

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2017

Attendance

Group A

* Mercedes Afnan
* Ven Sumana Sramaner
* Mike Bishop
* Neville Ransley
* Ciara O'Flaherty
* Vijay Hirani
* David Cryer
* Varsha Dodhia
* Gill Ross
* Doreen Samuels
* Zafar Khalid
~ *Zia Baig*
* Asad Omar
A Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Phiroza Gan-Kotwal

Group B

* Mary Abbott
* Revd Kate Blake
A Revd James Power

Group C

~ *Manju Radia*
* Alison Stowe (Chair)
~ *Teri-Louise O'Brien*

Group D

* Cllr Camilla Bath Conservative (Vice Chair)
* Cllr Ghazanfar Ali Labour
~ *Cllr Kareema Marikar Labour*

A Cllr Simon Brown Labour (reserve)
A Cllr Manji Kara Conservative (reserve)
A Cllr Margaret Davine Labour (reserve)

Advisor to the SACRE

* Lesley Prior (Advisor to Harrow SACRE)

Clerk

* Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

* *denotes presence*

A denotes absence with apologies

~ *denotes absence without apologies*

Religious traditions and Christian churches

Baha'i
Buddhist
Christian (Free Church Federal Council)
Christian (Catholic)
Christian (Catholic)
Hindu (Swaminarayan)
Humanist (Harrow Humanists)
Jain
Jewish
Jewish
Muslim (representing Harrow Muslim Council)
Muslim
Muslim
Sikh
Zoroastrian

Church of England

Teachers' Associations

Local Authority

1. Welcome and Apologies for absence:

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from James Power. Retrospective apologies received from Paramjit Singh-Kohli.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Zia Baig

Group C: Manju Radia and Teri-Louise O'Brien

Group D: Kareema Manikar

SACRE membership

Group A: Zia Baig has not attended a meeting for over a year and has not sent apologies. The Clerk emailed him in July with dates of forthcoming meetings and has received no reply. According to the terms of the constitution, his membership is therefore terminated with immediate effect. The Chair will write to inform him of this.

Action: Chair

Zia Baig is from the Sunni Muslim tradition. The Chair will contact the nominating body with a view to finding a replacement.

Action: Chair

Group C: the Chair informed the meeting that Manju Radia will be retiring; it will therefore be necessary to recruit another Teacher Association representative.

Noted

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 29th June 2017 (previously circulated)

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

p.2. Item 4. Matters arising from the Minutes

(p.3. Item 6. The Role of the SEF for RE Leaders)

The Chair will post the comments received in response to Teri-Louise's talk on the website.

Action: Chair

(p.5. Item 10. Publications: Days of Religious Observance)

The Guidance for Days of Religious Observance is posted on the website.

Question from Mike Bishop: the Chair has followed up Mike's question regarding guidance for schools on handling requests from staff for leave to take part in Hajj. The Chair explained that SACRE does not advise members of staff as the terms of their employment are governed by their contracts with the LA. Ultimately, the decision to grant leave is the responsibility of the Head Teacher and governors of the school concerned. 2018 will be a good year for teachers to take part in Hajj as this festival falls in the middle of the summer holidays.

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

4. Monitoring of syllabus and websites – future programme

The Chair has written to Head Teachers to remind them of SACRE's responsibilities. SACRE will be monitoring RE provision in schools through their websites. In her letter, the Chair encourages schools to communicate with SACRE to share examples of good practice or to seek advice.

Lesley informed members that a major report on RE was published last Thursday: its findings suggest that schools are not always fulfilling their legal obligations with regard to RE.

Another report was published by the RE Council and National Association of Teachers of RE: this report received some national media coverage. The findings of this report indicate:

- In secondary schools RE is not always taught to all age groups as required by law;
- RE is more likely to be left off the curriculum in academies
- RE has a higher profile in LA schools where a locally agreed syllabus is followed;
- Faith schools have the best track record regarding RE teaching.

SACREs have an interest in all schools whether they are LA schools or academies. Lesley felt that monitoring school websites would be a useful exercise; it had been wise to wait until the Chair's letter had gone out to schools.

Lesley suggested that she and the Chair develop a pro-forma which members could then use as a monitoring tool for school websites. Interested members would be given a list of schools to work on.

Lesley has been looking at some websites for schools where her students have placements; some do not mention RE although this does not always reflect the true situation. In some schools, good work is being done that is not featured on their websites.

Both Collective Worship and RE are legal requirements and both should be covered in the pro-forma.

Lesley and the Chair will develop the pro-forma.

Action: Chair and Lesley Prior

Comments and questions

Mike Bishop: would it be useful to set up a support group to help RE teachers complete the SEF? It was agreed that this might be helpful for RE teachers.

Doreen Samuels: the SEF would be a good topic for discussion at a meeting of RE leaders. Lesley mentioned that a meeting of RE leaders had taken place last week. Many of them are new to the post. Doreen suggested that good examples of completed SEFs could be circulated and that Ciara and Teri-Louise might share their expertise. Perhaps examples of good practice from faith schools could also be made more widely known.

Varsha Dodhia: do RE teachers from the new faith schools (e.g. Krishna Avanti) attend the RE leaders meetings? The Head Teacher of Krishna Avanti has attended one meeting; faith schools have their own SEF procedure; it is quite heavily regulated. The Roman Catholic and Church of England schools have their own RE leaders' network; other RE leaders can attend but where this happens, Lesley's practice is to point teachers back to the networks appropriate to their type of school.

Ciara O'Flaherty: it is more valuable for teachers to share good practice with like schools.

Lesley Prior: do secondary schools have networks of RE teachers? Ven Sumana Sramaner replied that although teachers do consult each other, this is on an informal basis. There is not a great deal of common ground as secondary schools follow different examination boards.

Doreen Samuels: there are no secondary school RE teachers' networks in Hertfordshire.

There were no further comments or questions

5. RE Commission: interim report on RE

Lesley Prior introduced this item; she began by apologising for not circulating the report: it had only been released last Thursday, after the papers for the meeting had gone out.

This is an interim report. As members are aware, there have been several recent reports on RE education and these have included some recommendations for changes to the

current provision of RE. The Commission has investigated the current state of RE and whether previous recommendations should be taken forward. The commission was chaired by the Very Revd. Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster.

The report contains four recommendations:

- **A national entitlement for RE:** this is not the same as a national syllabus; there would still be local input. This recommendation will come as good news for SACREs, especially those which, like Harrow, have a keen sense of ownership of the locally agreed syllabus. The entitlement should be for all types of schools.
- **Holding schools to account for the provision and quality of RE:** this recommendation addresses the concern that Ofsted is not challenging schools who are not fulfilling their legal obligations towards RE.
- **A National Plan to improve teaching and learning in RE:** the average training in RE teaching for a primary school teacher is three hours. With this amount of preparation, it can be seen that the variety and diversity represented in a typical Harrow classroom would be a challenging prospect.
- **A renewed and expanded role for Standing Advisory Councils on Religious education (SACREs):** the report recognises that SACREs have an important role in promoting RE and fostering good community relations. SACREs are not always properly resourced by their local authorities (Harrow is fortunate in this respect).

Over the next year, the Commission will engage in further gathering of evidence and invite various groups to respond to the interim report. Lesley asked how Harrow SACRE would like to respond? Responses can be individual or collective. NASACRE is holding a training day in November when two of the commissioners will be speaking. The Chair will try and attend this.

Action: Chair

Comments and discussion

Doreen Samuels: could we encourage schools to submit written comments from their pupils about the benefits of RE? These could be submitted as part of Harrow SACRE's response to the interim report. The Chair agreed that children's testimonies are powerful evidence. The report already includes quotes from children.

Gill Ross: regarding the fourth recommendation concerning an extended role for SACREs: within the legal framework, SACREs are committees of Local Authorities. Only one secondary school in Harrow is a Local Authority school, the rest are academies. Could SACREs have their remit extended to cover all types of schools? Lesley Prior acknowledged this was an interesting point. Could SACREs cover Academies, Free and Independent schools? SACREs are publically funded so they should have a wider purpose but this is not enshrined in law. Academies and Free Schools should display information about their RE provision on their websites but do not always do so. Who is holding them to account? This should be part of the SACRE role. SACREs would be a more appropriate authority to assess determinations in academies and for free schools than the DfE.

Varsha Dodhia: are schools required to comply with the Equalities duty set out in 2010? Yes, schools must publish equalities information annually and review their Equalities policy every four years.

Lesley Prior: funding for SACREs should be ring fenced in LAs. Sometimes LAs confuse SACREs with voluntary bodies but they are as statutory body and the LA has a duty to maintain its SACRE. If this were to be put into practice, a funding formula would need to be set up involving the DfE. Local government and the Home Office.

Lesley Prior: SACREs also undertake a further function and this is to advise on faith and religious practices. Owing to the expertise and knowledge of SACRE members, this advice can be provided in a sensitive and nuanced way. It is difficult to know where else schools could find this advice. The recommendation to expand the role of SACREs could encompass this aspect of their work which is also an important factor in fostering good community relations.

There were no further comments or discussion points.

6. Collective Worship

The Chair explained that the RE Whats App group have been exchanging views about Collective Worship. Harrow has provided some funding for SACRE to produce up to date guidance on Collective Worship. The law hasn't changed so the underlying principles of previous policies will still be valid but descriptions of resources and teaching practices will need updating.

Harrow SACRE previously published an *A-Z of Collective Worship*. Mike Bishop has a hard copy and Alison has an electronic copy. No list of previous determinations has been found. The Chair will check past minutes and ask Pat Stevens to see if she can find this information.

Action: Chair

Lesley Prior explained that there is no appetite for a change in the law which would be necessary to change the nature of Collective Worship in schools. The RE council is not dealing with Collective Worship although it is interesting to note in passing that Charles Clarke has changed his views on this.

Note: Back in 2015, Charles Clarke co-authored A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools. In this report, the following recommendation for Collective Worship appears: We believe that a far more effective and more productive way of making the necessary change is to remove the requirement in law and replace it with non statutory guidance and the duty of OFSTED to inspect this aspect of every school.

Lesley Prior continued by saying that many schools are rediscovering Collective Worship through meditation, mindfulness and stillness which provide moments of tranquillity in the busy life of a school.

Issuing an updated edition of guidance for Collective Worship would give Harrow SACRE a good opportunity to remind schools of the opportunities offered by determinations.

Some schools cover the "mainly or broadly Christian" requirement of Collective Worship through their British Values curriculum.

A determination allows a school to waive the "mainly or broadly Christian" element in Collective Worship. However, it does not remove the requirement itself or the fact that it should include an element of worship.

What is SACRE's role?

SACRE is looking to provide schools with a model for Collective Worship resembling a child friendly version of Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*. It would represent the humanist tradition as well as other faith traditions.

Lesley Prior concluded this item by observing how guidance on Collective Worship would be welcomed by teachers. It is a complicated subject and training in non-existent.

7. NASACRE briefing

The NASACRE briefing for the autumn term is in preparation. It will include:

- Feedback from BIG NASACRE survey: the results of the survey were used when giving evidence to the Commission on RE.

- NASACRE AGM: 24 May 2018 in the Merchant Taylors' Hall in London. This grand venue has been chosen because it is the 25th Anniversary of NASACRE and the 40th Anniversary of the Education Reform Act of 1988.

8. News from Faith Groups

Past events

- **Board of Deputies Accreditation Day: 5 September.** Doreen Samuels and Gill Ross took part in this Accreditation Day.
- **Rosh Hashanah: 20-22 September.** Doreen provided honey cake to celebrate Rosh Hashanah last week.
- **Garba celebration: 24 September.** Dancers took part in a traditional Garba outside the **Zoroastrian Centre** in Rayners Lane.

Future events

- **Talk to Newton Farm pupils: 29 September:** Phiroza has been asked to give a talk on Zoroastrianism to Year 5 pupils at Newton Farm
- **JW3 Jewish Community in Hampstead: 27 September 6.00pm.** Phiroza has been asked to take part in some cooking at JW3, for Mitzvah Day; to prepare food to be distributed to the homeless at Ashfield House in Cricklewood.
- **Sewa Day: 1 October**
- **Harrow Interfaith: Faith, Health and Healing: 3 October 7.30-9.30pm at the Harrow Quaker Meeting House.** Phiroza informed members of this event and distributed fliers.
- **Harrow Baha'i Bicentennial Celebration: 21 October.** Mercedes gave each member an invitation to the Bicentennial Celebration to be held at the Pinner Memorial Hall. Members are asked to reply if they wish to attend.
- **Harrow Interfaith Week: 12-18 November.** Varsha is Chair of Harrow Interfaith; she will send details of events taking place in Interfaith Week to the clerk for circulation.

Action: Varsha Dodhia

Places of worship: if any faith traditions wish to open their places of worship during the week, Harrow council will advertise this. The Council might also give permission for a display in the Civic Centre foyer.

Booklet: David informed members that a free booklet is being published during the week. He asked permission to use the self descriptions written for the Agreed syllabus. **Members gave their permission to use the unedited text; edited text should be submitted to the appropriate representative for approval.**

- **Mitzvah Day: 19 November.**

9. Any Other Business

There were no items of any other business

10. Future Dates:

RE Leaders CPD:

Thursday 1 February 4.30-6 pm at Elmgrove Primary School
Tuesday 1 May 4.30-6.00pm at Belmont Primary School

SACRE members are welcome to attend if they wish.

Future SACRE dates:

Tues 5 December 2017
Thursday 22 March 2018

An item for the next meeting will be the annual report. Lesley will be working on this; she explained that the good work of the Chair and the Clerk make this task less onerous than it might be.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending. The Meeting closed at 8.55pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)