

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 25th JUNE 2014

Attendance:

Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)

~ Mr Zia Baig	* Mr Neville Ransley
* Ms Mercedes Afnan	* Ms Ciara O'Flaherty
A Mr Mike Bishop	A Mrs Gill Ross
* Dr Julie Crow	A Mrs Doreen Samuels
A Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal	* Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Mr Vijay Hirani	* Ven Sumana Sramaner
* Ms Varsha Dodhia	* Mr Zafar Khalid
* Mr Asad Omar	A Ananda Caitanya Das
~ 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:	Reserves:
A Ghazanfar Ali	A Kareema Marikar
A Sasi Suresh	~ Margaret Davine
* Camilla Bath	A Manjibhai Kara

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

1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Rachel Bowerman chaired this part of the meeting

Chair

Matthew Stone seconded by Cllr Camilla Bath proposed Alison Stowe as Chair
Elected unanimously

Vice Chair

Matthew Stone seconded by Asad Omar proposed Cllr Camilla Bath as Vice-Chair
Elected unanimously

Alison Stowe then took over as Chair

2. **Welcome and introductions:** the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Unfortunately the new council members were unable to be present. Members introduced themselves.

3. **Apologies for absence:**

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Mrs Doreen Samuels, Mrs Gill Ross, Mr Mike Bishop, Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal, Cllrs Ganzanfar Ali, Sasi Suresh, Karimar Marikar, and Manjibhai Kara.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Mr Zia Baig and Ms Beverley Wilson

Group C: Mrs Manju Radia

4. **Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th March 2014** (pages 1-7)

NOTED: Ms Ciara O'Flaherty was present at the meeting

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

5. **Matters arising from the minutes**

4. **Jewish Way of Life**

Everyone had been invited to the launch and Mary Abbot and Doreen Samuels had attended.

7. **Harrow SACRE Annual report**

a) To receive the analysis of the published examination data and entry patterns.

Rachel Bowerman is checking the numbers of students taking AS level in Harrow in 2013.

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

Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship

6. **SACRE Monitoring the Quality of RE: a presentation by Belmont School**

Unfortunately Belmont School had cancelled their presentation at short notice owing to staff commitments. Rachel Bowerman apologised for the consequent abbreviation of this evening's agenda. The pupils of Belmont were due to have given an account of their visit to the Jewish Way of Life Exhibition, including their preparation for the visit and how the exhibition related to what they have already learnt.

Instead Alison Stowe gave a brief oral report of a visit to the Exhibition by year 5 pupils from Priestmead School. Alison Stowe explained that there are not many Jewish children at Priestmead and it was very good for the children to get this authoritative information about the Jewish faith. They were taken round the exhibition in small groups, each accompanied by a guide. The guides were very open to questions and good at conveying a sense of wonder as well as the rules and teaching of Judaism. The children were very engaged with the exhibits, especially the banners. Time flew by and they overran their scheduled time.

Questions and comments

In reply to a question from Matthew Stone as to whether this will be an annual event, Rachel Bowerman replied that it would not be repeated every year. The response to the exhibition has been very positive with eighteen schools booked to visit totalling nearly 1200 children in all.

Zafar Khalid commented that this exhibition has raised children's awareness of the Jewish community in Harrow.

Rachel Bowerman informed members that she had organised a training event for teachers about the exhibition and the launch event had also been preceded by training for teachers who were bringing children to visit the exhibition.

Cllr Bath commented that there are now far fewer Jewish children in Harrow schools. This is in part due to demographic changes and in part due to the growth of Jewish faith schools in the area. This makes it even more desirable that children should have a chance to visit this exhibition although, as Rachel Bowerman pointed out, Judaism has always been included in the Agreed Syllabus.

Discussion

This led to some discussion about the desirability of holding similar exhibitions about other faiths. Rachel Bowerman and Zafar Khalid explained that the possibility of holding an exhibition about Islam has been discussed at national level.

Varsha Dodhia explained that the Hindu community has discussed the possibility of some event centred on the Kenton temple.

She added that to celebrate its thirtieth anniversary, the Harrow Interfaith Council is planning to hold some events to stimulate interfaith dialogue. These would be held in Interfaith Week in November.

Rachel Bowerman suggested that faith communities and belief groups might create stalls that offer information about their beliefs and also educational materials and information about how they can help prepare and receive children for visits.

Varsha Dodhia has suggested to the Interfaith Council the possibility of holding a series of interviews similar in format to the BBC's "Listening Project" where young people talked to each other about their faith. Such a project might need some funding and Rachel Bowerman pointed out that preparation for such interviews was very important. Participants would need some training. Varsha Dodhia explained that there would be some set questions and some open ended questions.

Mercedes Afnan commented that it was important to find the common themes in different faiths rather than focussing on the differences.

Safeguarding

Rachel Bowerman then set the context for a report on a discussion with Zafar Khalid before the meeting. Members who are involved with schools will be aware that the government has issued new guidance to headteachers on keeping children safe in education. This includes advice on how to educate children about the risks of extremism. Rachel Bowerman suggested that SACRE should explore the possibility of supporting schools in this area which can be complex and controversial. She believed that it was within SACRE's remit as an advisor on religious matters.

Zafar Khalid added that Islam is often mentioned in the context of discussions about extremism. He fully supported the suggestion believing that SACRE should take a lead in this area. SACRE should create a team to work on the Ofsted guidelines and find case studies to illustrate how its recommendations can be implemented.

Rachel Bowerman explained that she has no data on whether extremism is a problem in Harrow schools and Mercedes Afnan again stressed the importance of being aware of cultural differences but finding common spiritual ground. This would lead to greater understanding and sense of bonding.

Philip Barnes commented that part of the challenge is how to define extremism and that case studies would be very useful in this regard. Much of the controversy centres on certain areas of the curriculum, for instance, sex education.

Neville Ransley hoped that the revised RE syllabus will reflect the government's guidance.

Varsha Dodhia made the point that piety can sometimes be confused with extremism.

Paramjit Singh-Kohli asked if copies of the guidelines can be provided for members and Rachel Bowerman agreed that the summary guidance would be circulated.

Action: Rachel Bowerman and Clerk

In response to a question about how SACREs in other areas, especially Birmingham, are responding to the new guidelines, Rachel Bowerman agreed to investigate initiatives that may be taking place at national and local level.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

In response to Varsha Dodhia's point about piety and extremism, Neville Ransley felt that it is important to distinguish between religious and cultural practices. SACRE could offer guidance on specific points.

Vijay Hirani made the point that observing a dress code does not constitute extremism. Extremism occurs when another person is harmed either physically or by verbal bullying and abuse.

Rachel Bowerman gave an example of children who were influenced by the teaching at a weekend school; this caused them to act in a vociferous and insulting way towards children of another faith in class. Matthew Stone was also aware of a similar instance in another authority.

Asad Omar recalled an occasion when he was asked to speak to parents who refused to allow their children to attend a visit to a Hindu temple. As a result of his intervention, the parents agreed to the visit. Zafar Khalid has also advised in similar instances.

Rachel Bowerman hoped it would be possible to involve High Schools in SACRE's work on the new guidance. Camilla Bath welcomed this possibility; she has every confidence in Rachel Bowerman's ability to engage the high schools.

Information Items: improving SACRE's effectiveness

7. NASACRE AGM 22.05.14. 'Rising to the Challenge'

Rachel Bowerman set the context for this year's NASACRE AGM. Last year two speakers, Mark Chater and Alan Brine had challenged SACRE questioning its purpose and relevance (*see papers for the SACRE meeting of 12th June 2013*). This provoked a considerable reaction from local SACREs and consequently the theme of this year's AGM was 'Rising to the Challenge'. The keynote speaker was Steven Lloyd who is a member of the all-parliamentary group on RE. His speech can be found on the NASACRE website.

The workshops for the AGM consisted of ten different local SACREs showcasing their initiatives. Rachel Bowerman attended one workshop on promoting the RE Quality Mark. This demonstrated how to build networks of RE teachers including the use of Twitter and other social media. It covered issues about quality assurance and generated a sense of enthusiasm and commitment.

The other workshop which Rachel Bowerman attended was about how to develop a RE hub from a group of local SACREs. This followed a recommendation by the RE Council and the workshop demonstrated how a group of SACREs working together in Hampshire had responded to this recommendation. Rachel Bowerman was doubtful about the ultimate usefulness of this initiative which she felt would only add to the number of meetings members would have to attend.

Records from the minutes of all ten workshops will be uploaded onto the NASACRE website: Rachel Bowerman will let members know when they are available. She will also provide the username and password needed to log in to the site.

Action: Rachel Bowerman

Rachel Bowerman explained that she has not herself presented to other SACRE members on the work of Harrow SACRE, but she has made a presentation to the Board of Deputies for British Jews at the invitation of Sara Younger who spoke at the last SACRE meeting. Members of the Board were particularly impressed by the guidance materials published by Harrow SACRE.

Delegates at the AGM concluded that SACREs were not outdated. It has become harder to promote RE in the current educational climate where there is less external validation. SACREs have an important part to play with a specific focus on RE entitlement to all pupils.

Rachel Bowerman asked if any members were interested in attending next year's AGM, they should let her know.

20+ ideas for SACRES

Included in the papers for this evening's meeting is a sheet from the conference listing 20+ ideas for SACREs. These have been formulated in the context of 'rising to the challenge'.

Neville Ransley asked if point 2 is necessary. This point concerns the representation of members from the teaching unions on SACREs. Rachel Bowerman replied that in her view this representation is necessary in order to ensure that teachers appointed to SACRE are representing teachers across the LA and not just their own school. Rachel Bowerman is finding it difficult to recruit such representatives: she keeps trying but was recently turned down by a promising and enthusiastic candidate who felt unable to add this to her already overloaded schedule.

Rachel Bowerman recommended that members consult this list and bring up any points that they feel Harrow SACRE could or should be doing at the next meeting.

Action: Committee members

8. Reports from National RE Associations

- **RE Council newsletter June 2014 and retiring Chair's report**

John Keast's final letter as retiring chairman of the RE council is included in the papers for this evening's meeting. John Keast was an influential advocate of RE as he was the external consultant for the DfE. Varsha Dodhia added that he is a member of the national Interfaith network. Rachel Bowerman differs from John Keast in his views about RE's place in the new national curriculum but she paid tribute to his work in setting up the DfE Expert Advisory Group (EAG), chaired by Dave Francis, to advise the government on RE. This gives RE parity with other subjects. Members wishing to explore the work of the EAG can find a link to their website via the website of the RE Council.

Rachel Bowerman was asked to join the EAG but is not eligible as she is not a practising teacher.

9. Reports from SACRE partners

a) Harrow Interfaith Council

Varsha Dodhia reported that the Interfaith Council is supporting Harrow Community Action; this initiative was launched recently. It is a venture designed to build capacity in faith groups in order to counteract the depletion of LA funds and services which will take place over the next few years. Communities will need to be resilient in order to respond to local needs. Much of their work will be around fundraising as Harrow receives such meagre funding from central government in comparison with other London boroughs. Further information on Harrow Community Action can be found at www.harrowca.org.uk

(For other activities of the Interfaith Council see also Discussion under item 6 above.)

b) Faith Communities

Report on the Launch of the Jewish Way of Life exhibition

Gil Ross is unable to attend this evening's meeting so cannot make her report on the launch, but Mary Abbott had also attended so was able to provide members with a brief report. She informed members that visitors were made very welcome at the exhibition; like the children from Priestmead, she was very impressed by the banners. The food was delicious and the event was very well attended.

10. AOB

- At the beginning of the meeting, Rachel Bowerman had read out an email from Mrs Gan-Kotwal in which she explained that she already has two meetings today but hoped to leave the second meeting early in order to attend SACRE. However, in the event she was unable to attend, so her apologies are recorded under item 3 above. Considering Mrs Gan-Kotwal's recent illness, the list of her many and varied activities is impressive.
- **Animated videos on Humanism, narrated by Stephen Fry:** Mercedes Afnan drew members' attention to these animated videos narrated by Stephen Fry. She wondered if these were intended for school use as she felt that their approach undermined belief and was derogatory towards religious faith. Julie Crow was able to reassure Mercedes Afnan and other members of the committee that these videos were produced for general consumption and not intended for schools. As outlined in the papers for this meeting, there is a wide range of resources on Humanism for educational purposes. The purpose of Humanism is to encourage a questioning approach but not to undermine religion.

Rachel Bowerman read an extract from the *Review of RE Education in England, October 2013*:

'Religious education contributes dynamically to children and young people's education on schools by provoking challenging questions about meaning and purpose in life ... They learn to articulate clearly and coherently their personal beliefs, ideas, values and experiences while respecting the right of others to differ'.

She thanked Mercedes Afnan for her comments and understood her concerns. She cited an example of educational materials where the creation stories are portrayed as a hierarchy in which the scientific explanation occupies pre-eminent place. For Humanists everything is open to question. For people of faith, science and religious belief are not necessarily in opposition.

Members made the following comments:

Paramjit Singh-Kohli stressed the importance of respect for each other's beliefs. Children will ask questions when it is possible to explain to them that different people believe different things but this does not affect shared values involving good citizenship, kindness and respect.

Philip Barnes added that challenge can be respectful. It need not imply belittlement or undermine the beliefs of others.

Camilla Bath shared her experience of a Humanist wedding which she had found a profoundly moving and indeed religious experience. The celebrant spoke about goodness in a way that might be found in any church, synagogue, mosque or temple.

Julie Crow added that reports she has heard on Humanist funerals also reflect this wonderful and uplifting quality. Humanist values are the same as those of other faiths reflecting the golden rule of doing unto others as you would wish to be done by.

Asad Omar read out a little motto which said, 'there are two types of people: brothers in faith or equals in humility.'

Rachel Bowerman drew the discussion to a close reflecting that it has come full circle to a point where members were again considering how people could share their beliefs in a respectful way that does not belittle the beliefs of others.

11. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:

Thursday 11th September (Agreed Syllabus conference)

Wednesday 1st October (*apologies received in advance from Neville Ransley*)

Thursday 4th December

Proposed date for spring meeting in 2015:

5th March: this coincides with Purim so an alternative date will be found.

The Meeting closed at 8.45

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)