

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.30 pm on 25 May 2011

Present:

Martin Sweet (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Anne Manning (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gordon Norrie, Reverend Canon M Camp,
Mr Gupta, Mrs Hawkes, Mr Mahmood, Mr Riat,
Ms Thompson and Ms Tranchina

Also Present:

Ms Penny Smith-Orr, RE Adviser
Christine Reeks, Clerk to SACRE

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF ALTERNATE MEMBERS

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Gordon Norrie, the new Councillor member to the meeting. Councillors Adams, Carr and Evans had also been appointed to SACRE as new members, but unfortunately as the SACRE meeting dates clashed with meetings of the Executive, Councillor Carr and Evans would be unable to take up their SACRE appointments. It was hoped that two further Councillor members would be therefore be appointed. Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Adams and Charsley, Mrs Colling, Ms Honey, Ms James, Mrs Polydorou, Mr Stone, Mr Town and Reverend Varney. Mr Gupta left the meeting at 7.35pm and Rev Canon Michael Camp left at 7.50pm due to other commitments.

The Chairman hoped that as SACRE meeting dates were published well in advance Members would be able to attend on a more regular basis.

The Committee were sad to note the death of Rae Michaelis who had been a member of SACRE for many years. The Chairman and Vice Chairman had attended her funeral and had written to her husband to express appreciation for the valuable contribution she had made to the work of SACRE.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3 A) MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 FEBRUARY 2011

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 16th February 2011 be confirmed.

B) MATTERS ARISING:

Item 4 f) RE in Secondary Schools:

The Chairman reported that he had written to the three local members of Parliament, but their responses had not taken the matter any further forward. Bob Stewart MP for Beckenham Constituency had said that he would like to visit Bromley SACRE and the Chairman suggested that he could be invited to attend a future meeting.

The Chairman commented that on 19th May 2011, officers from the RE Council had met Nick Gibb, Minister for Schools to discuss RE and the English Baccalaureate, and further clarification was awaited. He understood however, that the Government were determined to support RE in schools and that it should remain statutory.

The Chairman further commented that SACRE should not underestimate the impact they can have on Bromley schools.

Item 5) Development Plan 2011 and Budget

The Chairman had spoken to George Searle, Assistant Director, Learning and Achievement, regarding the outstanding queries, and made the following comments:

RE Centre: Given the current economic climate the Local Authority were unable to give priority to fund such a centre. The Chairman suggested that if the Diocese had any concerns regarding the funding agreement with the Local Authority this should be taken up directly with them. However, Jan Thompson, Diocesan Adviser present at the meeting commented that she felt there would be little point in pursuing the matter. The Diocesan Adviser further commented that there was a small office at the Education Development Centre, (run by two volunteers on Wednesday mornings), which was able to provide RE Resources Boxes to Bromley schools.

SACRE Budget:

The funding for the RE Adviser (for 35 days per year) would continue to be provided.

SACRE Annual Report

This would no longer need to be submitted to the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency as this had been disbanded. The Annual Report would however need to be submitted to NASACRE, the Department for Education and the Local Authority's, Children and Young People Policy Development and Review Committee.

4 ORAL UPDATE AND PUBLICATIONS

a) NASACRE Annual Conference

The Chairman had attended the NASACRE Annual Conference on 11th May 2011, when Dr Robert Beckford had given a keynote address on “Effective SACREs engaging with Young People in the Big Society”. There was also a report on the NASACRE conference “Who’s RE is it anyway?” which had been held on 31st March 2011.

(The report is available on the NASACRE website on the following link: <http://www.nasacre.org.uk/downloads/WhoseRE.pdf>).

In addition, John Keast (future Chairman of the RE Council) addressed the Annual Conference and spoke on the state of RE and future issues. Finally, Claire Dempsey, (who was about to start post 16 education), spoke movingly on the subject of “Why is RE important?”. (Notes of the NASACRE Annual Conference are attached to these minutes – Appendix 1.)

The Rev Canon Michael Camp said that it would be helpful to clarify the relationship between SACREs and academies. The Chairman remarked that comments were awaited from the Minister for Schools which would hopefully clarify the position. The RE Adviser informed the meeting that it was still a legal requirement for Academies to follow RE, and although they had to follow an agreed syllabus this did not have to be one which had been agreed locally. The Diocesan Adviser commented that Voluntary Aided church schools did not have to follow the locally agreed syllabus, and if they converted to an Academy this right went with them. It was up to the governing body to decide which syllabus to use. The Rev Canon Camp advised that most of the church schools followed the Diocesan syllabus.

Councillor Manning remarked that even though some schools were converting to academies she felt that many Head teachers wanted to maintain links with the Local Authority.

The Chairman commented that even though clarification of matters was awaited it was important for SACRE to be proactive and begin to plan the RE syllabus (see item 6 on this agenda).

b) London SACRE

A meeting was due to be arranged during the Autumn and members of SACRE would be notified of the details as soon as possible.

c) Islamic Competition 2011

As mentioned at the previous SACRE meeting, the next Islamic Competition would be held at Darul Uloom on 24th November 2011. Mr Mahmood hoped that more schools would take part this year. The RE Adviser informed the meeting that details relating to the Islamic Competition had been put on the

Managed Learning Environment (MLE) SACRE page for Bromley schools. Mrs Hawkes who had attended the Competition with her pupils in 2010 said that she had a Powerpoint presentation and poster relating to the event and would email this to the RE Adviser to put on the MLE.

d) Churches Networking Event

During Celebrating RE Month (March 2011) the Chairman and RE Adviser had attended this event at Orpington Baptist Church, to which teachers and others had been invited. The Chairman commented that it had been encouraging to attend such a proactive event, which had been a good opportunity for local networking between teachers and groups of churches. The Chairman commented on the importance of encouraging relationships between schools, churches and other faith organisations.

e) School Visits

The Chairman, RE Adviser, Councillor Manning and Reverend Varney had visited Princes Plain School the previous week. A report on the visit would be submitted to the next SACRE meeting. The RE Adviser commented on the difficulty in arranging SACRE visits with schools, and would try to arrange another school visit during the next half term. She would give members as much notice as possible to see if they would be able to accompany her on the visit. Ms Tranchina suggested that if possible a rolling programme of planned school visits would be useful. SACRE members agreed that this would be a good idea. Councillor Manning suggested that Kevin Gerrard, the Partnerships and Planning Officer at the Local Authority might be able to assist as he arranged a programme of school visits for the Councillors. The RE Adviser agreed to contact him to see if he might be able to help. The Chairman suggested that perhaps a list could be drawn up of RE related questions which Councillors could ask on their planned school visits. The RE Adviser said that she would discuss this with the Partnerships and Planning Officer and emphasised that the school visits made by SACRE members were not inspections.

Mrs Hawkes asked about the RE Audit of schools which had been carried out several years earlier. The RE Adviser commented that this exercise had been interesting and had provided useful information on schools' RE requirements. Although several secondary schools had completed the questionnaire, unfortunately not many primary schools had done so. Ms Tranchina wondered if it would be worth carrying out the audit again. The RE Adviser would make enquiries with the Education Department to see if this would be allowed

5 SACRE SELF EVALUATION

Report No. DCYP11068

Self-evaluation of the work of SACRE was carried out on an annual basis. The results were linked into the development plan so that the work of SACRE could be as effective as possible. In previous years the evaluation had been

done in a variety of different ways, and the SACRE Chairman suggested that this year the RE Consultant look at the document, evaluate the work, and advise on areas to be considered. Two areas that were still developing according to the last review were: 2B “Membership and Training” and 2F “Partnership with Key Stakeholders”.

The SACRE committee had previously completed one training exercise from the NASACRE training CD, entitled “What should a good SACRE be doing?” The results of this were included in the last set of minutes. One area members considered important was to listen to teachers and invite them to talk about good practice in the classroom. The RE Adviser suggested that appropriate teachers could be invited to do so, and Mrs Hawkes and Ms Tranchina were asked if they could speak at the October SACRE meeting. This would contribute to developing items, 2B and 2F. The RE Adviser suggested that discussion on section 5D “Links to the LA initiatives promoting social and racial harmony” should take place at a future meeting.

Members discussed the essential purpose of RE in schools and comments made included the following:

- To give pupils a greater understanding of diversity.
- To secure an understanding in students of what it is like “to be religious”.
- To show students different faiths, especially those who have no faith background.
- To support the growth of the person and help students understand practices and forms of religion and to develop empathy.

Members present at the meeting then took part in a training exercise organised by the RE Adviser which looked at the questions of “What do we want pupils to gain from their experience of RE?” and “What does good quality RE look like?” The RE Adviser would analyse the responses and report back at the next SACRE meeting.

RESOLVED that in future the RE Adviser will monitor SACREs progress and development, and advise SACRE accordingly on the areas to be considered and how to achieve further progress.

6 SACRE AGREED SYLLABUS

Report No. DCYP11069

The Bromley Agreed Syllabus was due for a 5 year review during the next academic year. The RE Consultant had been to a number of meetings, run by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (now disbanded), discussing syllabus review with 52 other local authorities. The Chairman suggested that prior to gathering an Agreed Syllabus conference in 2012, a working group be formed to meet to discuss the process of the forthcoming review.

The Chairman commented that it was important to look around and see what other syllabuses were available. It might be possible to purchase an “off the shelf” syllabus, incorporating IT support which could be adapted for use by Bromley and which would save many man hours of work.

The Diocesan Adviser was concerned about acting too quickly, particularly in view of the fact that the Government’s new RE framework was awaited. However, the Chairman commented that he felt it was important to be proactive whilst waiting for the Government guidelines to be issued.

SACRE Members agreed that it would be a good idea for a working group to be formed to meet and discuss the process of the forthcoming review. The Chairman commented that it would be important to listen to the views of the Primary School RE co-ordinators. The RE Adviser said that a few teachers from the Primary network meetings had already expressed an interest in joining such a working group. The Diocesan Adviser, Mrs Hawkes and Ms Tranchina also said that they would like to join the working group. The RE Adviser agreed to contact them direct with a view to arranging the first meeting of the working group in late September 2011. She would also speak to Dr George Searle, Assistant Director for Learning and Achievement, about the budget and planning for the new syllabus.

RESOLVED that

(i) a working group be formed to discuss the process of the forthcoming review of the Bromley Agreed Syllabus;

(ii) members interested in being part of the working group to contact the RE Adviser.

7 YOUTH SACRE/ANNUAL EVENT 2011

Report No. DCYP11072

Bromley Youth SACRE met at the end of the Spring term and had a showing of the film of the Synagogue which is now on the SACRE website. They would be meeting in June 2011, to plan the next filming session which would be in the Parish Church on 29 June. Hopefully the film would be ready to be shown at the Autumn term meeting of SACRE.

One possibility for the annual event for Bromley SACRE was to hold another 6th form conference using the model from 2009 and also to invite Key Stage 4 pupils to attend. Members of the Youth SACRE would be leaving school at the end of July 2011 and a conference would encourage new members.

The last conference had been sponsored by a grant from NASACRE, and the materials and presentations were still available. The RE Adviser informed the meeting that the Head Teacher at Coopers Technology College had kindly agreed to host the event at the college, with other schools being invited to attend. Mrs Hawkes from Coopers Technology College would liaise with the

RE Adviser in setting a date for the conference. The RE Adviser would in turn notify relevant parties when a date had been set. It would be good to have members of the faith communities involved with the conference and students from Darul Uloom would be most welcome.

RESOLVED that the SACRE annual event should accept the invitation from the head teacher at Coopers Technology College, to hold a sixth form conference, with key stage 4 pupils being invited to attend.

8 SACRE FAITH DIRECTORY FOR SCHOOLS

Report no. DCYP11071

At the February meeting it was agreed that the volunteers from faith groups who had offered to talk in schools should meet for a short 'training' event which would outline the legal requirements for RE teaching and strategies for use in the classroom. Volunteers attending the training would then be put on a list for schools to access. The list would be available on the Managed Learning Environment (MLE) SACRE page for Bromley schools, and held by the RE Adviser for those schools who have not bought into the MLE.

The date for the training had been set for 14 June 2011, from 7-9 pm at the Civic Centre.

RESOLVED that members inform colleagues who would like to volunteer to speak about their faith in schools, of the date of the training and encourage them to contact the RE Consultant to secure a place on the training.

9 CELEBRATING RE

Report no. DCYP11070

March 2011 had been designated as national Celebrating RE month. Members were informed of the events being held in Bromley schools and as a result there were no official SACRE school visits in the Spring Term.

Members considered a report prepared by the RE Consultant on the events which she had attended. These included visits to Royston Primary School, Bishop Justus School and St. George's Primary School in Bickley. Ms Tranchina and her pupils had attended the event at Bishop Justus School and commented on the excellent event which had taken place. Mrs Hawkes also commented on activities which had taken place at Coopers Technical College to celebrate RE month.

Members noted that a legacy of the month was the website www.celebratingre.org which illustrated good RE practice taking place across the country, (see also minute number 5 on self-evaluation above).

RESOLVED that the report on Celebrating RE month be noted.

10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Riat invited members of SACRE to an open day at the Sikh Gurdwara on 5th June 2011. It was an all day event and there was no need to notify them in advance.

11 DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 19th October 2011

Wednesday 1st February 2012

Wednesday 30th May 2012

All meetings to start at 6.30pm

The meeting ended at 8.45pm

Chairman

APPENDIX 1

Notes from NASACRE Annual Conference Birmingham

Wednesday, 11 May 2011

Title: Effective SACREs engaging with Young People in the Big Society

Keynote speaker: Dr Robert Beckford (Educator, theologian, TV presenter – current post at Warwick Univ.)

He started with a quote: “Faith without engagement is faith without works” and then confessed to not being an ‘expert’ on this subject area, but he wanted to address the issue of “Young People and the Big Society” and he sought to triangulate a response from his various backgrounds.

He started by referring to Saul Alinsky, who proposed that a dis-integrated/agitating society is significant in the process of change, especially for establishing a future for the have-nots. He quotes from the life of Obama when he was a social activist in Chicago who started his work with a project to remove asbestos from working-class housing.

Robert suggested that he felt the aim of the government’s ‘Big Society’ policy was to replace big government by encouraging local people and groups to take responsibility. A major obstacle is that this policy tends to favour people with both ability plus an awareness of what is best for them since it is these people who have local knowledge and understand that their effectiveness is in dealing with local social/community issues. Critics are quick to assume that the ‘Big Society’ is an excuse for imposing cuts or making savings, but a greater, more astute criticism is that it is weak on equality, empowering those who already have a degree of influence, rather than give all groups the means to tackle their own poverty and inequality. Robert explained that a major criticism of the ‘Big Society’ is that it might make ‘charity cases’ out of sections of society. His hope was that the Big Society would be a vehicle for ‘from the ground-up’ politics.

The debate is whether we see ‘Big Society’ as problematic or as an opportunity, and Robert suggested three ways in which we can make ‘Big Society’ work.

1. Unless you make social justice the main goal, the Big Society will not be successful.
2. By making sure that co-operation is the standard way of getting things done, since co-operation taps into the abundance of local resource, encourages people to join forces by building effective networks.
3. Sustainability - the Big Society can only be built if it has long term goals and processes. There are few gains in the short term – many in the long-term.

So how does Big Society relate to young people? Researchers into this question found three key points:

- There is high degree of ignorance among young people, in that only 25% know or even care what Big Society might mean.
- Surprisingly, most young people are indeed anxious about cuts to public services.
- The British Youth Council were told by young people that an important issue was the level of empowerment and that apparently 75% of youth wanted to have a greater say in decisions made with the local area.

We need to encourage children to become ‘critical thinkers’ – perhaps we need to create an environment where young people are empowered and feel listened to. Young people should be encouraged to be more interventionist, where for example, in some schools; the young people are proactive in changing the purchasing of food for school dinners from fair trade or non-exploitative sources. He also suggested that good teachers can make these connections and empower young people and not just ‘follow the script’.

Robert’s concluding remarks was to suggest:

- We must give Big Society a chance, since for all its faults; it could have some positive outcomes.
- Whilst Big Society is not actually a radical policy, it can have a radical effect provided its goals remain realistic.
- Robert suggested that we need to set radical goals and instigate a process of radical transformation and establish a process that can tackle systemic failures.
- We need to be aware of what drives young people. For example, we should identify how we might use social media (especially as most of us are pre-social media types). He is also concerned that young people in our society may have a poor view of ‘religion’, especially at a time when much media promotes the tabloid view that ‘religious’ people are assumed to be ‘fundamentalist’. A clear role for RE is to respond to these comments.

How do we use the full array of educational resources to empower young people? He felt that teachers need to make connections. For example: we can name black athletes and musicians, but black writers? His belief is that the “teacher embodies the change” – making education dialogic. The best form of teaching is to inspire the child and inspirational teachers empower children. The major issue is that we have too many children who ‘don’t know’ and ‘don’t care that they don’t know’. The objective is surely to change these attitudes.

Robert told the story relayed to him by a lecturer in USA who served in Vietnam as a low ranking soldier. This man was not allowed to question the platoon leader’s judgment about a certain offensive action and as a consequence, the lecturer was the only man to survive that day’s action. Maybe we need to find ways listening to young people? Faith groups in

particular can give young people a genuine voice, but the first step is to listen to them and help them establish realistic goals.

Finally, questions and comments from the floor to Robert:

Guy Hordern (Birmingham), chair of Birmingham SACRE (a Conservative Council) questioned Robert's rather jaundiced view of the government's negative attitude towards RE, exemplified by the government's hesitation to include RE in the new English baccalaureate. Guy mentioned that Birmingham has an SACRE budget of £90,000 a year (!) and added that he spoke with PM only last week (what is it with name droppers!), stressing to the PM that RE is significant. In response, Robert suggested that RE is being marginalised – accepting that Birmingham is a case in point.

When asked about the Bishop of Oxford's statement last week that there should be a 10% ceiling on church schools intake of children from church based families, Robert was in broad agreement with this since without such a policy we society will end up with a 'life style enclave' rather than the church using its schools as a mission.

One person asked about how their aging church membership might do more to engage with young people. (A surprising question given the nature of the conference) Robert again suggested that radical goals are needed if we are to reach young people. He suggested encouraging senior citizens to engage in surrogate fostering and mentoring, especially working with young black men, and especially with those involved in prison work.

Andrew Copson (Westminster SACRE) wanted to hear other examples of Saul Alinski's work (other than Obama removing asbestos). Robert suggested the American Civil Rights campaign was the only movement lead by a religious leader in the 20th century.

Bill Moore thanked Robert for his contribution and in summary asked: Why should we do RE? Because it is a dialogue and dynamic. What is the role of RE? We can ask and wait for government to define and plan it, but it is up to us (SACREs included) and the teachers to equip young people to shape their future world. The initiative lay with those involved in RE.

NASACRE Business meeting:

Item 4: accounts and treasurer's report.

The financial future of NASACRE, on current expenditure does not look bright. With the reduction of LA budgets – it essential that L.A.s maintain their subscription to NASACRE. Numbers attending the conference today are down, is this indicative that SACREs are finding it harder to afford and maybe even finding it hard to function.? As the roles of SACRE change and with the growth of academies, what will be the impact on NASACRE of LA funding decisions?

Item 5:

The report of the conference 'Who's RE is it anyway' held on the 31st March is now on the NASACRE website: <http://www.nasacre.org.uk/>

Item 6: Elections: all duly elected.

Item 7. Report on Celebrating RE

- good to see number of partnerships
- an array of good events and ideas.
- Legacy of Celebrating RE – currently working on this.
- Celebrating RE website is still operating.
- 4 page article in RE Today autumn issue
- SACREs still to ensure that teachers understand what good RE actually is.

Item 8: matters arising

- Did Mr Gove notice anything during the Celebrating RE month?
- Has the early day motion taken place?
- Daily Telegraph: Comments on RE debate.
- Should there be a more interactive aspect to NASCR website and utilise some social networking capacity?
- Question relating to RE being beyond school – possibly into adult education
- It should be noted that Westminster has a humanist rep, where SACREs do have humanists as members they are not outside the law. Many SACREs do take a similar position – some don't. Bill's comment was along the lines of need to work together.
- Board of deputies – Jewish reps on SACREs – KS3 www.theholocaustexplained.org

Need to put youth/children and infant SACREs on NASACRE website – so that there is a growing awareness of projects up and down country. Claire Clinton (Newham) suggested the possibility of networking youth SACREs and setting up a sort of youth NASACRE?

Voice of the Future: John Keast (future chair of RE council)

State of RE nation address and questions.

John started with an illustration. During an RE inspection of one department, one teacher got a high grade whereas the other was failing. To give any grade to the department did not reflect its true state. Similarly, to characterise RE as 'satisfactory' would be a similar mistake. There are pockets of great work, and areas less than satisfactory. Consequently, RE is in a mixed state – better than it used to be, but the real question is to ask 'where is it going?'

John quoted a former Bishop of York (John Hapgood?) who suggested that "if we could deal with the problems of RE - we could deal with the problems of religion". The profile of religion has not diminished with rise of secularism, but

hopefully the state of the RE nation reflects the trends of our wider society. However the state of the RE nation will never be utterly clear – since ‘religions’ are contestable.

The development of academies is still relatively un-tested and unknown, and there is a legal questions since the statutory place of RE has been removed from academies, does that impact the ‘national’ statutory requirement that is regularly quoted by MPs?

Three key issues:

1. resolve English Baccalaureate
2. we do need to get involved in the review of eth curriculum
3. to try to resolve the role of SACRE – not least in relation to academies.

In the face of this, there are several opportunities:

Question: where does authority lie in relation to RE as a subject? Who are the guarantors of quality in RE.? John feels that the authority lies within the RE community itself – but by RE community, John means a loose community of organisation, faith groups, professionals and so on. So we need to identify the workings of this community and how each member relates, the quality of their input/relationship.

How can various members of the RE community work together? Identifying what bits are done collaboratively and what bits are done in isolation? RE community like this must identify local and national issues. For example – local agreed syllabuses – what is the definition of ‘local’?

How do we get representatives form different groups and constituencies working together? John used the analogy of the United Nations. If the nations don’t unite then the UN is not an effective agency. Therefore, the greater the working together – the more effective the outcome. So there needs to be, for example, greater link up between school RE and Higher Education that teach theology. The real question is how we get higher institutes more involved – especially in maintaining the through flow of students.

John is about to take up the role of chair of the RE Council, and he believes a key objective is for RE Council to identify the opportunities that can be created in the current wave of changes. To remedy the threats we need to work together – if we fail to do that, the various threats will create a toxic brew that will undermine so much of the progress has been achieved.

Finally, in response to the theme of the day, John felt that youth and children should not be ‘used’ to promote the aims of others.

Voice of the Future: “Why is RE important?” by Claire Dempsey

(Note: Claire Dempsey is just about to start post 16 education and hopes to enter university en route to a teaching career.)

The nature of RE is to question, but some groups, possibly the government, don't understand what RE is and why we need it in schools. In schools RE philosophy and ethics. RE is the only palace where certain issues, such as euthanasia, are tackled. Where do we study these issues if not in RE? Without RE children will not learn a true picture of Islam. Community cohesion is a major target for RE – it challenges and raises awareness of the dangers of extremist views. Whether we like it or not, religions are here to stay.

Outcomes/action for Bromley SACRE

- Continue to develop and promote Bromley's Youth SACRE – not as a gimmick but as a route to promoting RE amongst peers.
- Research network of new agreed syllabus that are responding to current changes (e.g. Somerset)
- Determine the future of RE in Bromley schools for ourselves: produce a new fresh syllabus that all schools will value.
- Identify and possible adapt/adopt good practice that came out of the Celebrating RE month earlier this year.
- Study the report on the 'Who's RE is it anyway' held on the 31st March which is now on the NASACRE website.