

**HARROW SACRE**  
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 26<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2012

**Attendance:**

**Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)**

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

**Group B: (Church of England)**

A Mrs Mary Abbott	* Rev'd. Matthew Stone
A 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 ( <i>delayed</i> )
	* Sasikala Suresh

**Officer**

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

**Visitors / observers**

\*Anne Drakeford, headteacher of Stanburn First School (for item 7a of the agenda)  
Cllr Brian Gate, Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Families

**Clerk**

\*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

\* denotes presence

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

**1. Order of the Agenda:** it was agreed to take item 7a first so that Anne Drakeford did not have to stay for the rest of the meeting.

**2. Collective Worship**

**a) To receive an application to Harrow SACRE to lift or modify the requirement of the Education Reform Act 1988 and the Education Act 1993 that collective worship should be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character"**

Rachel Bowerman introduced Anne Drakeford, headteacher of Stanburn First School. She explained that Anne was in attendance to present her school's re-submission. SACRE did not agree the school's

original application for a determination in March 2012 and Rachel Bowerman had written to the headteacher with constructive feedback about the nature of the SACRE's concerns. As recommended, Anne Drakeford had taken advice from Rachel Bowerman and an external RE consultant and had reviewed the school's policy and framework for collective worship. Anne Drakeford had been asked to support her application with a presentation to SACRE. This gave members of the committee the following information:

**The context of the school**

Stanburn has 300 pupils and is growing. 37 languages are spoken and 13 faiths are represented within the school community.

**Developments in the school's approach to collective worship**

A new menu of weekly themes has been identified. The newly appointed subject leader will deliver training for staff. A new framework has been introduced which has four elements:

Shared experience: a story or artefact designed to capture the children's attention and introduce a specific theme or concept, "Plug in"

Understanding and Imagination: an opportunity for children to engage with the theme, "Switch on"

Reflection: providing a focus for reflection, such as a prayer or poem, which children could affirm, contribute or listen to, "Light up"

Response: children's opportunity to make an individual commitment or response, "Light up"

**Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development**

Anne explained that collective worship is linked to the curriculum, to the school's approach to co-operative learning structures and is central to the school's promotion of SMSC, for which there is a newly drafted whole school policy.

**Whole School Community**

Anne outlined how she had consulted pupils, parents, governors and staff on collective worship.

Children want to share assemblies with parents and to contribute prayers and stories from their own faith traditions.

Anne Drakeford then presented an example of collective worship using the school's new framework. Despite interruptions when the room became a thoroughfare for people leaving another meeting, members of the committee were spellbound as Mrs Drakeford told the story of "The Rainbow People." She modeled the questions she had used to help children 'switch on' to a key theme of the story and the prayer to prompt their 'light up' using reflection and response.

In response to a question from Doreen Samuels, Anne Drakeford explained that the themes of assemblies are linked to other parts of the curriculum and often connect to current projects going on in school. The themes might also be reflected in the golden rules. Children's response to assemblies is very positive.

Vijay Hirani expressed the view that the story carried a universal message and its themes would be shared by many faith traditions.

Rachel Bowerman drew the committee's attention to guidance they had issued to Stanburn First after its first application was judged to be unsatisfactory:

- where the words of a prayer are used, the prayer should be explicitly located within its faith tradition;
- a structure should be used as a consistent introduction that develops pupils' confidence so that they feel comfortable about listening to prayers and other prompts for reflection, whether or not they are from a faith background;
- assembly themes should more inclusively reflect the faith and cultural traditions, ethnicities, age and backgrounds of the diverse school community.

Rachel explained that she had suggested to Anne the four elements as a structure for planning and commended Anne for embracing these and expressing them in child friendly terms.

Doreen Samuels expressed her admiration for the four elements as a planning tool. She felt it would be a wonderful resource if SACRE could collect stories appropriate to Harrow's diversity, to use in assemblies. Varsha Dodhia, representative of Jainism, said that she would be willing to share stories and other resources. Anne Drakeford welcomed others to share her planning proforma and resources.

Rachel Bowerman reminded members that collective worship, unless schools were granted a determination, was required to be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” and that it fills this description if it “reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief.” Rachel suggested that the story of The Rainbow People, (a story from the Christian tradition) explored some key Christian beliefs – about fellowship, stewardship and equality in the sight of God - which would also be broadly echoed in other religious traditions. By exploring shared beliefs, through stories from faith traditions, schools could meet statutory requirements whilst sustaining their commitment to inclusion. The three examples of acts of collective worship submitted by Stanburn First also demonstrated that secular stories can promote exploration of a spiritual theme.

The committee thanked Anne Drakeford for her inspiring presentation and indicated their favourable response to her application. This would be followed by a formal decision later in the meeting, when a Chair had been elected.

*Anne Drakeford left the meeting*

### **3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair**

**Doreen Samuels, seconded by Cllr Nana Asante proposed Alison Stowe as Chair. Alison Stowe was elected unanimously.**

**Cllr Nana Asante, seconded by Vijay Hirani proposed Camilla Bath as Vice-Chair. Camilla Bath was elected unanimously.**

*The election of Vice-chair took place later in the meeting so that Camilla Bath, who had been delayed, could be consulted first. It is included here for better continuity.*

### **4. Welcome and Introductions**

**a ) Welcome:** Alison Stowe, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially new members, Varsha Dodhia, nominated by the Jain Network, Zafar Khalid, nominated by Harrow Central Mosque on behalf of Harrow Muslim Council, and Sasikala Suresh who replaces Cllr Nizam Ismail. Cllr Ismail is now Mayor of Harrow and his mayoral duties would preclude him from attending SACRE regularly. Another new member, Ananda Caitanya Das, nominated by Bhaktivedanta Manor Temple, had sent apologies but looks forward to joining the committee at the next meeting in October. Alison Stowe also welcomed Cllr Brian Gate, portfolio holder for Children, Schools and Families, whose role includes oversight of SACRE, and Claire Ali, education consultant, who would be speaking to item 8 of the agenda.

#### **b) Update on membership:**

**Academies:** Rachel Bowerman reported that in accordance with the decision of the last meeting, she had written to the headteacher representative of the academies and he had agreed that SACRE’s invitation would be considered at a future meeting.

**Teachers’ Associations:** Rachel Bowerman is awaiting an update from the secretary of Harrow Teachers’ Association clarifying which teachers’ unions are currently represented. If she receives no response, she will take this forward herself.

**Lapsed members:** in response to a question, Rachel Bowerman explained that she is in the process of advising those members who have not attended meetings this year and who have not sent apologies, that they are no longer eligible to sit on the SACRE committee. Rachel Bowerman is actively engaged in finding new members.

### **5. Apologies for Absence**

**RESOLVED:** To note apologies for absence from Sanaz Ajala, Gill Ross, Mike Bishop, Mary Abbot, Jill Crow, Paramjit Singh-Kohli, the Rev’d Philip Barnes and Ananda Caitanya Das. Camilla Bath sent her apologies for late arrival.

The meeting was quorate.

The following members were absent without apologies: Zia Baig, Niru Desai, Cllr Asad Omar, Beverley Wilson, Manju Radia.

### **5. Minutes of the Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> March (pages 1-8)**

Cllr Nana Asante had sent apologies

**With this amendment the minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.**

## 6. Matters arising from the minutes:

### a) Item 4, page 3: Invitation from Louise Browning, headteacher, for a small group of SACRE members to attend a celebration assembly at Norbury School on 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> June

Vivian Wright, who is also Clerk to Norbury School, agreed to contact Louise Browning and ask for further dates for next term. She would then communicate them directly to SACRE members and would collate responses for Rachel Bowerman.

**Action: Clerk**

There were no further matters arising from the minutes

## ***Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship***

## 7. Collective Worship

### a) Stanburn First School (*see also 1 above*)

Nana Asante declared an interest in this item as she is a governor at Stanburn First School **Varsha Dodhia, seconded by the Rev'd Matthew Stone proposed that SACRE grant a determination to Stanburn First School. This was agreed unanimously with one abstention.** At the committee's request, Rachel Bowerman when she writes to inform the school of this decision, will also say how much the committee had enjoyed Anne Drakeford's presentation.

Doreen Samuels expressed her appreciation of the presentations that have become such a feature of SACRE meetings under Rachel Bowerman's leadership. Rachel Bowerman responded by emphasising that SACRE had fulfilled its duties rigorously. It had been robust in its evaluation of the first application and constructive in its feedback. She judged that SACRE's recommendations had been implemented and SACRE had therefore been instrumental in improving provision for collective worship at Stanburn First.

SACRE had now seen two presentations on collective worship and, although this was a very small sample, this evidence would inform its future reports to the LA and its future workplan. SACRE had also improved its own processes by stipulating that schools should attend a SACRE meeting to present an application for a determination

Doreen Samuels suggested that the committee should start compiling a handbook exemplifying good practice in collective worship. The Chair supported this suggestion. The SACRE website, when launched, would be a most appropriate forum to publish such materials and examples of resources. Varsha Dodhia observed that collective worship is also related to health and well-being. She suggested that photos of collective worship might be posted on the website in the same way as the local papers publish photographs of new pupils at the beginning of the autumn term. These resources would help schools in the process of applying for determinations and also celebrate Harrow's diversity.

Cllr Brian Gate spoke of his remit to oversee the LA's provision for SACRE. He congratulated SACRE on its achievements. Diversity is a great strength in Harrow and SACRE does significant work in this respect. Schools have effective partnerships within their communities and this has an impact on society as children are our future adult citizens. It is important both to respect each other's values and beliefs and also to have the courage to sustain one's own beliefs. He recommended that SACRE talk to the Communications team about celebrating its work and raising its status.

### b) **Collective Worship Revisited** (*pages 33-44*)

Rachel Bowerman explained that this document from NASACRE and AREIAC (Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants) forms a very strong argument outlining the case for collective worship. It covers the requirements of the law both in terms of the spirit as well as the letter. It was written by Julie Grove, previously RE advisor for Solihull and now an executive of NASACRE. SACRE's expectations of collective worship, demonstrated in their

response to the two applications for determinations in 2011 – 2012, were aligned with the NASACRE guidance.

### **8. Meeting the needs of families from religious backgrounds: developing SACRE Guidance for schools (pages 45-48)**

Rachel Bowerman set the context for this item. The headteacher of Grange school had contacted her asking for advice when a group of Muslim parents requested that the school make provision for their children to perform their midday prayers in school. Rachel Bowerman had recommended that he formally request guidance from SACRE.

Rachel Bowerman welcomed Claire Ali, to speak to this item; she runs a consultancy advising schools within the Muslim tradition but also non-denominational schools.

Claire Ali introduced her presentation by saying that she intended to provide ideas and thinking points which might enable SACRE to formulate its own guidance for schools. She commented that the paper circulated for the meeting ('Meeting the needs of Muslim pupils in state schools' published by the Muslim Council of Britain) could be seen as quite demanding and prescriptive. However, it contained some useful information for those who knew little about Islam.

#### **Types of Prayer**

Claire Ali explained the two types of prayers: salaah (5 times a day and one of the pillars of Islam) and du'a (supplication which can take place at any time). There is a cycle of movement accompanying salaah and the prayers are performed in Arabic.

#### **Attitudes to Islam**

Surveys suggest that the majority of people are ignorant about Islam and what they do know is obtained from media reports which are likely to be negative.

#### **What does "establish a prayer room" mean to schools?**

Claire was candid in acknowledging that, when school leaders are asked to consider establishing a prayer room, they are likely to be confronted with a number of factors that appear to be problems. These include:

- Location and staffing of the room
- fear of the unknown
- fear of setting precedents
- disorder
- inequality in the provision for and treatment of different groups.

SACRE members were asked to consider what might be positive outcomes and they suggested:

- Provision that meets a child's right to practise their faith – established in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Learning about how their peers pray and what is important to them;
- Grounding children in their identity. To support children in the expression of their religious beliefs is to help them to express who they are and to feel 'connected' spiritually;
- Acknowledging that, for some children, prayer is a part of their daily life;
- Developing the skills of contemplation and inner reflection – a quiet time in the business of the school day – and building inner strength;
- The discipline of prayer might develop pupils' self-discipline and inner strength and an ordered approach to meeting their responsibilities.

Claire Ali complemented this list with the following list of positive outcomes:

- Time to recharge
- Time to connect
- A good model for time management
- Community brain gym/workout

In conclusion, Claire Ali suggested that establishing a space for prayer could have the following educational benefits for all learners, whether Muslim, of another faith background or not from a faith background:

Refreshed learners

ID valued learners  
Faith factor  
Home-school continuity  
Learners who belong (to school and society)

Returning to her starting point, Claire suggested that “a place to pray” could be offered as:

Quiet space  
Quiet ‘club’

**Rights and entitlement:** Claire Ali stressed that she had no wish for the issues around a prayer room to become confrontational. A prayer room could be seen, not as a “right”, but as a normal part of life. Mutual respect and understanding is the best way forward. It is better not to get to a stage where parents are demanding their “rights”. Claire Ali explained the Muslim concept of “deen” – Islam is not a religion but a way of life. Prayer is a part of the “deen” – something that is a normal part of life that can fit in harmoniously with work and school.

Members asked the following questions:

- How would the considerable variations in different types of Muslim practices be accommodated? Claire Ali felt that flexibility and willingness to compromise were key to this
- Would Muslims and Christians be able to pray in the same room together? As with many things this would depend on the individuals concerned, but representatives of both faiths present at the meeting felt that most Muslims and Christians would be happy to pray together.
- Would a member of staff need to be present? This was essential in regard to health and safety and if schools could see the prayer room as positive and beneficial, they would find requisite staff,
- What should the attitude of the member of staff be? For instance if s/he was reading a newspaper, would this be seen as disrespectful? Staff would only be needed for a short specific time for prayers. Muslim salaah has a set pattern and is not time consuming
- Could non-Muslim staff supervise the prayer room and how could an appropriate environment be provided? Non-Muslim staff could supervise. The prayer room should be available at specific times so staff time was not wasted.
- Could boys and girls pray together at primary school age? There is no problem with this. In fact if space is limited, men and women pray together in the same room, the women separating themselves by standing behind the men. Schools could gently remind parents of this accommodation if they disputed the sexes being together.
- In both Muslim and Judaic traditions, when children reach puberty, they have an obligation to pray. Might not having a prayer room create pressure for families who felt that their children were not yet ready to take on this obligation? No pressure should be put on children or families. As with all faiths, there are practising and non-practising members in Islam and the non-practising members should not feel under pressure.
- Would the very specific times of Muslim prayers create problems with the school timetable? These could be accommodated: Zafar Khalid explained that Muslims in the workplace create time to fulfil their obligations by praying within prescribed lunch hours.
- Practical considerations of time and space would need to be carefully considered. Spare space in schools is being used up by the school expansion programme. Prayer rooms can be used for other things at other times. Claire Ali recommended trying out a prayer room for a limited time, if it does not work, it can be withdrawn.
- Cllr Nana Asante reflected that it is important to make time and space for religion. We need to be mindful of complexity and work together to give parents and children opportunities to pray. This is something that could benefit all faith groups as well as fitting in with the ethos of Harrow schools.

Members agreed that the message Claire Ali had given did not apply exclusively to meeting the needs of Muslims but was concerned with promoting schools as a place of harmony and respect for all.

Rachel Bowerman responded to some of the points made during Claire's presentation She agreed that Muslims are victims of negative coverage in the media and suggested that so are the media images of other religious believers and religions.

Rachel Bowerman reminded members of the request from Grange school which had prompted this item on the agenda and suggested that she should draft some guidelines based on the “positives” expressed

by SACRE members. She made the further suggestion that Claire Ali should be commissioned to work on this with her. **This was agreed.**

**Action: Rachel Bowerman and Claire Ali**

### **Information Items:**

#### **9. Reports from National RE Associations**

**a) NASACRE AGM** Rachel Bowerman gave an oral report of this meeting. In particular she drew the committee's attention to the main points of a presentation by Sarah Smalley, representing the RE Council and Alan Brine, HMI on the national headlines for RE:

- Half of secondary schools are becoming academies. Academies are not required to deliver the local agreed syllabus and academies can choose or develop their own syllabus without external quality assurance. SACREs have no remit for monitoring provision for RE in academies. Harrow SACRE's offer of representation for local academies is therefore well timed;
  - A DfE workforce survey has found that in 2010 - 2011 the introduction of the English Baccalaureate appears to have caused no reduction in the number of staff teaching RE. It is expected that the impact of the EBacc may be felt in 2012 – 2013;
  - NATRE has carried out a follow-up survey and found that the EBacc has impacted negatively upon provision for RE in  $\frac{1}{3}$  schools. In many it is the full course GCSE which is no longer offered as an option; the number of schools not entering any pupils for GCSE has doubled.
  - Short course GCSEs no longer count towards school performance measures and can no longer be topped up with a second short course to make a full GCSE. It has been through the short courses that most secondary schools have met pupils' entitlement to RE at KS 4 and numbers of pupils entered had increased year on year, nationally and locally;
  - Places for RE in Higher education have been reduced and this has affected 19 of 34 university / college RE departments. Whilst 50 places were reinstated, as the result of protests, this measure may have come too late for some 'downsized' departments;
  - Membership data from the Association of RE Advisers, Inspectors and Consultants illustrates the impact of changes at Local Authority level. Only 36 of AREIAC members are Local Authority advisers with RE as their main responsibility. Many LAs only fund a consultant for the termly SACRE meetings which limits the extent to which SACREs can be proactive in their work with schools and in their monitoring and evaluation of provision and standards for RE. Harrow Council continues to regard SACRE as a priority, ensuring that HSIP provides RE expertise to SACRE;
  - The review of the national curriculum will not include a framework for RE because the government is mindful that in law it is determined locally. The RE Council will develop some non-statutory guidance and have advised Agreed Syllabus Conferences to wait until this is produced before concluding a local syllabus review;
- The Chair had mentioned earlier that this will be a busy year for SACRE. This is because the agreed syllabus, last revised in 2008, is due for revision in 2013 by an Agreed Syllabus Conference. At the moment, the recommendation is to wait and see what is happening to the National Curriculum before revising the agreed syllabus.

In addition to these concerns, there were some headlines about positive developments:

- A RE quality mark is being trialled. If successful it will be introduced nationally. Given the success of the Artsmark and PE mark, this is likely to raise the profile of RE;
- An All Party Parliamentary Group for RE has been established and the first priority of its workplan is to initiate an enquiry into excellence in the teaching of RE. 115 MPs signed an early day motion to attempt to include RE in the EBacc and, building upon this high level of interest, SACRE members nationally have been urged to write to their MPs urging them to join this APPG;
- The January 2012 Ofsted Framework has enhanced the profile of SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural), to which RE and collective worship should make strong contributions;
- When academies are inspected, there is a recommendation that inspectors should investigate if there is no provision for RE, but the recommendation goes no further than this. Alan Brine, HMI, plans to scrutinise the tranche of spring term 2012 inspection reports to see what mention

is made of RE. At the end of 2012 the next HMI evaluation of RE, based upon a 3 year cycle of thematic and subject visits, will be published.

Rachel Bowerman will email copies of her report to members and the clerk.

**Action: Rachel Bowerman**

Varsha Dodhia commented that, in preparation for joining SACRE, she has been reading SACRE reports on the Internet and Harrow SACRE has the strongest report.

Rachel Bowerman felt that SACRE was lucky to have such commitment from members of all faith groups and strong support for SACRE from the LA. Cllr Brian Gate observed that it is strange that the government does not see the relevance of RE as an important part of people's lives. Appreciation of different faiths underpins diversity and helps mutual understanding and community cohesion.

#### **10. Any other business**

- a) **SACRE conference:** Rachel Bowerman suggested that SACRE should hold a conference with the theme of meeting the needs of children and families from religious backgrounds in schools. **This was agreed.** Rachel Bowerman will circulate some dates for members of the committee to consider.

**Action: Rachel Bowerman**

- b) **Day of Service:** this suggestion will be discussed at a future meeting
- b) The Chair and Rachel Bowerman apologised for the change of venue and the consequent delays in setting up equipment. They will be writing to Democratic Services about this.

**Action: Chair and Rachel Bowerman**

#### **11. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:**

The following dates were agreed:

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 7.30pm in the Council Chamber

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm Committee Rooms 1 and 2.

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013 7.30pm Committee rooms 1 and 2

**The Meeting closed at 10.10 pm**

**Signed:**

**(Chair)**

**(Date)**