

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.30 pm on 30 May 2012

Present:

Martin Sweet (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Anne Manning (Vice Chairman)
Councillors: Reg Adams, Stephen Carr, Roger Charsley,
Kate Lymer and David Jefferys.
Virginia Corbyn and Christopher Town.
Christine Duncan, Arlene Fane and Emma Honey.
Samantha Barnett, Patricia Colling, Saiyed Mahmood,
Swarn Riat and Sue Polydourou

Also Present:

Ms Penny Smith-Orr, RE Adviser
Beverley Johnston, Head of Education Commissioning and
Business Services
Christine Reeks, Clerk to SACRE

31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Chairman welcomed Christine Duncan from Raglan School as a new teacher representative and Councillors Carr, Jefferys and Lymer who had recently been appointed as new Councillors to serve on SACRE. Councillor Carr apologised for having to leave the meeting early due to a longstanding engagement. Councillor Charsley, Mrs Duncan and Beverley Johnston also had to leave the meeting early due to other commitments.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gordon Norrie, Ray Hagley and Reverend Steve Varney. Councillor Stephen Wells the newly appointed Portfolio Holder for Education also submitted his apologies.

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

33 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 FEBRUARY 2012

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 1st February 2012 be confirmed subject to the following amendments:

Members Present: "Swarm Riat" should read "Swarn Riat".

Minute 22: "Canon Reverend Michael Camp" should read "Reverend Canon Michael Camp".

B) MATTERS ARISING:

Minute 26:

With reference to the resolution that the Chairman contact Bob Stewart MP regarding a question in Parliament, it was considered that this course of action should be deferred (see minute 34d below). A standard letter had been prepared to be sent to Members of Parliament asking if they would like to be involved in the All Part Parliamentary Group for Religious Education which had been set up. A letter would be sent to Bob Stewart asking if he would like to be involved, and if he was in agreement this would provide an opportunity for SACRE to make representations to him.

34 ORAL UPDATE AND PUBLICATIONS

a) NASACRE AGM – 23rd May 2012

The Chairman and RE Adviser had attended the NASACRE AGM on 23rd May 2012. The Chairman commented on the keynote address by Professor Robert Jackson who had spoken on "Research and European Policy Making on Religious Education: taking account of young people's views in developing the subject". In addition Sarah Smalley, a member of the RE Council also spoke on the State of Religious Education. (Notes of the AGM are attached to these minutes – Appendix 1.)

b) Youth SACRE

The RE Adviser reported that the Youth SACRE had made a very eloquent presentation at the inter secondary school "Neighbourhood in-Service Training" event on 24th February 2012 at Bullers Wood School.

Emma Honey from Kemnal Technology College remarked that she found it frustrating that schools which were not part of the Bromley Schools Collegiate were unable to participate in such events. The Head of Education Commissioning and Business Services explained that the Collegiate was a formal teacher training partnership of half of the secondary schools in Bromley and suggested that this might be something she could discuss with Emma Honey outside of the meeting.

In response to a further point raised by Emma Honey the RE Adviser confirmed that Youth SACRE events normally took place after school at 4.30pm.

It was noted that there had not been a meeting of the Youth SACRE since the spring term and it was hoped a meeting would be arranged before the end of the summer term. The RE Adviser would contact Fiona Hawkes and Jed Stone (both Members of SACRE) who were involved with the Youth SACRE.

c) Inter-faith Walks -14th and 15th July 2012

This item had been considered at the previous meeting (Minute 29a). The Chairman reported that Dr Peter Boydon had compiled a suggested walk around the Bromley north area which had been submitted for consideration by the South London Inter Faith Group. However, due to limited inter-faith venues in the Bromley area it had been decided that it was not “inter-faith” enough. Patricia Colling said that she had attended a meeting of the South London Inter Faith Group earlier in the month. It had been suggested that Bromley could join the inter-faith walk being organised in the Lewisham and Catford area. However, she reported that plans were now being made for an afternoon/early evening walk on Sunday 15th July 2012, visiting six to eight churches in the Bromley area, using Dr Boydon’s walk as a basis. It was hoped that a visit to the Bromley Reform Synagogue might also be incorporated. As soon as details were finalised Mrs Colling would inform the clerk to SACRE who would notify SACRE Members of the arrangements.

The RE Adviser encouraged SACRE members to join the walk if they were able to do so. The Chairman said that he would write to Dr Boydon to thank him for the work which he had undertaken.

d) All Party Parliamentary Group

An All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Religious Education had been set up and a paper was submitted to SACRE Members for information, (see also Minute 33B – Matters Arising). The APPG would comprise a group of well informed and positively disposed MPs and peers available to be contacted about particular campaigns and issues and would help keep RE on the national government agenda.

(Councillor Carr left the meeting after consideration of this item.)

**35 SACRE MEMBERS' TRAINING
Report No. ED12001**

As a result of the continuing development plan presented at the last meeting and discussions with the Head of Education Commissioning and Business Services on the need to update the Bromley Agreed Syllabus, the SACRE Members training at the meeting was based on the responses to a survey sent to Bromley schools RE co-ordinators and their comments from a meeting held on 18 April 2012 at the EDC.

A presentation on the Bromley Syllabus Review was shown to SACRE Members by the RE Adviser. It was noted that the current syllabus comprised:

Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1:

Core: Christianity. Other religions as appropriate.

Key Stage 2:

Core: Christianity. Also: Judaism, Islam and Hinduism.

Key Stage 3:

Core: Christianity. Main: Sikhism and Buddhism. Subsidiary: Judaism, Islam and Hinduism.

Key Stage 4 and Post 16:

Core: Christianity. Other religions as appropriate.

An analysis of the responses to the survey sent to the Bromley schools RE co-ordinators was discussed.

Matters arising included reference to the RE co-ordinators request for a useful RE website. The internet Managed Learning Environment "Frontier" was currently restricted to schools in the borough who had bought into the system and was therefore not available to all RE Co-ordinators. However, the RE Adviser was making arrangements for the RE Co-ordinators to have access to it. The Head of Education Commissioning and Business Services asked if the relevant information could be accessed via the main Bromley website. The RE Adviser said that she had been told this was not possible. She agreed to discuss this further outside of the meeting with the Head of Education Commissioning and Business Services.

The Chairman suggested that one of the main changes to the new syllabus should be to move away from using 'activity sheets'. Emma Honey commented that she did not have time to be creative, especially with regard to Key Stage 4. The RE Adviser said that this comment related more to primary schools where there was room for more creativity, although she acknowledged the fact that many teachers did not have RE experience. In answer to a question by Councillor Jefferys, the RE Adviser confirmed that in primary schools RE was mainly taught by non-specialist staff, but specialist RE staff were employed in secondary schools. She added that in Bromley there were more RE specialists employed than in a lot of London Boroughs.

Virginia Corbyn advised that the National Framework said too many religions should not be introduced at Key Stage 1, and a lot of research had said that this was confusing. (Further discussion on the syllabus took place under the next agenda item.)

Mr Riat commented on the very positive educational benefit of pupils attending different places of worship and said that they were welcome to attend the Sikh Temples at Woolwich and Gravesend on the last Sunday of the month. The RE Adviser agreed that such visits were a good learning experience but the cost of arranging these would probably be prohibitive for

schools. Mr Riat remarked that if schools could not afford to arrange visits perhaps the children's parents could be encouraged to take them. He added that no invitation was required. The RE Adviser added that there were some very good websites which had virtual visits to different places of worship.

RESOLVED that the presentation and discussion be noted.

(Councillor Charsley left the meeting after consideration of this item.)

**36 TAKING RE FORWARD IN BROMLEY
 Report No. ED12002**

The priority of a SACRE is to monitor Religious Education and Collective Worship in schools and support schools in the provision of excellent RE. The current Bromley Agreed syllabus and the units of work for Primary schools were due for a formal review.

The Chairman commented that the syllabus should be easy to use and workable and added that it needed to be more appropriate for today's society. It was important that by the end of Key Stage 3 children had knowledge of other faiths. There were a lot of resources available which could be accessed through the use of white board technology. (Mr Mahmood later commented on the need to look at the resources available, but expressed caution as there was a huge amount of information about different religions which was incorrect. The RE Adviser agreed and emphasised the importance of only giving internet links to suitable sites.) The Chairman went on to say that that the quality not quantity of religious education was important. Clearly feedback from teachers on what was required for the RE syllabus was essential. The aim of the Agreed Syllabus Conference was to produce an excellent syllabus which could be commended to every school.

Discussion took place on the future syllabus requirements for Bromley schools, particularly the addition of a defined Foundation stage, and the addition of faiths during the Primary stages.

(Christine Duncan left the meeting at this point.)

It was noted that an RE Quality mark was to be introduced nationally which would be, "an accreditation system recognising good practice in religious education. Designed to be a mechanism for whole school improvement beyond religious education since its principle focus is enhanced pedagogy". This mark would only be available to schools which as well as teaching on the six major world faiths, also allowed the teaching of a secular world view. The RE Adviser informed the meeting that a pilot scheme was due to take place and confirmed that the scheme would not be compulsory. She was due to attend a day event about the Quality Mark in October 2012 and would report back to SACRE Members at their next meeting.

(The Head of Education Commissioning and Business Services left the meeting at this point.)

Virginia Corbyn commented on the need to ensure that the requirement of the law with regard to teaching RE was adhered to. The RE Adviser confirmed that when updating the RE syllabus the law would be followed and Christianity would still be taught as the main religion.

The Chairman in concluding the discussions asked the RE Adviser to continue to work with teachers and to progress the work in connection with the Bromley Agreed Syllabus.

RESOLVED that work on the Bromley Agreed Syllabus be progressed

37 SCHOOL VISITS
Report No. ED12003

The RE Adviser, Councillor Adams and Councillor Mrs Manning had visited Balgowan Primary School on 6th February 2012, and a report of the visit was considered by members. Councillor Adams said that they had been made very welcome by the school and commented on the worthwhile visit which had taken place.

It had been decided at the previous SACRE meeting that the RE Consultant would not undertake any visits during the next two terms and that other members would carry out school visits. The Chairman advised that he had been in contact with Christopher Town and Rev Steve Varney regarding possible visits. Emma Honey extended an open invitation to Kemnal Technology College if they wished to visit a secondary school. The Chairman remarked that all Members of SACRE were welcome to attend school visits and when arrangements had been made the dates would be circulated to them.

Arlene Fane invited Members to attend St George's CE Primary School, Bickley, at 1.30pm on Friday 1st June 2012, when an event would be held to celebrate the end of their RE week.

RESOLVED that the report of the school visit be noted.

38 BROMLEY SACRE SELF-EVALUATION
Report No. ED12004

Self-evaluation of the work of SACRE was carried out on an annual basis. The results were linked to the development plan so that the work of SACRE could be as effective as possible. The SACRE self-evaluation tool had been circulated to Members and it was noted that the Chairman had asked the RE Adviser to look at the progress which had been made towards being an advanced SACRE.

The RE Adviser reported that the sections on the Agreed Syllabus would be addressed during the year.

It was very difficult for SACRE to monitor what happened in schools, particularly in regard to Collective Worship; however the school visits made by SACRE Members address this to some extent. The continuation of the Primary network meetings also ensured that some monitoring information was available. The Chairman commented that if Members were linked to schools through Governor involvement, this might be a way to find out what was taking place with RE in their schools and to feed information back to SACRE. Councillor Mrs Manning remarked that there were a lot of school governors who were appointed by the Local Authority who might be able to help in this regard.

The RE Adviser further commented that there was still not enough of a link between SACRE and the initiatives undertaken by the Local Authority. The Chairman added that SACRE was a Committee which could be of use to the Council.

RESOLVED that the documentation and comments on self-evaluation be noted.

39 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

40 DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 7th November 2012
Wednesday 6th March 2013
Wednesday 5th June 2013

All meetings to start at 6.30pm

The meeting ended at 8.30pm

Chairman

APPENDIX 1

Annual General Meeting of NASACRE - Wednesday 23rd May 2012

Key note address

Research and European Policy Making on Religious Education: taking account of young people's views in developing the subject

Prof Robert Jackson. Prof of RE at Warwick University

Professor Jackson started by making the statement that SACREs are the backbone of RE in England and Wales and, as an expression of local democracy that is unique in Europe, need to be safeguarded.

He asked the question: why should religious education be included in the curriculum of state funded schools?

In seeking to answer this question, Professor Jackson suggested that the first problem was to clarify the terminology of RE. In various countries, including England and Wales, it is known as religious education, but in USA it is called religion education. The UN calls it 'education and teaching about religion and beliefs'. In other places it is referred to as ethics and religious cultures (Quebec) and in Scotland it is called 'religions and moral education'.

Professor Jackson suggested that the ambiguity about terminology, especially of these and other words such as 'spirituality', 'beliefs' and 'confessional', created a hurdle to identifying the role of RE. Because these expressions mean different things to different groups it is therefore harder to come to some form of consensus.

So in order to answer the question, we need to be clear of both the terminology we use and what this means for us as a local SACRE. There are a number of intrinsic reasons why RE should be taught in state funded schools and that a broad/liberal education should cover all distinctive realms of meaning. In other words, by using terminology and ideas that most can accept as educational, it avoids the implication that RE is confessional. By way of example, he suggested that we need to be clear that there is a great significance between the words 'secular' and 'secularist', since the first is inclusive and the second relatively divisive.

He stated that there is an instrumental reason why some understanding of religions is needed if pupils are to gain knowledge of the culture that surrounds them. Thus RE promotes social development and citizenship, it increases tolerance and freedom. There was some discussion afterwards (of course!) about the term tolerance. In response to one question from one delegate, Professor Jackson conceded that 'accommodation', 'respect' and 'integration' are better than tolerance. RE promotes both religious freedom and enhances the personal faith development of many pupils since it affirms their beliefs and rarely, if ever, does it undermine. In his opinion, good RE will endorse and challenge pupils and is character forming.

Professor Jackson built on this by suggesting that, just as the local SACRE is a good expression of local democracy in action, so too RE creates a democratic principle in the school. The classroom needs to become a 'safe-place' for dialogue and that it can be, surprisingly, a better place for dialogue than within a peer group or even within the pupil's family. His research team (REDCo research into reaction of 14-16's to RE in school) discovered that most students want a peaceful co-existence, based on knowing about each others views, where there are common, shared interests. In other words, students like doing things together!

He went on to say that their research found that students with strong religious convictions did not feel threatened by dialogue. Some students from minority groups (depending upon area) at times did feel vulnerable, which may be due to poor teaching styles, especially when pupils are uncomfortable 'representing' their own faith group.

He is especially keen on the notion of 'direct contact with difference' and felt that SACREs should encourage the creation of space and opportunity for dialogue and discovery within their schools. Research has shown that RE helps develop positive attitudes towards others, and that knowledge of others helps pupils develop awareness in the development of their own faith background. A searching question at the end asked how we can face issues of conflict and prejudice that seems to dominate some young people's thinking. Professor Jackson felt that RE can address appropriate and non-appropriate behaviour towards those who are different and suggested that an important step is for RE teachers to establish procedural rules for their classroom discussions.

Interestingly, one delegate asked about how to deal with parents and groups of "strong, charismatic ... etc etc Christians". (Perhaps NASACRE needs to also "establish procedural rules" since some were concerned by this questioner's intolerance!) Another delegate added that maybe what we need to do is think about how we teach parents what RE is all about. (Or even some NASACRE delegates)

Professor Jackson felt that good RE must start where the pupils are at. So therefore RE must support pupils from minority faith backgrounds. Equally, children from non-religious groups should not feel exposed. Indeed, good RE should expose pupils to the danger of stereotypes, especially when some faith groups have great diversity and plurality within them. Nowhere is this more important than in equipping pupils to counter the stereo types that are generated in the media. There is great value in 'direct contact with difference' and he added that there needs to be more research into the study of non-religious models within RE.

He concluded with three challenging questions for local SACREs to ponder:

- What is the level of competence of our teachers to deal with these issues?
- Are SACREs encouraging schools to be 'safe spaces' for dialogue?
- Do SACREs have any student feedback mechanisms?

Perhaps the most challenging thought with regard to the topic under consideration (of future of RE and the theme of taking account of young people's views in developing RE) was one of Professor Jackson's final comments when asked the question 'what is the autonomy the child'? In other words, is RE should be 'outward looking'? It should not be for teachers, educational thinkers or even SACREs .but for the pupils in our schools.

Maybe we need to listen more to what they think!

The treasurer reported that since most SACREs were struggling with less support, it as not surprising that there had been a drop in the number of delegates nor of the number of SACREs affiliating to NASACRE.

The published secretary and chair's report are available if required.

The State of RE Sarah Smalley

John Keast was not available to address the conference, but Sarah Smalley, also a member of the RE Council was on hand to fill in. Her opening comment summed it all up. RE in 2011 was in a poor state of health and she suggested that most SACREs were struggling with less input.

The REC does not yet have any idea of the impact of the EBacc neither on secondary schools nor of the changes implicit in the relationship between SACREs and academies. Whilst nationally half of all secondary schools are now academies, there is no certainly as to how this will impact any RE syllabus re-write. But 1/3 of all secondary schools have changed their curriculum because of the EBacc and that this must have an impact on RE provision. Alan Brine (senior HMI for RE) suggested that despite the fact we do yet know what will be impact of RE not being included in the EBacc, RE is not in 'wholesale melt down'. Some schools were dropping the short course in favour of an RE long course – and even this seemed unsatisfactory to the HMI, although he did not explain why. He added that they do not know the impact of the removal of short course RE from schools performance records. It seems that the short course is still widely accepted that short course RE is valuable regardless of this change maybe because OFSTED are not using EBacc statistics?

Sarah added that another problem was that 19 out of 34 post graduate teacher training institutions had lost student numbers in RE, resulting is closing or shrinking RE departments. Similarly, whilst AREAC had seen a marked drop in membership, the development of an RE 'quality mark' was proving useful.

Another positive development was the formation of an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for RE. (see notes from Bromley SACRE meeting notes 30 May 2012 agenda item 4d). She also suggested that when the National Curriculum review becomes available, any local agreed RE syllabus may become dated very quickly.

Finally, there is an OFSTED report on RE due to be published this autumn.

Martin Sweet/Penny Smith-Orr