

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 24th OCTOBER 2013

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

~ Mr Zia Baig	<i>A Mr Neville Ransley</i>
*Ms Mercedes Afnan	* Ms Angela Clapham
* Mr Mike Bishop (<i>until 8.30pm</i>)	* Mrs Gill Ross
* Dr Julie Crow	* Mrs Doreen Samuels
* Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal	~ <i>Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli</i>
* Mr Vijay Hirani	* Ven Sumana Sramaner
* Ms Varsha Dodhia	* Mr Zafar Khalid
<i>A Councillor Asad Omar</i>	* <i>A Ananda Caitanya Das</i>
* 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:	
<i>A Nana Asante</i>	<i>A Camilla Bath</i>
<i>A James Bond</i>	<i>A Sasikala Suresh</i>

Officer

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

Clerk

*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

** denotes presence*

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

Order of the Agenda: the agenda should include *Reports from SACRE partners* and *Any other business*. These would be added as items 9 and 10. Future meetings would become item 11.

1. Welcome and introductions: the Chair welcomed everyone to this first meeting of the academic year.

2. Apologies for absence:

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Cllr Camilla Bath, Cllr Asad Omar, Cllr Nana Asante, Cllr James Bond, Cllr Sasi Suresh, Mr Neville Ransley and Ananda Caitanya Das. Rachel Bowerman explained that none of the councilors were able to attend owing to an Extraordinary Council meeting set up at short notice. Rachel Bowerman explained that Ananda Caitanya das will be away for some time and will miss the next three meetings. **It was agreed to try and find a temporary replacement until his return.**

The absence of the councillor representatives meant that the meeting was inquorate. However, there were no decisions pending so it had been decided not to postpone this meeting.

The following members were also absent:
Group A: Mr Zia Baig and Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2013 (pages 1-8)

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

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

The Chair will ask Cllr Camilla Bath if she is willing to stand again as Vice-Chair

Action: Chair

p.4. Minute 6: RE examination paper: this was deferred until the next meeting when examination data will be available and the RE examination paper can be viewed in this context.

p.5. Rachel Bowerman to attend meetings of Harrow Head Teachers to raise the profile of RE: Rachel Bowerman has attended a meeting of Primary Head Teachers. She was pleased to report to SACRE members that the Head Teachers have agreed to report to SACRE using the monitoring form. They have not yet agreed a schedule, but it is hoped that the return of these forms can be staggered through the school year.

Some Church schools have also expressed interest in reporting to SACRE.

Rachel Bowerman has not yet spoken to the Head Teachers of the High School Academies in Harrow.

In answer to a question, Rachel Bowerman informed the committee that currently there is only one primary school in Harrow that is an academy.

Rachel Bowerman will circulate a copy of the monitoring form to SACRE members.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

p.7. Minute 12c: AOB: comments from Humanist member: Dr Crow, humanist member asked if she could follow up on her comments recorded at the last meeting. She would like to know the basis on which religions are chosen for study, pointing out that the National Curriculum speaks of "Christianity and other principal religions" and the Non Statutory Guidance of 2010 also mentions "principal religions" and "world views". She drew attention to the fact that, according to the National Census, Zoroastrianism has a small number of followers and that numerically those of "no religion" are the fourth largest group in Harrow. The census forms do not allow for further analysis of this latter category, so it is not clear how many of "no religion" would describe themselves as humanists; however, humanism would certainly qualify as a "world view".

Phiroza Gan-Kotwal, Zoroastrian representative, explained that Zoroastrianism is represented in schools because it is one of the nine religions recognized by the United Nations and the EU. It is one of the oldest world faiths.

Mrs Manju Radia, Teachers' Associations representative, added that schools would aim to give as wide a picture as possible. Also, that where schools have staff and children of a particular faith, they would try and cover that faith.

Mrs Gill Ross, representative of Judaism, added that schools also respond to views of parents and the community. If humanists formed a substantial part of the school community, the school would attend to their views: they would be discussed even if not formally taught.

Rachel Bowerman then reaffirmed the response to Dr Crow's original comments received by email at the last meeting. This was to confirm with some emphasis that Zoroastrians do not proselytize, and that it would be entirely inappropriate for SACRE to proselytize or indeed for Rachel Bowerman, as a Local Government Officer, to do so. The event at the Zoroastrian centre was held in response to an invitation.

Rachel Bowerman then went on to speak of the danger of pursuing arguments through statistics. The Agreed Syllabus and RE provided in academies must reflect the fact that the major religion in this country is Christianity while also taking account of the other principal religions practiced in the UK. Rachel Bowerman would, both personally and professionally advise against either SACRE or the Agreed Syllabus Conference to make a case based on statistics. If they did it would mean that Humanism would not fare well. Harrow's Agreed Syllabus provides a scheme of work that helps to determine what is taught and when. This contains a single unit on Zoroastrianism taught in Year 4. She felt this reflected proportionality in a flexible way. Determining proportions based on statistics is not to be recommended.

Phiroza Gan-Kotwal, Zoroastrian representative, and Beverley Wilson, Rastafarian representative strongly agreed with these views.

Matthew Stone wished to congratulate Rachel Bowerman on her clarity.

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

Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship

5. Annual report (pages 9-15)

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item. She explained that she has added a new heading and put this first so that the report could feature the two pieces of guidance issued during the year. These were the guidance on *Authorised absence for religious festivals 2012-13* and *Offering a space for prayer and reflection in school*.

The report contains little in terms of reports from schools; this may change next year.

The exam data has not come out yet; it should arrive next week.

The membership list and financial statement also need to be added.

Rachel Bowerman also drew members' attention to p.12 which contains a report on the visit to Harrow Central Mosque organised by some members of Harrow SACRE in which some other members had participated.

The Chair thanked Rachel Bowerman for collating the report.

6. School Attendance and Absence for Religious Observance: reviewing SACRE guidance (pages 16-20)

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item. She informed members that Head Teachers were delighted with last year's guidance. They appreciated that the representatives of the different faiths had been rigorous. Members had before them a revised draft of the guidance for this year. It was important to issue this to schools by the end of term. Rachel Bowerman asked members of group A to contact her with the calendar dates for this year.

The representatives for Judaism pointed out that they have been granted an extra day. A representative for Islam pointed out that the dates for the Muslim festivals need to be changed.

Rachel Bowerman explained that the guidance is an invaluable tool for Head Teachers who are under pressure to improve attendance. Mike Bishop, Christian representative, cited an example where he had used the guidance to good effect. He felt that it was important that the information in the guidance was disseminated to staff.

The representatives of Judaism commented on the sensitivity with which the guidance was compiled and how it reflected and respected family traditions.

Rachel Bowerman reflected that the guidance provides a robust tool to support Head Teachers while also valuing the fact that families want to put the observance of their faith as a priority.

Doreen Samuels, representative of Judaism, recommended that the guidance be sent to NASACRE. This was agreed and Rachel Bowerman undertook to do this.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

The committee agreed that dates of religious festivals for 2014 should be returned to Rachel Bowerman by 30th November.

Action: Group A members

Information Items: improving SACRE's effectiveness

7. Religious Education: realising the potential (pages 21-23)

Rachel Bowerman tabled a HSIP power point review of the Ofsted Survey report. This was also displayed on the screen.

At this point (8.30pm) Mike Bishop left the meeting.

Rachel Bowerman highlighted the main points in the report:

Eight key challenges: these findings will not surprise SACRE members although it is alarming to find that learning about religion is trivialised. Knowledge is superficial and teaching has lost sight of learning from beliefs and traditions.

Low standards: the examinations system promotes looking at issues rather than knowledge and understanding. Teaching about Christianity is one of the weakest aspects of RE provision. When teachers use stories they use them for moral instruction or as a way of inviting children to reflect on their own values. In Rachel Bowerman's experience, teachers are nervous about teaching Christianity.

Weaknesses in teaching – primary: a representative from Judaism commented on the lack of resources and the need for strong and up to date materials to support the curriculum.

Weaknesses in teaching – secondary: teaching in secondary schools is too focussed on the examination system.

Factors that inhibit the use of enquiry in enhancing pupils' learning – secondary schools: Learning objectives distract from learning itself. A lesson planning is over elaborate and assessment levels are over used, so that they become mechanistic and generic.

Curriculum problems – secondary schools: planned work is not sufficiently challenging.

Confused sense of purpose: schools are not clear why they are teaching RE.

Limitations in leadership and management – primary: leadership in RE is not strong and there is little monitoring. Training is focussed on literacy and numeracy to the detriment of subject based learning.

Limitations in leadership and management – secondary: there is no clear rationale for changes in provision.

Gaps in training: NATRE (National Association of Teachers of RE) reports a decline in specialist staffing.

Impact of recent education policy changes on RE in schools: the summary ends with quote from the report:

RE has been the unintended victim of a combination of major policy changes rather than the subject of a deliberate attack. Nevertheless, the combined impact of so many severe setbacks in such a short

time has been to convey the message that, even though it is a statutory subject, RE is of less value than other subjects.

Rachel Bowerman commented that this makes gloomy reading.

In response to a question about whether it was realistic to expect RE teachers to have in depth knowledge of all the religions they teach, Rachel Bowerman expressed the view that teachers are expected to have expert subject knowledge in numeracy and literacy, although in her opinion, training is more important than specialist knowledge. Another member commented that teachers only need to know the content of the syllabus in depth. Another member of Group A commented that the new teacher training system will only make matters worse: this was highlighted in the RE Education Council feedback.

Other comments reflected on the importance of good resources and good teaching. The Chair remarked that primary school teachers are trained to be good teachers and that children in Harrow are very knowledgeable. A Teachers' Associations representative drew attention to the amount of expertise in SACRE. The final question for this item came from Philip Barnes, a Church of England representative, who asked what the implications are for the faith communities in Harrow. Rachel Bowerman asked him to hold this question over for item 8.

8. RE Council Review report (page 24)

This report, timed to coincide with the Ofsted Survey report was published yesterday. Rachel Bowerman will email a link to the report to SACRE members.

Discussion of the report was deferred to the next meeting but it certainly links up with Philip Barnes' question because it recommends a national curriculum for RE. Although Rachel Bowerman is an adamant supporter of locally determined RE she is ready to recognise what is happening and to consider the findings of the report. Evidence that a national curriculum improves the quality of teaching and learning is not conclusive: Modern languages, ICT and D&T are subjects which have a national curriculum, but which are not necessarily well taught or given enough time and resources.

SACREs may adopt the report. Monitoring arrangements which would form part of a national curriculum could make a difference. Two other factors which make a difference are model syllabuses containing content and Ofsted subject inspections. RE was weakened when Ofsted discontinued subject inspections.

In answer to a question, Rachel Bowerman explained that the RE report was not nationally funded but ran concurrently with the Ofsted subject survey. It has no status apart from the fact that it is produced by the RE Council. It does not commit the government to any action.

Manju Radia suggested that in order to raise standards, the Harrow Agreed Syllabus Conference should think about adopting the national curriculum but adjusting it to the local context. Rachel Bowerman informed members that this is what the Agreed Syllabus conference did last time and it might well be a course of action for the future.

It was agreed to defer further discussion until the next meeting and the formation of the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

Regular Items

9. Reports from SACRE partners

a) Harrow Interfaith Council

- **Meaning and significance of faith festivals: 21st November at the Middlesex New Synagogue in Bessborough Road: all welcome**

b) Faith communities:

- **Mizvah Day: Sunday 17th November:** an interfaith day for doing good works.

- **The Everlasting Flame: Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination:** an exhibition at SOAS 11th October –14th December.
- **Accord Inclusive Schools Award:** nominations are sought for the Accord Inclusive Schools Award for schools which have an outstandingly inclusive ethos and take steps to promote the growth of mutual respect and understanding (especially on the grounds of religion and belief). Deadline for nominations is 8th December.

10. AOB

- **Complaint to SACRE:** SACRE has received a parental complaint via email from a parent who is unhappy about the way RE is delivered at their child's school. This complaint will be handled by the school and if not satisfactorily resolved, will go to the LA. The school and the LA may seek advice from SACRE.
- **Carols at the Civic Centre:** everyone is invited to carols in the Council Chamber 6-7.30pm on 16th December.
- **SACRE distribution list:** Rachel Bowerman and the Clerk are in agreement that the SACRE distribution list should be kept only for SACRE business. Unfortunately this meant that SACRE could not accede to a recent request to circulate information about the Harrow Food Bank, although all agreed this was a very good cause.
- **Rastafarian curriculum materials:** SACRE has received a request to promote curriculum materials that support Rastafarianism from an Orthodox Christian perspective. The Rastafarian representative, having examined these materials felt that they do not truly reflect Rastafarianism.
- **Happy Diwali:** Hindu members wished everyone a happy and prosperous Diwali.

11. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

Monday 2nd December

Jewish representatives will bring a Hanukiah and some seasonal food.

Thursday 6th March.

The Meeting closed at 9.20 pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)