

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.30 pm on 5 June 2013

Present:

Martin Sweet (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Anne Manning (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors: Reg Adams, Roger Charsley, Kate Lymer
(present until 7pm) and Gordon Norrie.
Rev Roger Bristow, Virginia Corbyn and Christopher Town.
Arlene Fane, Fiona Hawkes, Jed Stone and Jackie Tranchina.
Samantha Barnett, Ray Hagley, Saiyed Mahmood and
Swarn Riat

Also Present:

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

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stephen Carr, Councillor David Jefferys, Patricia Colling, Emma Honey and Sue Polydourou. Councillor Lymer apologised for having to leave the meeting early as she needed to attend another meeting. The Chairman welcomed Rev Roger Bristow who had been appointed as the new Church of England Representative.

The Chairman informed SACRE Members that this would be his last meeting as he would be resigning as a member and Chairman of SACRE due to the relocation of his employment. He thanked members for their support, friendship and kindness over the many years he had served on SACRE. Mr Mahmood thanked the Chairman on behalf of SACRE members for the unstinting service he had given to SACRE. His contribution would be greatly missed.

The Chairman informed members that as a result of his resignation, Edlene Whitman a Baptist representative had been nominated by the Free Churches Education Committee to fill the SACRE membership vacancy. It was hoped that she would be able to attend the next SACRE meeting in November.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3 A) MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6TH MARCH 2013

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 6th March 2013 be confirmed.

(Councillor Lymer apologised for not submitting her apologies to the meeting, as she had been unable to do so due to last minute unforeseen circumstances.)

B) MATTERS ARISING:

Minute 5b: re: Letter to Michael Gove MP. It was noted that a response had been received from Michael Gove which had been circulated to SACRE members.

Minute 6: It was noted that instead of writing to the Assistant Director of Education, the Chairman had met with her to discuss the level of support being given to SACRE. The Chairman reported that The Department of Education had carried out a review of Local Authority Statutory Duties, and had published a document in which the duty of a local authority to fund and support a SACRE had been deleted. However, following further enquiries and investigation by the Chairman of SACRE it was ascertained that this provision had been omitted in error and the Department for Education subsequently apologised. The Vice-Chairman asked that SACRE Members' thanks be recorded in the minutes for the work undertaken by the Chairman in this regard.

The Chairman confirmed that the SACRE budget for 2013/14 had been agreed and that the next SACRE Chairman would need to be involved with determining the budget for 2014/15.

4 ORAL UPDATE AND PUBLICATIONS

a) NASACRE AGM 23rd May 2013

The Chairman and RE Adviser had attended the NASACRE AGM on 23rd May 2013. The Chairman commented on the keynote address which was shared by HMI Alan Brine (OFSTED national leader for RE) and Dr Mark Chater (Director of Culham St. Gabriel's Trust). Suggestions for the "next steps" for Bromley SACRE were outlined by the Chairman and discussion took place. The suggestions had been based upon conversations and the question/answer session which took place at the AGM, (see details in the notes of the AGM appended to these minutes.)

Particular points/suggestions raised by SACRE members included the following:

SACRE needed to adopt a positive approach. Efforts needed to be made to increase the awareness of SACRE and make its work/function more widely known.

Head Teachers and Departmental Heads/RE Co-ordinators from schools, including academies could be invited to attend SACRE meetings.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman should meet with the Assistant Director of Education on a regular basis.

Perhaps more could be done to publicise the work of SACRE, by issuing press statements for particular events, e.g. publicising the Youth SACRE.

Information could be distributed to school governors via updates/newsletters.

It was important to look at connectivity. Periodic meetings of Link Governors were held which most schools attended, and in addition there was a Chair of Governors' Forum. It was suggested that the RE Adviser could find out more from the Business Development Manager at the Widmore Education Centre who had now taken over responsibility for Governor Support.

Although some schools had access to the "Fronter" system, not all schools subscribed to this. It was suggested that perhaps a SACRE website could be developed which had a private area within the website (password protected) where such documents such as the Faith Directory could be accessed.

b) Youth SACRE

Since the last SACRE meeting, a meeting of the Youth SACRE had taken place which had been organised by the RE Adviser and Fiona Hawkes at Coopers Technology College. The meeting had been very positive and arrangements were being made for pupils to visit St Nicholas' Church in Chislehurst to make a virtual film, similar to the one which the Youth SACRE had previously made when they visited Bromley Synagogue. The visit to St Nicholas' Church was due to take place on 24th June 2013, and it was hoped that the film could be shown to members at the next SACRE meeting. The Chairman commented that during conversations with delegates at the NASACRE AGM, other SACRE's were impressed that Bromley still had a Youth SACRE.

c) Faith Directory

The training session for Faith Directory volunteers had taken place at the Civic Centre on Wednesday 20th March 2013. The RE Adviser reported that it had been very successful and thanked all those who had attended. Photographs had been taken at the event and had been submitted to the Council's in house newsletter "In Touch". Subsequently the RE Adviser had produced Guidance on Faith Speakers in schools, plus a list of volunteer speakers which had been circulated to all Bromley schools.

d) Islamic Competition

The prize-giving would take place at Darul Uloom from 6.30pm to 9pm on Thursday 7th November 2013. All SACRE members were invited and were asked to notify Mr Mahmood if they wished to attend. Mr Mahmood would send further details to the SACRE Clerk who would forward these to SACRE members.

5 AGREED SYLLABUS

The Bromley Agreed Syllabus and scheme of work was being revised to bring them into line with current thinking on RE teaching. The RE Adviser informed members that she had updated the previously circulated copies of the draft units of work, taking into account further comments and amendments which had been received from SACRE members. Since the last meeting the introductory pages of the syllabus had been circulated to SACRE members for consideration, together with themed units and learning objectives for Key Stages 1 and 2. A grid had been prepared to help teachers see a suggestion of how to spread the teaching of each religion across the year groups. It had been agreed with Beverley Johnston (the previous Head of Education Commissioning and Business Services) that the new syllabus be put onto a CD for use by schools, rather than produce a printed copy as had been done previously.

Following discussion SACRE Members agreed the following:

- (i) The Learning Objectives would form the statutory element of the RE syllabus.
- (ii) The study of Buddhism at Key Stage 2 would be optional; if this were chosen, the relevant learning objectives would be statutory, and that a further themed unit be written should schools not want to use the optional Buddhism unit.
- (iii) The suggested teaching grid and themed units should be approved.
- (iv) A designer should be appointed to produce the final document. It was noted that any grammatical and typographical errors in the documentation would be rectified and the publication would be proof read before being produced on a CD.

The Chairman requested that if SACRE Members had any further minor points to make they should contact the RE Adviser direct.

Mr Mahmood thanked the RE Adviser on behalf of SACRE members for the considerable amount of work which she had undertaken in connection with the revision of the agreed syllabus.

RESOLVED that work on the revised agreed syllabus be progressed, in accordance with the points outlined above

**6 SCHOOL VISIT
Report No. ED13059**

SACRE members visit local schools in order to observe the teaching of RE and to offer support to the RE Coordinator of the school. On 18th January 2013 the Chairman, Councillor Adams and Christopher Town visited Marian Vian Primary School. A report of the visit was considered by SACRE members.

Councillor Adams remarked in particular on the tour of the school by pupil "guides" which took place after a Year 5 class assembly, and the discussion on RE and collective worship which subsequently took place with pupils on the school council. Christopher Town commented on the excellent displays of RE work around the school and the very good RE lesson which had been observed.

The Chairman drew SACRE members' attention to the key issues for SACRE outlined in the report. Members of SACRE found the report very useful and informative. The Chairman would write to the Head Teacher of the school to thank him on behalf of SACRE for allowing the visit to take place.

The RE Adviser informed SACRE members that a visit to Valley Primary school was being arranged for 20th June 2013* and a visit to Darrick Wood Secondary School was planned for 16th September 2013. Councillor Adams, Christopher Town and Fiona Hawkes indicated that they might be able to visit Valley Primary School and Councillor Mrs Manning and Samantha Barnett might be able to visit Darrick Wood School. Members were asked to email the RE Adviser direct to confirm their availability.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the report of the school visit be noted,**
- (ii) SACRE members notify the RE Adviser if they would be able to attend the school visits planned for the summer and autumn terms.**

(It subsequently transpired that a visit on that date would not be possible and it was hoped that this could be rearranged for the 10th October 2013.)*

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

8 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 6th November 2013

Wednesday 5th March 2014

All meetings to start at 6.30pm

The Meeting ended at 8.20 pm

Chairman

Report on the National Association of SACREs
Annual General Meeting
23rd May 2013
Birmingham

Challenging SACREs

Keynote address was shared by HMI Alan Brine (OFSTED national leader for RE) and Dr Mark Chater (Director of Culham St.Gabriel's Trust)

HMI Alan Brine

Alan started by telling the conference that there was a new OFSTED subject report on RE due out soon and he shared verbally the key headlines contained within this report:

- too much RE is not good enough and there is little evidence of improvement, with 60% of provision less than good (note: PSE being 40% less than good).
- there is still the need for significant curriculum thinking in order to address these concerns.
- there are additional concerns about the quality and provision at GCSE. Whilst there are high numbers taking GCSE, the quality is not good enough with far too much 'rote' learning.
- pressure is being placed on RE due to recent educational policies, and it is as yet unclear how much long-term damage has been done to RE by this squeeze.
- Government policy changes and ideology are threatening the rationale for some established structures such as SACREs.

In terms of how all this was impacting SACREs, he suggested that the recent NASACRE survey and OFSTED evidence indicated that SACREs were under increasing pressure, which was leading to an increasing variability in the capacity of SACREs to undertake their responsibilities effectively. This is being compounded by issues of inadequate funding and limited access to adequate expertise.

These reasons together, with the continued drive towards 'academisation', raise serious and immediate questions about the future of the local SACRE.

He used the Biblical analogy of Pharaoh's dream that Joseph interpreted. He suggested that Pharaoh's dream of the 7 fat cows and 7 lean cows (interpreted by Joseph as 7 good years of plenty and 7 bad years famine) was a good analogy to use and he went on to explain why.

From 1990 – 2010, SACREs functioned well with good national support from DfE and the then QCA (QCDA), their statutory duties were respected and undertaken seriously. OFSTED reports and regular subject reports provided the SACRE with evidence of what was happening in all their local schools. GCSE in RE (both long and short course) was booming and because there was a board consensus about RE, the subject benefitted from wider educational aims and government initiatives such Every Child Matters and Community Cohesion.

Alan went on to suggest that even in the 'good years', cracks were appearing. The key emerging issue was the subjects 'statutory' status as against its educational justification. The subject's 'odd' legal status needed to be addressed. The short course GCSE was successful but, whilst it had relevance, the subject did not have sufficient educational rigour. Finally, because SACREs were fragile and variable, on the ground, there was little improvement and, for all the success, the issues surrounding the purpose and status of RE remained unresolved resulting in a significant 'climate change'.

Since these issues were not addressed, the resulting 'lean years' were driven by the growing autonomy of schools to determine their own curriculum and ethos. The first change was the impact of the collapse of national support structures, such as QCDA, which meant that the Non-statutory framework had a limited impact due to a lack of support. At the same time there was a reduction in the LA support for SACREs, undermining both their function and effectiveness. Alan also questioned if there are grounds for RE, or any subject, having statutory status.

However, in the face of all this there is some good news (!). There is a lot of creative and innovative embedded in the thinking behind the new syllabuses. There are now some good models of SACRE/academy partnerships, with academy chains exploring new models of RE.

Another further bit of good news is that the threat that RE is facing has generated a lot of debate, not least in the formation of the APPG (all party parliamentary group). Plus several new networks and initiatives have been set up, such as Face to Faith, Three Faith Forum and the setting up of Faith Ambassadors.

Alan concluded his part of the presentation by offering conference some key questions. Should RE be aligned with the National Curriculum being developed? Or should the subject status remain detached, developing the capacity of the local SACRE in preparation for better days ahead?

He proposed that the most effective resolve conference can make is to continue to develop a concerted campaign but questioned if the current wide-distribution of responsibility for RE is too wide? We could try demanding a response from those who can influence the government's stance, but he questioned how can NASACRE or the local SACRE possibly engage with a government that refuses to engage in debate?

Dr Mark Chater

Mark continued this debate by talking about the Leviathan – a mystical beast first mentioned in the Bible, a huge sea monster and, used as expression by Hobbs in 1651 to represent the formidable nature of 'the state'. Mark suggested that today we associate the Leviathan with central government, but he went on to suggest that the many challenges facing SACREs are not necessarily the government's fault.

Could the real Leviathan be the very cumbersome nature of the RE animal? There are, after all, 154 (150 in UK) local authorities each producing an agreed syllabus. Is it right that the RE education each child receives is determined by a SACRE that is relatively unrepresentative; certainly not representing the children they are seeking to serve? There are national and local education structures seeking to determine the character of RE all the while putting pressure on teachers. And all this is surprising given that the local SACRE has considerable responsibility but with little power and insufficient resources and funding.

Mark then asked a telling question, which evoked little response, "If we had a blank bit of paper to design a system for RE, would it be like the one we have?" (one positive hand went up!)

He then went on to suggest a new definition of SACRE:

- S** **Semi-detached**, meaning not fully engaged with the rest of the curriculum
- A** **Antiquated**, in that each SACRE a limited membership that excludes other groups/faiths, which, in his opinion is indefensible. The inevitable growth of academies will render SACREs obsolete.
- C** **Compliance-fixated**. It might seem that the established stakeholders of RE are always winging about compliance, which is a very hollow argument considering the growing strength of school autonomy.
- R** **Rigid**. The whole system seeks a future by being inflexible and outmoded.
- E** **Extravagant**. There is a lot of labour, volunteers, paper.. and so on .. to make this rather inefficient system work!

Perhaps the biggest 'failure' of the system is that SACREs, by their very objective make RE a special case, isolating the subject from the rest of education development. And the continued demand for 'compliance' actually weakens the pedagogical rational for the subject.

The growth of academies has 'leapfrogged' the system and, in some cases, becoming in a sense SACREs in their own right, rendering the LA structure, with its statutory duties, impotent. Far from promoting the subject, the Agreed Syllabus system fragments the support the subject needs, embedding itself in underperformance and thus reducing the very impact the subject it is seeking to promote.

He also went on to explain further his allegation that the RE system is 'extravagant'. Is the locally agreed syllabus flawed? He questioned if the 'local-stake ownership' model actually works. There are, after all, a good many hours of work, support and costs that go into producing 154 relatively similar agreed syllabuses – many of which are not needed as the

LA does not have any non-academy schools. He went on to make a prediction that the national curriculum would be obsolete within 2 years.

He then wondered if RE were a 'protected space', suggesting that the system of local structures had actually done more to stunt the growth of the subject? In fact he suggested that it is far from protected, it is in fact a 'dying system'. The real monster of RE, the Leviathan, is in fact already dead!

Having started with this rather blistering analysis of RE and its future, he then asked what kind of future do we (delegates of NASACRE?) want? Is the future local or national?

At present, Charles Clark (probably the secretary of state that most engaged with the issue of the future of RE) is looking for a redefinition of RE and the role of SACRE. Mark went to start his own prognosis/re-definition and suggested replacing the term SACRE with the similar quasi-Latin expression FIDES (faith?).

F **Freedom** - not compliance driven but guided
I **Innovation** - making the subject so much better, driven by children's enquiry
D **Democracy** - with real openness to fresh thinking
E **Engagement** - linked with the wider curriculum, not set apart
S **Standards** - driven by content

But there is a real danger, that if one Leviathan is dead (or nearly dead), there are other monsters growing in strength. The growth of 'affluenza' is changing the life goals of children and we live in a period of continuing national tensions relating to issues of faith.

Some LAs now appear not to recognise the role of the local SACRE and consequently provide poor support. Consequently it was accepted that SACREs will need guidance if they are to fulfil their statutory duties.. but they are unlikely to get any!

One view is to see SACREs in terms of evolution. If it is to be 'the survival of the fittest', then SACREs will need to stop thinking of their own future, and instead of seeing themselves as 'protected', actually change to become leaner and fitter! But these changes will need to come from the ground up – not via top down support, which the government seem reluctant to give anyway! Innovative SACREs should seek to impact parents with the importance of RE, which is also essential we are to combat growing issue of parent bigotry.

Mark suggested that the question to be asked to parents is "do you trust your child".

Are there any ongoing positives regarding the local SACRE? Using another metaphor, Mark and Alan suggested that SACREs need to 'make the weather', and take the lead in RE reform and development. Indeed, the most effective SACREs are working beyond their statutory duties and provide a valuable local network.

He then quoted sociologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of well meaning individuals can change the world". So Mark and Alan concluded with the question to NASACRE: is there a new way ahead? What does a grass-root model of education development look like?"

(Perhaps it already exists and RE needs genuine 'localism' with a re-investment into re-invigorated current structures – after-thought by MS)

Note: Actual full quote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has". Margaret Mead: anthropologist (1901-1978)

NASACRE business meeting

This year the business time was sharp and brief.

The most impressive point to report is that for all the 'negatives' that had been exposed by Alan Brine and Mark Chater, 120 SACREs were still affiliated and paid up, which is 80% of all LAs. Even more interesting was that all SACREs had at some point in the recent past been affiliated.

We were later treated to a preview version of the new NASACRE website which will have an open/public area together with a private area for those who are paid up/affiliated who will receive an annual password.

Group discussion

In the afternoon there was a series of questions for groups to discuss.

Question 1 What can SACREs do to work with academies?

Question 2 How can SACREs best press LAs to comply with their statutory duty to support SACREs?

Question 3 What should be the focus of RE syllabus review?

The various suggestions made by delegates will be published in the NASACRE report on the conference on their website.

Feedback relevant for Bromley SACRE

I felt that one outcome of the conference was to set out our own key 'next steps' for Bromley SACRE. These suggestions are based upon table conversations and the question/answer time.

- What kind of future do we want? Is the future local or national?
- Can we make better use of the secondary RE teacher's network?
- We could invite RE coordinators to visit and present something of their work to SACRE.
- Can SACRE encourage schools to cooperate in the sharing of resources?
- Should SACRE develop a stronger person specification for membership?
- We should arrange for the chair of SACRE to meet with the director of education on a regular basis.
- How can we encourage academies to buy into the local syllabus?
- Should SACREs make press statement from time to time to focus attention on their work?
- Can SACRE distribute information to school governors?