

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 13 MARCH 2012

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

~ Mr Zia Baig	A Councillor Asad Omar
~ Mrs Sanaz Ajala	A Ms Beverley Wilson
* Mr Mike Bishop	* Mr Neville Ransley
* Dr Julie Crow	* Mrs Gill Ross
~ Mrs Niru Desai	* Mrs Doreen Samuels
* Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal	* Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Mr Vijay Hirani	* Ven Sumana Sramaner

Group B: (Church of England)

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

Group C: (Teachers' Associations)

* Ms Bhavita Pandya	~ Mrs Manju Radia
	* Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)

Group D: (Local Authority)

Councillors:	
~ Nana Asante	* Camilla Bath
	* Nizam Ismail

Officer

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

Visitor (for item 6a of the agenda)

* Ms Lou Browning, Head Teacher of Norbury Primary School

Clerk

* Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

* denotes presence

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

1. Welcome and Introductions

Alison Stowe, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Lou Browning, Head Teacher of Norbury Primary School. Lou Browning was going to make a presentation on the school's application for a determination.

2. Apologies for Absence

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Asad Omar, Matthew Stone and Beverley Wilson. Mary Abbott, Neville Ransley and Paramjit Singh-Kohli arrived late. Until the arrival of Mary Abbott, the meeting was inquorate.

The following members were absent without apologies: Fatema Rahemani, Vinod Kapashi, Zia Baig, Manju Radia, Sanaz Ajala, Nana Asante and Niru Desai

3. **Order of the agenda:** it was agreed to take item 6a first so that Lou Browning could make her presentation and leave the meeting.

4. Collective Worship: applications for determination: Norbury School (*pages 7-11 of agenda papers*)

Lou Browning spoke to her application and a power point presentation, illustrating Norbury's approach to collective worship. She began with a photograph of the children gathered together in the hall for collective worship.

Slide 1: there are 516 children on roll and the school has a diverse ethnic, cultural and religious profile. The school is proud of the fact that no children are currently withdrawn from RE lessons or assemblies. The school governors had discussed the application for a renewal of the school's determination. A letter was sent home to parents and governors attended a parents' evening to about it.

Slide 2: Collective worship takes place every day. The weekly themes are carefully mapped, with links made to religious festivals when they fall in the calendar, and to the principles and charters of a Rights Respecting School. Collective worship is designed to be an experience which is different from the way in which pupils experience the curriculum in lessons. It includes opportunity for prayer / reflection and sometimes artefacts, such as candles, are used to create that 'special' atmosphere. It is not always located in the hall and this, again, denotes its special nature.

Slide 3: Ms Browning regards collective worship as important because it allows opportunities for the whole school to develop an awareness of the 'Norbury Commonwealth.' Staff have had CPD on collective worship.

Slide 4: this slide and the application form (*p.9. of the agenda papers*) show the percentage of the pupils, staff and parents who voted to continue collective worship in its present format. These percentages relate to the numbers who expressed an opinion. Parents responded to the consultation with suggestions for further developing collective worship, for example by composing a Norbury prayer that expressed the values and beliefs of being a 'Norbarian.' They recommended websites for relevant material and it was their suggestion that the weekly themes should be published in the school newsletter.

Slide 5: pupils' had suggested that collective worship should sometimes be held outside as they felt this aided them in their reflection. Ms Browning was also keen to involve pupils in leading assemblies. An example of the 'strap line,' which is used to introduce the opportunity for prayer / reflection, was shared with SACRE members. This is designed to be inclusive of all pupils, those from a faith community and those who are not. The school has recently established an assembly committee with representatives from parents, pupils and staff.

There then followed an example of an act of collective worship which had been planned to mark Martin Luther King Day. The lyrics of the Stevie Wonder song, 'Happy Birthday,' which was written in memory of Martin Luther King, were explored.

Lou Browning concluded her presentation by explaining that the school wanted a renewal of its determination in order to continue the spiritual and all-embracing nature of its collective worship.

Rachel Bowerman thanked Lou Browning for her presentation which had exemplified for SACRE members the approach to collective worship at Norbury and the excitement and enthusiasm it generated amongst children, parents and staff. She asked if the strap line changed according to the theme of the assembly. Lou Browning replied that the wording of the strap line remains the same, whatever the focus of the assembly theme. Pupils may bow their heads at this point but are not required to. Ms Browning regards this consistency as reassuring and confidence-inspiring for both pupils and staff. In this context, pupils are offered the opportunity to worship in a way that is appropriate to their own faith tradition or to reflect on the theme in their own way if they are not part of a faith tradition. .

Rachel Bowerman drew members' attention to p 50 in their papers where the NASACRE newsletter refers to an intention to develop guidance on collective worship. NASACRE is looking for partners in this enterprise. In response to a request from Rachel Bowerman, Lou Browning said she would be willing to be nominated by Harrow SACRE to contribute to this development of guidance at a national level.

Phiroza Gan-Kotwal, the Zoroastrian representative asked about the percentage of families at Norbury who do not believe in God. 11.74% describe themselves as Humanist, Atheist or Agnostic. Lou Browning expressed some reservations about this grouping of belief stances but Julie Crow explained SACRE's rationale and reminded Ms Browning that parents could specify or not as they so wished. In response to a question about the use of outside areas for assemblies, Lou Browning explained that the school is fortunate in having a variety of outside spaces and all can be used for assemblies: the outside canopy, the gazebo and even the pirate ship are popular spaces for assemblies!

As the meeting was by this time quorate, Doreen Samuels, seconded by Camilla Bath, proposed that SACRE should agree to renew the determination for Norbury Primary School. This was agreed unanimously.

5. Membership

- a) New members: there were no new members.**
- b) Update on membership:**

Group A:

Hindu Representative: It had been agreed at the November 2011 meeting that Rachel Bowerman should recruit a SACRE representative from ISKON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) to fill the vacancy for a third Hindu member of Group A. His Grace Srutidharma Das has nominated Ananda Caitanya Das. Rachel Bowerman continues to research contacts within the South Indian Hindu community.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

Jain representative: Vinod Kapashi has resigned from SACRE this term. Varsha Dodhia has been nominated as his replacement by the Institute of Jainology & by Dr Natubhai Shah of the Jain Network.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

Muslim representative: as agreed at the last meeting, the Harrow Muslim Council had been invited to nominate a representative. Their nominee is Zafar Khalid from the Harrow Central Mosque. A representative from the Sri Lankan Cultural Centre is willing to join the committee to fill the next vacancy for a Muslim representative.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

Christian representatives: there followed some discussion as to whether there should be a representative of the Orthodox Church on the committee. It was agreed that, in view of the growing numbers of Romanian Orthodox believers in the borough it would be a good idea for them to be represented. Although, in the main, Romanian orthodox worship in the Russian tradition, many of them attend the Greek Orthodox Church of St Pantaleimon in Kenton. Rachel Bowerman will speak to Father Anastasios at St Pantaleimon to identify a contact for SACRE.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

Rachel Bowerman also reported on the non-attendance of some members of Group A and the actions she was taking to remind them of SACRE's attendance policy or to recruit replacements.

Group B: Church of England representatives: as agreed at the last meeting, the Chair and Rachel Bowerman have written to the Diocese of London Board for Schools explaining that, in accordance with the terms of its constitution, SACRE already has three active representatives of the Church of England appointed by the Harrow Deanery Synod. They asked for clarification as to why two more nominations had been received, only one of which was a headteacher of Harrow school. In response, Rachel

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Bowerman received a telephone message from Penny Harvey who is clerk to the Board's Governor and Appointments Panel. This message expressed the surprising view that there must be a mistake in the SACRE constitution. It was noted that one of the nominees had not been informed that her name had been put forward by the Diocesan Council.

Mary Abbott reported that she has spoken to the Area Dean about this. Revd. Philip Barnes will follow it up on behalf of SACRE if Rachel sends him copies of the correspondence. The Committee approved this action.

Action: Rachel Bowerman & Revd. Philip Barnes

Group C: Teachers' Associations Representatives: There are teachers keen to be nominated to represent their associations on SACRE. Rachel Bowerman is awaiting an update from the secretary of Harrow Teachers' Association clarifying which teachers' unions are currently represented.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

c) Reserve Members: there were no reserve members

6. Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th September 2011 (pages 1-6)

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

7. Matters arising from the minutes:

5. Matters arising from the minutes:

Item 7b. Letter to Michael Gove: Gill Ross reported that she had attended a meeting where Nick Gibb, Minister of State for Schools, was present and she was able to question him about the erosion of RE in the curriculum. In his reply, he stated that he was receiving many enquiries on this subject from SACREs, which have been very active in highlighting their concerns about the status of RE. The Minister assured his audience that the place of RE in the curriculum is being monitored. Mike Bishop added that the Head Teacher of Whitmore has also written to the Minister for Education about RE and the English Baccalaureate and SACRE should prompt other headteachers to do so.

7. SACRE logo: Rachel Bowerman tabled the draft Guidance for Schools and Annual Report. These two documents show the new logo and SACRE branding. The branding concept was designed by the LA graphics team and will provide a template for future SACRE publications. SACRE members expressed their delight with the logo. Doreen Samuels voiced their feelings in saying that the design represents everything that SACRE stands for: reaching out to all religions and none without the imposition of any religious symbolism. Rachel Bowerman asked members to find ways of sharing the Annual Report with the faith communities they represent.

Action: Rachel Bowerman and members of SACRE

There were no further matters arising from the minutes

At this point Doreen Samuels passed round refreshments from the Jewish festival of Purim, summarising the theme of the festival in nine words: "They tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat"

Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship

8. Collective Worship: Applications for Determinations (see also 4 above)

b) Stanburn First School (pages 12-29)

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item. She explained that the Head Teacher had apologised for being unable to present her application in person as she had a governors' meeting the same evening.

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Putting the application into context, Rachel Bowerman explained that, having scrutinised the application when it was first submitted, she had asked the school to elaborate on the 'Thank you' which concluded each of the three examples of acts of collective worship. These examples are pages 26 – 28 of the agenda papers. Rachel had asked for this additional information in order that SACRE could have evidence of how collective worship is distinct from the curriculum.

SACRE observed that the examples of the 'Thank you' element were in the form of prayers. They wondered how these were introduced, so that children who might pray differently or not at all would feel that their beliefs and traditions were respected. It was agreed that it was entirely appropriate to include prayers as a focus for reflection but that these should be contextualised within their faith tradition. The committee made the following further observations:

- There did not appear to be an obvious correlation between the weekly assembly themes and the monthly list of events and famous people
- The choice of events and famous people appeared to be heavily Eurocentric, not reflective of the religious profile of the school nor of the age and background of the pupils of Stanburn First School (for example, Trafalgar Day, the birthday of Lord Sandwich, the International Boat Show and Crufts Dog Show)
- SACRE took note of the religious profile of the school (including 46% Hindus and 24% Muslims) but did not feel this was sufficiently recognised in the weekly themes
- Members of Group A suggested that the themes applied to some religious festivals were not accurate eg Purim linked to 'goodness'.

Mike Bishop, seconded by Julie Crow proposed that the determination is not granted. This was agreed with no votes against and two abstentions.

In her letter recording SACRE's decision, the Chair would provide constructive feedback to the Head Teacher and would recommend that she sought advice from Rachel Bowerman before re-submitting. Rachel Bowerman will mention the inspirational nature of the Norbury approach to collective worship at the next meeting of Heads and Directors.

Action: Chair and Rachel Bowerman

It was further suggested that a note should be added to the SACRE guidelines to reflect the need for provision to be inclusive of children from a variety of belief backgrounds including those who are not from religious traditions. This will go to the Chairs' group and then back to the full committee as it requires the development of a new SACRE policy document.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

A representative queried why non-religious belief is being included. Rachel Bowerman explained that the term "Collective Worship" has a very special meaning and applies only to schools. In other contexts, "corporate worship" describes a group of people, gathering together for worship, who hold beliefs in common. Collective worship is a unique educational term and applies to a group of people who have gathered together in an educational setting but about whom it could not be assumed that they hold a shared religious belief. What was provided for them at such a gathering must them, in law, take account of their age, aptitude and family background.

It was further agreed that a note should be added to the guidelines for schools applying for a determination requesting that Head Teachers support their applications with a presentation to SACRE.

9. Religious education: to update SACRE on issues relating to standards and provision in religious education:

a) Ofsted 2011-12 religious education subject survey inspection: Canons High School (pages 35-38).

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item by explaining that Bhavita Pandya is a member of the RE department at Canons and this is a letter about standards and provision for RE at her school. At one time, Ofsted included a summary of their findings in relation to every curriculum subject in their inspection report. This practice has been discontinued. HMI leads

the work of Ofsted and from time to time they undertake subject inspections in a small sample of schools. Sometimes they have a focus for the inspection such as “RE in the creative curriculum”. The inspection carried out at Canons was a subject inspection.

The outcome of this inspection is a letter rather than a report. This is reproduced on pages 35-38 of the documents for the meeting. The outcomes from the school will be collated in a HMI RE and the school would not be identified in the main text.

Bhavita Pandya described the nature of the inspection. The school had a week’s notice of the inspection. Whole lessons were observed. Whilst the experience was very stressful, on the whole she agreed with the report findings. Leadership and management was judged to be good and she regarded it as a tribute to the respectful ethos established across the RE departments that students were described as “confident in expressing views and discussing issues related to the study of religion and belief.”

Rachel Bowerman drew members’ attention to the “Achievement in RE” section on p.35. This mentions that the results in the option group are higher than those doing the short course. Rachel Bowerman pointed out that it is to be expected that results will be better in a group where pupils have chosen to do the subject than in short course which is compulsory. She felt that this was an unfair comparison but questioned Bhavita about what future provision there would be at Canons High for RE across the Y10 and Y11 cohorts since the Ofsted letter referred to the short course having been ‘dropped’ and the GCSE reinstated.

Bhavita Pandya explained that the short RE course will now be removed from the curriculum and RE will be delivered through PHSE. This means that apart from those students who choose to take RE as a GCSE subject, there will be no provision for Agreed Syllabus RE except in years 7 and 8.

Bhavita Pandya also explained that inspectors felt that more emphasis should be placed on “big questions” and had encouraged the use of provocative “what if” scenarios. Mike Bishop reminded SACRE that such an approach must be rooted in teaching about key beliefs and values of each religious tradition otherwise pupils’ responses to big questions might be superficial and ill-informed.

b) Academies Act 2010 and the implication for SACRE pages 39 – 43

The monitoring of standards and provision for RE and for collective worship in Harrow’s Academies is no longer the remit of SACRE. Where there are complaints with regard to RE and Collective Worship or requests for determinations, these now fall within the remit of the YPLA and will then pass to the Education Funding Agency. Guidance about the change in responsibilities did not indicate that the EFA would be carrying out any monitoring, evaluation or reporting on compliance and quality. The guidance establishes Academies are not required to deliver the local agreed syllabus. Academies, that do not have a religious designation, must provide RE that “reflects the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.” (page 40)

This raised the question of how Harrow SACRE should consolidate the positive relationships with Harrow’s Academies which had been established when they were High Schools within the Local Authority. It had been at the last meeting that the Academies should be invited to nominate a teacher to represent them collectively. Action had only been delayed because it was felt that Bhavita Pandya, once she ceased to be an AST, would be a suitable person to represent the academies.

There was some discussion as to whether it would be more satisfactory to have two representatives of the academies on the SACRE particularly since the majority of high schools are now academies. Members also considered whether it might result in representatives for the academies being involved in making decisions about RE or collective worship with which they would not be required to comply. At present, the Harrow academies are working together but, as can be seen from what is happening at Canons, one school is now changing the way it delivers RE. The committee felt that SACRE should do everything possible to encourage the academies to take a unified approach.

It was the feeling of the meeting that two representatives would be more satisfactory than one.

In response to a question about how these representatives would fit into SACRE's constitution and whether they could be non-voting members, Rachel Bowerman referred to the constitution. This does not provide guidance on this issue and is, in fact quite out of date and due for a review.

It seems as though teachers from academies would be willing to join SACRE.

Rachel Bowerman will write to Emlyn Lumley at Park High to propose two associate representatives from the academies, suggesting that Bhavita Pandya would be one and indicating that there is another High School teacher who has expressed interest.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

It was agreed to review the constitution and insert a clause detailing the appointment of associate representatives from the academies. Given the changing nature of academies, this addition to the constitution would be reviewed annually. It was agreed that the academy representatives should form part of Group C where they would be able to influence the decisions taken by Group C even though unable to vote themselves.

Action: Chairs' group

In 2013 the agreed syllabus is coming up for review and an Agreed Syllabus Conference will be convened. It was felt that the influence of the academy representatives should be reviewed when this happens. It was suggested that they could be excluded from the conference or included as advisors but not voting members.

Nizam Ismail brought up the question of whether there should be a SACRE representative on the Education Consultative Panel. There was some discussion about this. Camilla Bath is on this panel but it would not be appropriate for her to represent SACRE as she is there to represent the council. The panel is to become the Education Strategy Panel. It was agreed that Camilla Bath should make an initial informal approach to Brian Gate, Portfolio Holder for Schools and Colleges, and this would be followed up in writing by Rachel Bowerman and Alison Stowe.

Action: Camilla Bath, Chair and Rachel Bowerman

c) HMI subject survey visits and subject inspections (pages 42- 48)

Harrow has a high proportion of outstanding schools and two of these have already been revisited in the form of subject inspections of Art and Design and PHSE. These inspections are as thorough and rigorous and driven by the same generic criteria as a Section 5 (full) inspection.

Ofsted had published subject grade descriptors to run alongside the Ofsted Evaluation Schedule, including grade descriptors for the inspection of RE (pages 43-48). These show generic descriptors on the left hand side of the page and the RE descriptors on the right hand side. Rachel Bowerman recommended that these were used as a focus for training for RE subject leaders. These descriptors may prompt subject leaders to use a subject specific SEF and this might see RE subject leaders report to SACRE again using an RE SEF in a revised format.

Information Items: Improving SACRE's effectiveness

10. Reports from National RE Associations

These have been provided for background reading.

a) NASACRE winter/spring 2011/12 Newsletter (pages 49-63)

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Rachel Bowerman asked members to note the importance of SACRE keeping up pressure on the government (page 50).

The importance of provision for pupils' SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development) has been re-emphasised in the January 2012 Ofsted Framework. Again this was recommended to become a focus of training for RE subject leaders commissioned by SACRE.

NASACRE AGM is on Wednesday 23rd May: Alison Stowe, Mary Abbott and Rachel Bowerman hope to attend.

b) RE Council March 2012 Newsletter (pages 64-67)

All party parliamentary group for RE (page 64) this may be a response to and a way of managing pressure from SACREs.

11. Any other Business

a) Street pastors: Mike Bishop reported that the street pastors initiative is up and running in Harrow and Wealdstone

b) Prayer room: a request from a parent to a governing body for provision of a prayer room has been referred to Rachel Bowerman by both the parent and a member of the Governing Body. Rachel Bowerman has sent to both a chapter from guidance published by the Muslim Council of Britain. The school has made the decision not to set up a prayer room.

12. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

The following dates were agreed:

Tuesday 26th June 7.30pm in the Council Chamber

Wednesday 10th October 7.30pm in the Council Chamber

Tuesday 4th December 7.30pm Committee Rooms 1 and 2.

Wednesday 6th March 2013 7.30pm Committee rooms 1 and 2

The Meeting closed at 9. 50pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)