

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.00 pm on 17 November 2015

Present:

Reverend Roger Bristow (Chairman)

Councillors Kevin Brooks, Mary Cooke, Robert Evans, and Sarah Phillips, Denise Angell, Samantha Barnett, Virginia Corbyn, Saiyed Mahmood, Catherine Shelley, Jed Stone, Christopher Town and Reverend S Varney

Also Present:

Penny Smith-Orr, RE Consultant/Advisor
Stephen Wood, Clerk to SACRE

27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from:

- Raymond Hagley
- Cllr Keith Onslow
- Cllr David Jefferys
- Hannah Arnold
- Sanjay Gupta
- Sue Polydorou
- Mr S Riat
- Edlene Whitman
- Mrs P Colling
- Julia Waldman

Notification was received in advance of the meeting from Cllr Sarah Philips that she would be arriving around 6.20pm.

It was noted at the commencement of the meeting that three of the Councillors present would have to leave the SACRE meeting at 7.00pm to attend a meeting of the Care Services PDS Committee that was set for the same evening.

28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

29 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1ST JULY 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on the 1st July 2015 were agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 1st July 2015, be agreed and confirmed as a correct record of the meeting.

30 ORAL UPDATE AND PUBLICATIONS

Updates on previous Matters Arising:

Cllr Mary Cooke referred to a previous matter, where it was noted that arrangements were being made for the SACRE Chairman to meet with the Chairman of Croydon SACRE. It was noted that this meeting had not taken place as yet. However, the Chairman was now in possession of the email contact details for the Croydon SACRE Chairman, and it was anticipated that a meeting would be arranged for the near future. Members would be updated in due course.

The Chairman updated Members concerning the attempts that had been made by the Archdeacon's Office to email incumbents on behalf of SACRE in an attempt to gain details of small religious groups that were meeting in the Borough. It had been agreed previously that churchwardens should be copied into the email sent to incumbents. This was done, and seven responses were received, but they were not particularly helpful. The Chairman was grateful for the responses that had been received, and it was noted that at least on this occasion, some responses had been generated, and this was an improvement on the last exercise.

The RE Consultant informed SACRE Members that she had recently met the Archdeacon at Scotland Yard. The Archdeacon had noted that inter faith meetings had been established in the borough of Croydon, and he was interested in doing the same in Bromley. A meeting would be set up soon to look at this, and SACRE Members would be updated in the near future.

It was also noted that it had been agreed to purchase the document on "British Values", and that this would soon be distributed to all maintained schools in Bromley; these were mainly primary schools.

Islamic Competition:

SACRE Members were reminded that the prize giving for the Islamic Competition had taken place at Daryl Uloom on 12th November 2015. The competition had been set around the concept of "The True Meaning of Islam". Pupils had been required to explain what they considered to be the essential teachings of Islam, and to discuss the implications of these teachings for contemporary issues. They also had to finish with a statement to explain what they had gained from their work. Forty students had competed from five different schools.

A document was tabled at the meeting that highlighted extracts from some of the entries submitted. The extracts tabled looked at various themes such as:

- The perception of Islam in the Media
- Jannah and Jahannam
- The Sharia Law
- The Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad

Mr Jed Stone remarked that the event had been a very interesting and enjoyable evening, and that he was impressed by the projects and the extracts. He stated that both pupils and parents were impressed, felt welcome and enjoyed the experience. He felt that new friendships had been made, and that those in attendance would have gained a greater understanding of Islam. Mr Mahmood stated that the extracts had been displayed to show the quality of the entries, and that the focus of the projects was on God. It was important to see where the focus was. The RE Consultant stated that she had taken the opportunity to discuss religious education with the head teacher.

It was noted that the former Clerk to the Committee (Ms Christine Reeks) had emailed the new login details for the NASACRE website before she had left Bromley Council. The RE Consultant stated that she would re-email the login details for the website.

It was further noted that a new generic email for Bromley SACRE had now been set up, and this was:

SACRE.Chair@bromley.gov.uk

This could now be used for all future SACRE emails.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The RE Consultant email SACRE Members with the login details for the NASACRE Website.

(2) SACRE Members would be updated in due course concerning the anticipated meeting between the Chairman of Croydon SACRE and Bromley SACRE

(3) The RE Consultant would update the SACRE Members in due course concerning the establishment of an inter faith group in Bromley

31 REPORTS FROM THE RE CONSULTANT

SACRE Analysis of Top Challenges for SACREs.

SACRE Members heard that the Chairman and the RE Consultant attended the NASACRE AGM in May 2015, at which there was a discussion concerning the top challenges facing SACREs.

The challenges that were discussed were:

- Problems encountered when trying to engage with schools
- Problems with a lack of consistency in RE teaching across schools
- Confusion around the role of SACREs in relation to Academies and Free Schools
- The perceived decline of RE in Academies and Free Schools
- Problems encountered in engaging with Academies to develop better working relationships
- Problems encountered in sharing good practice across SACREs
- Sharing of resources with neighbouring SACREs
- Challenges faced in promoting the importance of RE in schools, and also with local authorities and with the Department for Education

The RE Consultant had noted on the SACRE Discussion Support Sheet (Appendix A) that OFSTED were looking at British Values, and that SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural values) would help to highlight the importance of RE. The RE Consultant had sent a survey to all schools in Bromley, and one of the aims of this was to collate email addresses for RE teachers and Co-ordinators. This would help with the process of engaging with schools.

The RE Consultant noted on Appendix A that there was not much evidence of the decline of the teaching of RE in Bromley, although it may be the case that collective worship was in decline. The RE Consultant noted that there was a need to try and get into more schools, and that new ways of being invited into schools should be investigated.

The RE Consultant asked the SACRE Members if they would like to comment further on the problems facing SACREs.

A Member expressed the view that it was difficult to know what to do as the SACRE had no powers to go into a school and investigate—they had to wait to be invited. Not much information was coming from schools, apart from at the termly network meetings although these were just with primary schools. A Member expressed the view that perhaps it would be possible to include secondary schools as well, if they were open to dialogue with Bromley SACRE.

The RE Consultant asked if Councillors visited schools, and that if they did, perhaps they could start talking about the importance of RE in schools. The Chairman felt that the Bromley situation was more difficult because SACRE was dealing mainly with Academies. He felt that maintained schools were generally more open to engaging with SACREs. Cllr Kevin Brooks suggested that it may be a good idea if the Leader of the Council, or the Portfolio Holder for Education sent a letter to Academies to encourage engagement with SACREs. Cllr Mary Cooke suggested that it may be a good idea to draw up a draft letter as a guide.

Samantha Barnett, informed SACRE Members that she was trying to arrange for more regular meetings of the Jewish Forum. Mr Mahmood stated that the Darul Uloom School participated in various events when invited, and that he was a regular visitor at school classes and assemblies. It was also noted that some schools in the Borough had been visited by representatives of the Hindu community, and that some primary school children would be visiting a Hindu Temple in the near future.

Teaching and Learning of British Values

The RE Consultant had drafted a report dealing with the Teaching and Learning of British Values in the curriculum and its relationship with Religious Education. This was because the new Ofsted Common Inspection Framework included the teaching of British Values.

The report was broken down into 5 core areas which were:

- Religious Tolerance
- Mutual Respect
- Democracy
- The Rule of Law
- Individual Liberty

The document contained examples of comments that had been made on the teaching of British Values from early inspection reports. The RE Consultant noted that there had been three different frameworks in the last 18 months. Because of this, retraining had been required, and so not many inspections had taken place last term; one day's notice only was required for inspections. The SACRE was informed that the new inspections had arisen out of the "Trojan Horse" affair. It was noted that the inspections applied to both primary and secondary schools. Mr Mahmood expressed the view that "British Values" were a small subset of Islam.

Reverend Varney stated that he was not keen on the concept of "British Values" in its current form as he felt that the agenda was too narrow. He expressed the view that the introduction of the teaching of democratic values had been brought about in an undemocratic manner, and that no qualities were absolutes. He was of the opinion that there were other moral and spiritual values that transcended the idea of "British Values" and that it was

the duty of the SACRE to make this clear. He felt that politicians had little concept of what gave individuals identity, and held communities together.

The Chairman commented that “British Values” was in danger of being muddled with spiritual, moral, social and cultural values. Cllr Sarah Philips felt that the issue was a matter of great significance, and that people were now really giving these matters great consideration. Denise Angell commented that everyone had a responsibility to live their life in a moral fashion, and Jed Stone felt that schools were not giving proper thought to how the subject was being taught. The Chairman expressed concern about the frequency of changes to the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework. Cllr Kevin Brooks disagreed with some of the previous comments, and stated that even if the changes were just headlines, they were important.

Cllr Mary Cooke, referred back to the previous comments made by Rev Varney, and asked what he meant when he had said that the introduction of the teaching of British Values had been undemocratic. Reverend Varney responded by stating that there had been no consultative process with any other bodies, both political and non-political. Cllr Cooke commented that the new framework had been introduced by elected leaders; Reverend Varney responded that he had not elected them.

Reverend Varney maintained his view that the policy of teaching “British Values” in schools had been introduced through a process that was undemocratic. A brief discussion followed, concerning the relationship between the Christian Faith and Democracy. He stated that God was not democratic, and that God was not open to us voting for him. The Bible was not democratic because God was the moral Absolute. Christianity was a Theocracy as opposed to a Democracy.

At this point it was 7.00pm, and the Cllrs serving on the Care Services PDS Committee had to leave—these were Cllrs Mary Cooke, Cllr Robert Evans, and Cllr Kevin Brooks. However, because Cllr Sarah Brooks was present, the meeting was still quorate.

Bromley SACRE Teacher’s Survey

A Teacher Survey had been sent out by Bromley SACRE to try and ascertain the needs of RE Coordinators in Bromley. Out of 95 Maintained and Academy Schools in Bromley, only 16 responded. The results of the survey were tabled at the meeting.

It was noted that 12 schools used the Bromley Syllabus, and that the schools that did not use the Bromley Syllabus were in the main Church Schools. Twelve schools stated that the Bromley Syllabus was easy to adapt, which was good, and similarly, 11 schools stated that they did not have any implementation difficulties which was also good. In the three instances where there were implementation difficulties, 2 instances related to newly qualified teachers, and 1 to a Special School. The RE Consultant was planning to visit these schools to try and assist with implementation.

It was noted that 13 respondents stated that they were not able to access the SACRE website via Fronter. The same number of respondents did not subscribe to a Resource Centre, which would explain why they suffered from a lack of resources. Some teachers and RE Coordinators had no idea what Fronter was, and it was not available in all schools. Members of the SACRE felt that this was a matter for the Council to deal with.

The SACRE saw from the data on the tabled report, that nine schools did not want a visit from SACRE, three were open to a visit, including St John's and Trinity.

Reverend Varney enquired who the survey was sent to. The RE Consultant responded that it had been sent to all Head Teachers to forward to RE Teachers and Re Coordinators. Reverend Varney suggested that a follow up email be sent to Head Teachers in case an RE Coordinator had not responded. There was still time to respond. Mr Mahmood suggested that the SACRE remind schools that their role was a supporting one, and that they were not inspecting schools.

School Visits

A report had been made concerning a visit undertaken by the RE Consultant and Mr Town to the Hayes School in June 2015.

The Sacre Members were informed that previously the RE Department at Hayes was not very well supported. However, this was definitely not the case now, and the situation has turned around. It was concluded that this was now a very good school where religious education was thriving.

Reverend Varney asked how the SACRE could identify failing schools. It was suggested that Julia Waldman (Interim Consultant, Schools and Early Years Commissioning and Quality Assurance) be tasked with identifying failing schools.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) The Members of SACRE consider new ways of getting into schools**
- (2) SACRE to reinforce the message that their role was to support, not inspect**
- (3) Councillors be encouraged to promote the importance of RE in Bromley schools**
- (4) A guide letter be drafted that could be used by the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Education to write to Academies and encourage their engagement with Bromley SACRE**

32 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The revised SACRE DEVELOPMENT PLAN was tabled for the attention of the SACRE Members. The RE Consultant asked Members to go away and consider the document. Mr Mahmood expressed the view that the Councillors that had left for the PDS Committee should be included in the consideration of the document.

RESOLVED that Members of the SACRE consider the revised SACRE Development Plan, and that the Plan be discussed at the next meeting

33 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

The next SACRE meeting is scheduled for 9th March 2016.

The Meeting ended at 7.30 pm

Chairman