

Minutes of the SACRE meeting held on Tuesday 3rd November 2020 (6.00-7.15pm)
Held remotely because of Covid-19 restrictions

Present Group A – Christian, Other Faiths & Beliefs

Mike Freedman (MF) – Judaism (from 6.30pm)
Geetha Maheshwaran (GM) - Hinduism

Group B – Church of England (SDBE)

Rachael Norman (RN)
Jane Savill (JS)

Group C – Teacher Associations

Debra Beale (DB) - NEU

Group D – Local Authority

Cllr Mike Brunt (MB)
Cllr Laxmi Attawar (LA)

LA Adviser

Keith Shipman (KS) – Merton Education Inclusion Manager

Others

Elizabeth Nassé (EN) Clerk

MERTON STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

ITEM	ACTION
1 <u>Protocol for holding the meeting remotely</u> All agreed that because of ongoing Covid-19 restrictions the meeting should be held remotely. The meeting was held with video, using Microsoft Teams.	
2 <u>Apologies for absence</u> Apologies for absence were received from: Audrey King (AK) Andrew Williams (AW) Action: EN to contact members unable to attend to see if online access was problematic and identify possible alternative arrangements.	EN
3 <u>Welcome and introductions</u> MB welcomed members and everyone introduced themselves. The meeting was quorate.	
4 <u>SACRE membership admin</u> EN reported that the Archdiocese of Southwark was trying to identify a Catholic representative, but no further contact had been received since early October. KS reported that, despite several requests at Primary and Secondary Heads meetings, no nominations for union representatives had been received; this is likely to be because of the challenging conditions. MB suggested that SACRE should routinely allow remote attendance at all meetings to make it easier for representatives to join. KS reported that the local press ('My Merton') were still interested in promoting SACRE. Ongoing actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KS to follow up on promoting SACRE in the local press, when appropriate. • MB/EN to follow up on the potential Buddhist rep and follow up with the Archdiocese. • KS to continue to ask for union reps at Primary and Secondary Heads meetings, when appropriate. 	KS MB/EN KS
5 <u>Minutes of previous SACRE meeting – 7th July 2020</u> The minutes of the meeting held on 7.7.20 were approved, subject to correction of the date in Item 6 (9.7.20 should read 9.7.19). The minutes will be amended and signed electronically.	
6 <u>Matters arising from the meeting 7.7.20 not completed or covered elsewhere</u> None.	

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Update on schools/education – lockdown, RE, collective worship.

ACTION

KS reported:

- Merton schools fully reopened in September; the level of attendance has been pleasing and better than expected. The LA was inspected in October and inspectors were impressed with attendance levels.
- Merton has had positive Covid-19 cases amongst staff and pupils and many others needing to self-isolate for various reasons. There have been more cases in secondary schools than in primary schools. The situation has been very challenging for a couple of schools and one primary had to close (St Thomas of Canterbury).
- Schools no longer receive routine guidance from the London Covid Recovery Cell (LCRC), nor the DfE helpline (established in September), as the services didn't have capacity to respond. Guidance and tailored advice are now being providing by local public health bodies and all schools have individual Covid-19 risk assessments. The LCRC will be referred to if there is a significant outbreak in a school; at present most cases are limited to individuals.
- Restrictions are having an impact on the delivery of the curriculum. In primary schools RE is being taught by class teachers, as children need to remain in bubbles. There is less opportunity to receive external RE input but in general the delivery of the curriculum is satisfactory.
- Ongoing Covid-19 restrictions may have an impact on 2021 GCSEs and A' Levels; schools may soon be able to buy into mock exams provided by exam boards, but the practicalities and implications of this are not yet fully understood.
- Whole school assemblies are not taking place, but schools are finding ways of practising collective worship in groups.
- The DfE's recovery curriculum (based on materials by Anna Freud) focuses on social, emotional and mental health, wellbeing and PSHE. Thirty-six Merton schools took part in the first day of training; feedback indicated that the theory was good but more practical examples would have been useful. The training identified that the recovery curriculum needs to provide more support for staff.

MB asked whether schools were complying with the law around collective worship.

JS explained that Sherwood school were streaming assemblies (not necessarily daily collective worship) into classrooms via Zoom; these have been well received and pupils have engaged well with them.

RN added that she also knew of schools that were providing live or recorded assemblies. Different formats are being used, but assemblies and collective worship are still taking place.

GM added that the Temple was developing online resources, had live-streamed during lockdown and were providing live Q&A sessions for schools and universities. GM suggested that schools could share recorded sessions on collective worship.

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ACTION

MF explained that the synagogue was also developing similar recorded and live-streamed resources.

- During the second national lockdown (for four weeks from 5th November) schools will remain open; no additional guidance has been received from the DfE, so schools will continue operating as they are.
- External professionals can visit schools e.g. Speech and Language therapists; all essential visits are still taking place.

MB asked about the impact on governance.

KS explained that governance meetings were taking place virtually; there had been some positive impact e.g. on attendance and quoracy, however insight into day to day running of schools may have reduced.

RN commented that when her school's governing board needs verification of what is happening in school, they request additional documents or online meetings with members of the SLT.

- Some pupils (with good access to IT at home) had made better progress during lockdown than when they had been in school. CAMHS had reported that self-harm had reduced during lockdown as the pressures of attending school had reduced.
- Gaps in attainment and progress had widened for pupils who were unable to access learning at home.

DB commented that the mental health of some pupils had improved but there were other groups of pupils e.g. those with SEND or limited access to IT whose progress had declined during lockdown. JS added that although most families may have some access to IT, many cannot use it effectively at home; the situation would also differ for primary and secondary age groups.

MB asked how schools could be better prepared for future interruptions, given that some schools' provision was much better than others and if there was anything SACRE could do to support schools/RE leads.

KS replied that schools had learned a significant amount about online learning and were now in a better position to offer a mix of online and in-school teaching; especially for mainstream secondary pupils. KS explained that the LA was still running sessions for RE coordinators and had asked RE leads for suggestions about areas of focus.

Actions:

- **GM/MF to send links to online resources to KS, for forwarding to schools.**
- **KS to contact Islamic faith groups to see if they have similar online resources and forward links to schools.**
- **Look at other SACREs/NASACRE to see if there are further resources to be shared.**
- **KS to liaise with RE coordinators (through Ewan Morrison) about lessons learned from the first lockdown on assemblies, collective worship, wellbeing and BLM.**

GM/MF
/KS

KS

All

KS

ITEM	ACTION
<p>8 <u>Black Lives Matter and RE - planning a review of the syllabus which considers the impact of BLM and Covid-19.</u></p> <p>KS explained that schools were each reviewing their curriculum, their systems and the experiences of pupils and their families. Merton has also established a diversity forum across the borough. The forum (of Heads, governors and teachers) had met twice and had looked firstly at headline issues, then in more detail at equality data.</p> <p>Action: KS to share equality data with SACRE members.</p> <p>KS highlighted trends. For example: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black boys start with high attainment in the foundation stage, but progress declines thereafter. • Black boys are less likely to be NEET (not in education, employment or training). • Asian pupils start with lower attainment, then make accelerated progress once language is less of a barrier. • Black boys are more likely to be excluded. This is less so in Merton than in other boroughs and is below National Average. • Black Caribbean boys in particular are failing in Merton. <p>KS stressed that the number of pupils in these groups were very low in Merton schools.</p> <p>KS reminded members that the Merton SACRE agreed syllabus had been developed to represent a range of faiths and beliefs but noted that some areas of the syllabus may be silent on the issue of ethnicity/diversity within different faiths.</p> <p>Members discussed how the BLM review of the syllabus should take place and identified the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether SACRE had encouraged representation from the borough's Black church groups. • Decolonising the curriculum; RN offered to share information and there are free online resources that could be shared with schools. • RE teachers are aware of diversity within faiths, but the quality of resources on diversity is variable. • The review of the agreed syllabus should be undertaken by specialists, rather than SACRE itself. • SACRE should check whether there had been any national comment or guidance from NASACRE on BLM. 	<p>KS</p>

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	<p>KS explained that volunteer teachers had previously reviewed the syllabus, so it may be possible to do this again, with a focus on BLM. The timescale for such input would depend on capacity; it may be realistic to aim for revision in September 2021.</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review diversity of Merton SACRE membership • KS to contact RE leads to invite interest in carrying out an external review of the syllabus and identify any issues with it. • Update the syllabus or produce a supplementary document which addresses any issues identified by the review. 	<p></p> <p>All</p> <p>KS</p> <p>All</p>
9	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>KS reported that another London SACRE had asked for advice on how Merton had managed the representation of different denominations within Islam. KS had advised that Merton had included separate statements for each group within the syllabus. The syllabus was not intended to reflect particular groups, but the principles of Islam.</p> <p>MB/KS reported that NASACRE would be making a Freedom of Information Request to all local authorities about the funding of SACREs and whether LAs are meeting statutory duties.</p> <p>The questions will include: the level of funding each LA makes towards SACRE; how much is from central services and how much is from schools; syllabus costs and when it was last reviewed; costs of SACRE admin, business and training.</p> <p>KS noted that in Merton the funding from Democratic Services is nil; SACRE is funded from the Education service.</p> <p>Items for the next meeting agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RE teachers' feedback on syllabus review (see item 8). • Faith group input (online materials from GM and MF first week of January (see item 7). • Election of Chair (following Council elections in November). 	
10	<p><u>Proposed date of next meetings: -</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6pm, Tuesday 9th February 2021 (online) • Tuesday 6th July 2021 	

Chair of Merton SACRE..... *Amber Williams*

date..... *7/10/21*