Beverley Wilson's attendance at meetings over the last year.

Action: Clerk

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 25th June 2015 (*previously circulated and available at the meeting*)

p.3. Item 4. Faith Matters in Harrow: second line of section on fasting: "religious majority" should read "religious maturity"

p.6. Item 13. Mitzvah Day: "Jewish New Year" *should read* "Social Action Day"

Patrick O'Dwyer also made some revisions to the text which he sent to the Clerk beforehand; these amendments have been incorporated into the signed minutes and the copy to be published on the website.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Actions arising from the minutes have been completed or appear later on the agenda.

5. SACRE Annual report 2014-15 (*Annual report 2013-14 previously circulated and available at the meeting*)

Patrick O'Dwyer would value input from members: he explained that Lord Nash's letter emphasises that SACRE Annual reports will now be more closely scrutinised than in previous years.

The Harrow SACRE Annual Report for 2014-15 will include:

Community engagement

Lord Nash's letter emphasises the importance of SACRE's work in promoting community cohesion: **if members have visited schools or engaged with the community in other ways, it would be helpful if they could send in reports of these activities.**

Manju Radia informed the meeting that the children of Newton Farm have been invited to the temple at Stanmore for Diwali on 12 November.

This visit falls outside the time frame of the annual report currently under consideration which runs from 1 September 2014 to 31 August 2015. However, a report would be welcomed for the next annual report.

Manju Radia will write a short report on Newton Farm's RE week celebrated last year.

Action: Manju Radia

Varsha Dodhia also mentioned a display of children's work celebrating 30 years of Harrow Interfaith Council.

All reports and photos should be sent to Patrick O'Dwyer.

GCSE Results (provisional)

32% - A*-A

76% - A*-C

92% - A* - G

These provisional results are broadly in line with national data. Contrary to expectation, the numbers taking RE GCSE have remained constant: this year 1389 students took GCSE RE, including the Catholic schools (denominational schools results are not included in the annual report).

PE Guidance

The Chair reported that Priestmead has already started using the PE guidance: it is proving very useful. As it was published after 31 August 2015, the guidance will not be included in the report but there will be a description of how it was developed. The guidance is still to be circulated to all schools.

Website address

This is included. Patrick O'Dwyer explained that the website is up and running. It is accessible from the Council website. It is currently being updated with the agendas and minutes. Patrick O'Dwyer asked if David Cryer, as an observer, would look at the website and pass on feedback on its accessibility and usefulness. Feedback from members of the committee would also be welcomed.

The website raises the profile of Harrow SACRE.

It will include easier access to the calendar of meetings and to Harrow SACRE guidance documents such as the guidance on;

- PE and religious jewellery
- Visitors to Schools
- Providing a Place of Prayer
- Days of Religious Observance

In addition the website will contain the Annual Reports and access to agendas and minutes of meetings.

A member of the committee asked if the website will include resources created by local faith groups. Patrick O'Dwyer explained that the council does not carry third party content. However, the committee could compile a list of links to websites where resources for different faiths could be found.

Members were asked to send Patrick O'Dwyer any useful website links that will help with the teaching of their specific faith. These can be compiled and added to the advice to schools.

6. Exam Period and Ramadan Advice from SACRE

At the last meeting, the Chair had been asked to contact NASACRE to see if there was any guidance on this subject. NASACRE had replied that there was no guidance available from NASACRE. They suggested an internet search.

Request from Head Teachers: Patrick O'Dwyer informed members that he has received a formal request from the secondary Harrow Head Teachers group for advice on Ramadan in 2016 when the fasting period coincides with public examinations.

The Head Teachers would like SACRE to agree a letter of guidance to be signed by leaders of the local Mosques and Head Teachers. If this were not possible, advice from SACRE would be welcome. The Head Teachers have also written to the Head Teachers' Unions seeking advice. Schools greatly value the advice of the SACRE.

Other LAs have produced very general advice on Ramadan and exams.

Cllr Ghazanfar Ali offered to speak to a local Imam tomorrow: this offer was welcomed and Cllr Ali agreed to email Patrick O'Dwyer the outcome of his conversation.

Action: Cllr Ghazanfar Ali

On further advice from SACRE members, Patrick O'Dwyer will draft a guidance document and circulate to members for comment.

Zafar Khalid suggested calling a public meeting discuss Ramadan and exams. The Muslim representatives agreed that fasting can be postponed but, as Mike Bishop pointed out, this is not always the understanding expressed on some websites.

The Rev'd Matthew Stone expressed the view that a local response would be very helpful to schools.

Cllr Ghanzanfar Ali also agreed to contact the Muslim Council of Great Britain.

Action: Cllr Ghanzanfar Ali

The committee agreed that this guidance should be published early in 2016.

Other comments included

- appreciation of Zafar Khalid's and Cllr Ali's offers of help
- it would be helpful to reach a consensus even though views will vary from mosque to mosque
- considerations of healthy nutrition during fasting periods should be taken into account
- exam boards are taking an interest in this issue: it might be worth investigating if they have produced any more recent advice
- practical arrangements, e.g. holding the core subject exams in the morning and seating and lighting arrangements, might assist fasting students but would be a matter for examination authority
- the Ofqual Equality Analysis Report shows that the examination authorities are also taking this issue seriously
- it would be worth considering holding any school internal exams outside of this period
- Harrow schools are sympathetic to all faiths and will do their utmost to reach an accommodation in this matter.

Patrick O'Dwyer thanked members for their input especially Muslim colleagues for their offers of help.

7. Budget Overview

Patrick O'Dwyer was pleased to inform the meeting that the current ASC programme projected to come in under cost at this time. It may, therefore, be possible to produce some printed copies of the agreed syllabus. The budget should be spent by the end of March when it will be withdrawn.

It is possible that the SACRE budget, which pays for the Adviser and the Clerk and the day to day costs, may be reduced next year. However, the council remains committed to SACRE and Patrick O'Dwyer is confident that SACRE will be in a good position to continue its work.

The SACRE budget also covers the costs of the NASACRE and AREIAC membership subscriptions and attending the annual conference. There are no outstanding concerns on the budget. Patrick O'Dwyer will provide a fuller report at the next meeting.

8. Guidance on authorising Pupil Absence for religious Observance 2015-2016

(previously circulated and available at the meeting)

This guidance has now gone out to schools. Additional advice can be supplied later in the year if needed. Head Teachers are pleased with the guidance and feedback has been very positive.

The guidance provides clarity regarding the law: parents do not have the right to take their children out of school for religious observance; decisions regarding requests for leave are for the Head Teachers to make. Harrow headteachers have always been supportive of observance and find SACRE guidance helpful.

The guidance identifies the days of observance, but granting any leave of absence is at the discretion of the Head Teachers who consider each request on its own merits. The Rev'd Philip Barnes informed the committee that the advice has been welcomed at the school where he is a governor.

The guidance does not apply to staff: their requests for leave are guided by employment regulations. Harrow Council recommends up to three days paid leave but this again is granted at the discretion of the Head Teacher.

Patrick O'Dwyer thanked all those who had contributed to the guidance.

Members agreed that the Guidance should be added to the Harrow SACRE website.

9. Business Items

- **Structure of ASC/SACRE meetings** (*Summary of discussion between Lesley Prior and Harrow Teachers tabled at the meeting*)

Dr Julie Crow updated the committee: the ASC working party has not met recently but Lesley Prior has begun consultation with the teachers. Dr Crow tabled a document that summarises the points coming out of this discussion. She explained that teachers would like the new syllabus to be a version of the existing syllabus. This is understandable but the working party should take account of national guidance which will form the basis of a new curriculum. Mary Abbott was present at the consultation. She informed members that it was an excellent meeting; she felt that the right questions were asked and that it was very constructive.

It was agreed that the next ASC meeting could precede the SACRE meeting on Wednesday 2nd December. Agendas and minutes should be separate. Some of the teachers who came to the consultation meeting could be invited to join the ASC group.

Lesley Prior has made a start on drafting based on ideas already prepared by SACRE and the suggestions arising from the consultation with teachers. She will be meeting teachers again on 3rd and 24th November.

Members particularly appreciated the final comment on the discussion document: "guidance needs to be provided on what religions share as well as differences between them".

Varsha Dodhia, Manju Radia and Mercedes Afnan provided examples of celebrations that were shared between different faiths.

Julie Crow invited members to send their comments to her, if possible by 3 November. Julie Crow will collate these.

Action: Members and Julie Crow

- **Lord Nash's Letter Revisited**

As mentioned above (*item 5*) Lord Nash's letter emphasises the importance of the Annual Report. Lord Nash feels that RE should take leadership in British society.

- **"A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools"**

The paper by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead "A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools" (*previously circulated*) is also very encouraging in many respects about the role of RE and the SACREs. This paper recommends SACRE's role as a body for improving the quality of RE teaching. It also recommends a national RE syllabus with local input. It suggests that by turning away from the traditional RE model, there would no longer be any need to allow children to be withdrawn from RE. It also recommends that Academies and Free Schools should follow the National Agreed Syllabus.

This is an interesting approach although not wholly compatible with the views of the RE Council. **It was agreed to discuss this document in more detail at the next meeting.**

- **Collective Worship**
Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead recommend the abolition of the current policies on Collective Worship: it should be left to schools. Removing the present requirements for Collective Worship would require a change in legislation and it is unlikely that the present government would undertake this.
- **AREIAC** (Association of RE Advisors and Inspectors Conference)
Harrow SACRE has taken out membership of AREIAC. The Chair spoke at the SE AREIAC meeting about leading Collective Worship in a multi-faith school. Advisors are very interested in how Harrow provides inclusive assemblies which are nevertheless “broadly Christian in character”.
- **Sewa Day**
Sewa Day was held on 4th October. The Chair described a range of exciting activities which took place at West Lodge. All emphasised the purpose of the day – to do something for other people. “Sewa” means “service”.
Varsha Dodhia described how different communities took particular themes, e.g. service to the elderly. Younger people would do something for older people, families would work together.
Manju Radia described how her school participates in a “go giver” project which is a similar idea. Her pupils are becoming energetic young activists campaigning for local amenities such as libraries, zebra crossings and lighting on pathways. Children have also sung hymns in various languages in a local Shelter home.
The Chair commented on how these activities also fit in with the concept of “British Values” such as kindness, respect and tolerance. The pupils at Priestmead demonstrated these values during the harvest festival when they collected food for the food bank.
Mercedes Afnan described how representatives of the Baha’i faith have visited schools to encourage pupils to serve their local community. Young children have a very positive energy. Such ventures provide a good discipline for adult life.

10. Update from the ASC work *see item 9. bullet point 1, above.*

11. External Input

- **British Values** (Nina Will from Stag Lane Infant School)
Nina Will was unable to attend this evening but she will come to the next meeting.

12. AOB

- **SEF for schools:** Paddy O’Dwyer would welcome offers of help with updating the SEF form for schools.
- **Representatives of Teaching Associations:** several teachers are interested in joining SACRE as representatives of Teaching Associations; the Teaching Associations have been very slow to respond to their requests. Paddy O’Dwyer will contact the Associations concerned.

Action: Patrick O’Dwyer

- **Mental Health among children and adolescents:** Varsha Dodhia asked any members who were interested in joining a small committee to work on mental health issues among young people to contact her. The Chair alerted members to a conference on Mental Health and Well-Being taking place at Elstree on 5 November.

- **British values:** Manju Radia asked how the ASC would incorporate British values into the Agreed Syllabus. This is mentioned in the SACRE guidance and Manju Radia will provide further feedback to Julie Crow. Mary Abbott will take this to the next consultation meeting between teachers and Lesley Prior. The Chair will book Samia Malik, Community Engagement Officer to speak at the March meeting. **Action: Chair**
- **Teaching the Baha'i faith:** Mercedes Afnan raised the question of teaching about the Baha'i faith in secondary schools. Although the syllabus at 14+ is governed by the national curriculum, Lesley Prior plans to reflect a range of faiths which will be studied across the Key Stages. Mercedes Afnan will feed back her comments to Julie Crow.

13. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

Wednesday 2nd December – starting at 7.00pm with the ASC
Thursday 3rd March 2016

The Meeting closed at 8.45pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)