

MERTON STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Minutes of the SACRE meeting held at 5.00pm on Tuesday 22 November 2022

At the Buddhapadipa Temple, 14 Calonne Rd, London SW19 5HJ

Present:

Group A	Christian, Other Faiths and Beliefs	
Ms Kamontip Evans	Buddhism	KE
Mr John Carter	Humanism	JC
Group B	Church of England SDBE	
Mrs Jane Savill		JS
The Revd. Andrew Williams		AW
Group C	Teacher Associations	
Ro Maybury	National Association of Head Teachers	RM
Debra Beale	National Union of Teachers	DB
Group D	Local Authority	
Cllr Mike Brunt	Councillor	MB
Cllr Klaar Dresselaers	Councillor	KD
Cllr Laxmi Attawar	Councillor	LA
In attendance		
Keith Shipman	LA Adviser; Education Inclusion Head of Service, Merton	KS

The meeting was quorate, as members from each faith group and sector were present.

The following papers were circulated prior to the meeting:

Item 4 – Minutes of SACRE meeting on 05.07.22

Item 8 – Teaching hours for RE in Merton schools, 2021 (NASACRE census)

Item 12 – NASACRE administration

(1) Virtual training 2022-23

(2) RE Hubs – training

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1. **Buddhapadipa Temple Presentation**

Kamontip Evans very kindly gave the SACRE members a guided tour of the Buddhist Temple. This was particularly accommodating as the Most Ven. Amarathera, Abbott of the Temple, had sadly died the previous week, and the community was busy with a week of funeral services. Everyone thanked Kamontip: even those who had previously visited the Temple found her explanation of the murals showing the life of the Buddha, and the great shrine with its four Buddhas, very moving.

2. **Welcome and apologies for absence**

Chair MB welcomed everyone to the meeting: the SACRE members all wished him many happy returns, as it was his birthday.

There were apologies from Rachael Norman, which were accepted. Waleed Ahmad, Salim Sheikh and Clare Bennett were absent. As this was a well-attended meeting and the first since July, the SACRE members introduced themselves.

The Committee welcomed observer Dimos Kechagias, Acting Head of Religious Studies from Ricards Lodge High School. DK was interested in becoming a member of SACRE, and might be co-opted if the members agree. Anne Judge, accompanying JC, was also welcomed as an observer.

ACTION

3. **SACRE Committee administration**

There were no administration matters.

4. **Approval of Minutes of the previous SACRE meeting, 05.07.22**

The Minutes were not comprehensive, as the Clerk had been unavailable due to illness, and the recording intended for the minute-taker had not worked. The Minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record, as far as was possible. KS told the members that the presentation made by Rutlish School at the beginning of the July meeting had been very thorough and interesting. MB said he thought that varying the meeting location had been a big benefit.

5. **Actions from the meeting on 05.07.22**

There had been three Actions, regarding further work on syllabus review, Interfaith dialogue and Worldviews. All were items on the Agenda.

6. **Matters Arising from the meeting on 05.07.22**

There were no matters arising.

7. **Interfaith dialogue project – progress**

Year 6 project

KS and AS had begun the Interfaith Dialogue project with 6th formers, but after only three sessions, the project had been interrupted by Covid. The July SACRE meeting had discussed the possibility of operating the same project with Year 6 pupils at Abbotsbury. RM explained that this worked differently at primary school level. The school had created positions for ambassadors who would share knowledge about their culture, heritage, country and traditions, and had invited applications from Y6 children, with a written account of why they would like to do this. The school had chosen 12 ambassadors, who would take control of events and who had written a document stating their aims (attached). These included learning about the cultures, heritage and religious beliefs of others, to ensure all felt welcomed, valued and represented at the school. The ambassadors concluded that it was their job to make sure this happened.

RM said that the group met every Friday and that one recent area of focus had been putting all the less well-known festivals the children normally celebrated at home, but not at school, on the main school calendar. Other ideas included a Cultural day, a Food day and themed faith assemblies. The children also wanted to visit Mosques, Hindu temples

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and Greek Orthodox and Catholic churches. RM said the school would be holding an Ahmadiyya Islam assembly that Friday, as the school is close to the mosque. This would be followed by a Hindu assembly.

KS said he had visited on one Friday. He had felt the project was very much led by the children, who had been clear about how important it was that all the local cultures were represented at assembly, which would then would make everyone feel valued at school and make it a whole school, which he had thought was an interesting concept. The children talked as though they felt their cultural and religious identity were all one.

RM said the design of the project had been inspired by the discussion with the girls from Ricards Lodge, who had made a clear presentation about personal identity and representation at school.

The SACRE members discussed the initiative.

Q – Would this model work at any school, or is this something to do with the richness and diversity at Abbotsbury in particular?

A – I think the principle could work anywhere: next year, the Y6 children will change but we are very diverse, proud and accommodating with one another.

Q – Because you have approached this from a cultural perspective, you can talk about the range of diversity within faiths, which is very good.

Q – I think this could be extended to other primary schools: we have great diversity among the schools from Merton and Surrey visiting our temple, including lots of Muslim children.

Q – We should think of a way of celebrating this before the end of the year so the children have a message to take with them to secondary school when they go.

A – It is something we could do. At our last assembly, we said, if you don't feel represented, come and talk to these children. One boy came to say that he didn't feel represented and that the ambassadors should do an assembly about England. He and one of the ambassadors will now organise an event, and both were very excited about it.

Q – Could you create a film of some of these events and discussions?

KS said that SACRE could do this at the Black Lives Matter forum, which was run by the Local Authority for all the schools in the borough, and was attended by a mixture of teachers, support staff and Governors. He would investigate the technical possibilities.

ACTION

6th form project

KS said the first Interfaith Dialogue meeting of 6th form students had taken place the previous week. Nineteen 6th form students from Ricards Lodge, Rutlish, Raynes Park, Wimbledon College, Ursuline and St Mark's had attended.

The meeting had discussed the participants' understanding of the process and the point of the exercise. The students formed three groups and developed their own set of rules for their conversations about faith, based on the Iona Community's Rules for Conversations, titled Our Ways of Working (p31 of the Community's introductory pdf, Transforming Lives to Change The World, attached). These cover respectful listening, respectful talking, respectful tone, respectful sharing and respectful air space, ensuring everyone has a chance to speak.

Each group had discussed a particular theme, set by AW. At the end of the series they would feed back about the conversations they had had.

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KS said this had been a very diverse group including Catholic, Christian and Muslim students. He said that the next meeting in the series would be held on 29 November at Mitcham Parish Church. Fr David had said he would introduce the evening with a speech on his own background in faith and belief, the theme the student groups would then go on to discuss. KS said that February's meeting would take place at the Ahmadiyya mosque, the 21 March meeting at the Hindu Temple, where the students could meet the SACRE members prior to the SACRE meeting, and the May meeting at Wimbledon synagogue. The venue for the final session involving students and SACRE members on 4 July was still to be agreed. **ACTION**

DK had been there and said he had found the students very diverse and fantastically engaged: they had really appreciated the chance to connect and had enthusiastically asked DK when the next meeting was.

MB said that the project was the result of the seed sown by AW at SACRE two years before. He said that it was brilliant to see it finally coming to fruition after two years of lockdowns. He suggested that the SACRE members might also wish to meet some of the pupils from Abbotsbury during the summer term. **ACTION**

8. **RE teaching hours in Merton**

The report was agreed. The members noted that its content was limited due to the pandemic.

KS said the DfE had produced the data on RE teaching hours per fortnight via the Merton schools' SIMS systems, but if a school did not use SIMS, no data could be entered. KS said that in addition to SACRE looking at and evaluating the quality of RE being taught in local schools, the data offered it another way of monitoring how RE was being taught.

KS also said Harris Morden had a new head of RE and was now teaching GCSE once again. Harris Merton was giving more hours to RE than Harris Wimbledon and Harris Morden. At Harris Wimbledon there had been no Year 11 at the time of the survey.

Q – Could we ask Raynes Park and Ursuline what their teaching hours are? If we can find out the missing hours we could add this as a table to the Annual Report.

KS said he would check the hours taught at Raynes Park and Ursuline. He said it was reassuring that RE was being taught in every school, and that it had not become PHSE, as it had in some schools. **ACTION**

MB asked if there was any reason why Harris Wimbledon and Harris Merton were not using the SACRE syllabus, while Harris Morden was?

KS said he could not say that they were not, but that he would ask once more. He said St Mark's used its own Church of England syllabus but also used the SACRE syllabus.

Q – Does SACRE have any power of oversight over academies, so we can see they are following their educational obligations, even if they are not following our syllabus? Constitutionally, do we have any supervisory role?

KS said he did not know definitively, but he thought SACRE had a general role, in the sense that academies should co-operate with the LA in fulfilling their educational duties, though SACRE could not insist that an academy follow its syllabus. He said that at the 2022 NASACRE conference there had been some debate on what the role of SACREs would be if all schools became academies.

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MB said that the fact that at least one academy was opting to use the live SACRE syllabus was a positive indication that this was something schools wanted to be included in. He said SACRE should definitely compile something for the Annual Report which covers all Merton secondary schools. **ACTION**

9. Schools update

KS said that SACRE had held another RE Co-ordinators' training session, organised by School Improvement Inspector Ewan Morrison. The focus had been on the teaching of Buddhism in primary schools, and on how well supported the Co-ordinators felt in their roles. Fourteen schools had attended and feedback on the session had been good.

During planning for the following session, MF had suggested inviting Anna Silver, Education Officer at the Board of Deputies of British Jews, to run a session on education on Judaism for the RE Co-ordinators. The Department has also started to offer teacher inset sessions on Judaism for primary and secondary school teachers. MF said that issues around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Judaism varied in how they affected different communities. However, anti-Semitism was big issue, so this initiative was part of a push to do something about the situation. MF said that someone from the Board of Deputies would also be available to talk to SACRE.

KS said that EM could organise a training meeting for teachers, and that it would also be useful to invite school Equality, Diversity and Inclusion leads jointly with the RE leads, as the session could be about EDI as it applies to Judaism. He said that it would also be useful to think about the link between EDI and teaching RE more broadly.

MB asked SACRE members if they would like a similar presentation about the issues and suggested this could take place in summer term, with the presentation the main item on the Agenda. This was agreed. **ACTION**

MF said he would check if it might be possible to book the Synagogue for the summer meeting. MB said that it would be good to meet the new Rabbi, Adrian Schell, who had arrived during Covid. MF confirmed that Rabbi Schell was very interested in interfaith issues. **ACTION**

KS said that at the training meeting, there had also been an item on sharing practice. Sherwood School had shared its Interfaith Week plan (attached). KS had been struck by the way in which each day of the week had featured a different topic, and that even the catering staff had been involved. One topic had been for the children to research famous or influential people from different backgrounds and faiths, including a Hindu astronaut and a Nigerian Buddhist actor. The Schedule for the week would be circulated with the Minutes.

10. Interfaith week (13-20 November 2022)

This had been discussed in Item 9, above.

11. Moving forward with the syllabus – Worldviews syllabus model

KS said that SACRE members had begun to discuss this towards the end of the meeting at Rutlish school in July.

JC said he thought SACRE was at a crossroads in term of structure. He thought the Merton syllabus as it stood was not representative of the population of the local area, compared to syllabuses from Hounslow, Harrow and Richmond, in which humanism had been embedded for many years.

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JC said that the NASACRE Still Standing report had recommended changes not just to the content of syllabuses but to the role of SACREs, giving these some statutory powers. However, the signals from the Government in this regard were contradictory. He said that the Merton syllabus was now five years old. JC had made it clear what he thought the issues were in terms of wording, but SACRE now had five years' knowledge and experience and should have no trouble finding ways of changing the standard wording to reflect the situation in Merton.

KS said various elements of the syllabus needed to be renewed and refreshed as it was out of date. However, SACRE's role would depend on that of the Local Authority. He said the recent direction of travel nationwide was that LAs would no longer be involved in education, though this was not Merton's approach.

Following the pandemic, the UK Government had realised it needed LAs to be linked to schools to deliver some things, including oversight of the most vulnerable, SEND and possibly a role in some form of governance over academies. It was still not clear what the outcome would be, nor what would be the role of SACREs, though there had been various reports in favour of strengthening this. KS said that during the past 40 years, every time a national British model RE syllabus had been proposed, a local syllabus had been thought to work better.

KS said that the Worldviews model syllabus currently being proposed differed from the Ofsted version. This emphasised academic rigour, which it expected would result in an improvement in RE.

From the NASACRE conference, KS understood that some areas were trying out a Worldviews syllabus with NASACRE's support – no one had actually implemented a Worldviews syllabus yet. KS said a Worldviews syllabus allowed for more variety of view, encompassing all faiths and none. It enabled discussion about personal beliefs, be they political, scientific or spiritual. This allowed for a greater diversity, which was why this model appealed to many. However, it left questions regarding content unanswered.

The SACRE members discussed the issue of syllabus review.

Q – From the aspect of different perspectives, a Worldviews syllabus might be extremely rich, but how practical is it to do this through from Early Years to 6th form? The Ofsted view strikes me as more practical, whereas the Worldviews option strikes me as a huge move. Additionally, if we were to change our syllabus to fit a model like that, the amount of work involved would be enormous.

Q – It does seem that a wholesale review of the syllabus at this point would be labour intensive against a background of uncertainty.

Q – As it is ten years since SACRE had originated the syllabus, and in that time the way it thought about RE had changed, this could be a big task.

Q – Perhaps we could develop something that could supplement the existing syllabus? We could look at the resources we provide to teachers to stimulate an investigatory type of approach.

KS said that two things were emerging from the evening's meeting: from the introductory item it seemed that the syllabus section on Buddhism might need updating, and that there was insufficient representation of Humanism and other non-faith views in the syllabus. He said that a distinction had also emerged between primary and secondary, and that while many primary teachers found having a syllabus a comfort, many

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secondary schools had well-staffed, specialist RE departments that showed real skill and confidence in teaching the subject.

MB said that SACRE might also need to examine how schools used the current syllabus before revising it, as this information would inform an overall review.

Q – It is worth remembering that the Merton syllabus also incorporates a program of study. A syllabus doesn't necessarily have to be a program of study, so we could have a much shorter document that lays out the principles. However, that would leave the people who do the teaching to do the work of developing their program of study. Also, the current syllabus is partly specific faith-based and partly thematic, as well as being mixed up across terms and Key Stages, so would be difficult to unpick.

Q – It does seem that if we want to review the syllabus we need to find out if it is working at all. Is there something it doesn't do that the schools want, due to the change of focus since the development of the current syllabus? Do schools need a different approach?

MB said that if Merton reviewed the RE syllabus as it stood, or started from the bottom up without understanding how it was used in schools, it might be redrafting something that was never used anyway. As the meeting had heard, a program of study was important for primary schools.

KS said that Muslim member Saleem Sheikh had also favoured the incorporation of a program of study, as a guarantee that faith leaders could have confidence that the language and information used was checked, correct and authoritative, and as a counter to concerns that schools might otherwise be using poor-quality resources.

DK and DB said they would be happy to share their schemes of work and curriculum materials. DK said there were interesting things happening across Merton secondary schools and it would be valuable to share these.

The members agreed to ask secondary schools for schemes of work.

ACTION

KS said that if SACRE were to revise the syllabus, someone would have to lead the process. In the previous revision process, units had been created and each faith group had looked at and reviewed its own units. These had been restructured and additional material written and put in. Final review and agreement had been done at a conference. KS said that for the previous review, SACRE had gone to primary RE leads to ask what was and was not useful in the syllabus. It had then carried out a short written Q&A survey of Primary school teachers and Head Teachers. KS said that unless the questions were carefully constructed, this method might not give SACRE the answers it sought to the questions about humanism and Worldviews. He said SACRE needed to be clear and accurate on what questions it wanted to ask, so it received the right information.

The SACRE members agreed that it would be best to form a working group to formulate questions for the survey. DK, JC and RM volunteered to join KS in the group. **ACTION** As the members thought an element of contact with RE leads would be helpful to introduce the survey and explain why it was being done, they agreed to attend meetings of primary school subject leads at the Merton school clusters. **ACTION** Secondary RE leads could be invited to training sessions for the same purpose.

ACTION

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One-to-one visits to schools to explain the survey could also be undertaken by SACRE members: KS would introduce this and allocate a school to a SACRE member, who would then visit. This was agreed. **ACTION**

KS said SACRE members would not have time to go to all 54 schools in Merton, but that this was more about getting into a dialogue, finding out how diverse the student population was, whether the syllabus helped and met the needs of all of students, and if it helped with issues of culture and diversity in school.

MB said that in this case there would be two tiers of questions for the working group to develop: lead questions for the questionnaire and prompt questions for the dialogues with schools.

The members agreed that the first meeting should take place via Zoom relatively quickly. Members could then visit schools before March and SACRE could discuss its findings at the 21 March meeting. This was agreed. **ACTION**

12. **NASACRE Admin**

- 1. Training schedule –This had been circulated.
- 2. RE Hubs – the members agreed that there was no need to action at present.

13. **Any Other Business**

KS said that Muslim member Saleem Sheikh had been unwell, but would be returning to SACRE in future.

MB thanked everyone for attending and for their contributions, which had helped to develop a substantive part of the Agenda for the spring meeting.

14. **Dates and venues for 2023 SACRE meetings**

- 21 March 2023, 4.15pm at the Shree Ghanapathy Temple to meet 6th form Students.
- 6pm SACRE meeting
- 27 June 2023, Wimbledon Synagogue (venue TBC) 5pm

Approved..... Date.....

XXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX – Chair

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Summary of Actions from the Merton SACRE meeting on 22 November 2022

Action	ref	description	by	date
1	2	Co-opt DK to SACRE if members agree.	All members	21 March
2	3	Investigate technical possibilities of filming Abbotsbury Cultural Ambassadors at a Merton BLM forum.	KS	ASAP
3	4	Meet 6 th form Interfaith Project students prior to the 21 March SACRE meeting.	All members	21 March
4	4.2	Meet Year 6 Abbotsbury Cultural Ambassadors during summer term.	All members	TBC
5	4.3	Check RE hours taught at Ursuline and Raynes Park schools.	KS	ASAP
6	5	Compile item on RE hours taught in Merton schools for SACRE Annual Report.	TBC	TBC
7	5.2	Hear presentation by Board of Deputies Education representative at 27 June SACRE meeting: make this the main Agenda item.	All members	27 June
8	5.3	Investigate booking Wimbledon Synagogue for 27 June SACRE meeting.	MF	21 March
9	7	Ask Merton secondary schools for schemes of RE work.	KS/DK	ASAP
10	7.2	Join KS in a working group to formulate questionnaire and prompt questions for syllabus review survey.	DK, JS, RM	ASAP
11a	7.3	Attend meetings of primary school RE subject heads and Merton clusters to promote RE syllabus survey.	Members TBC	By 21 March
11b	7.4	Invite secondary teachers to training sessions to promote RE syllabus survey.	KS	By 21 March
11c	8	Visit schools on a one-to-one basis to promote RE syllabus survey.	Members TBC	By 21 March
12	8.2	Meet via Zoom to decide syllabus survey questionnaire and dialogue prompt questions.	Working Party	ASAP

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Appendix A - Merton SACRE members as at 22 November 2022

Gro up	Name	Initi als	Title/organisation	Start date
A	Ms Kamontip Evans	KE	Buddhism	6.7.21
	VACANCY		Free Churches	-
	Ms Geetha Maheshwaran	GM	Hinduism	Pre-2016
	Mr John Carter	JC	Humanism	6.7.21
	Mr Saleem Sheikh	SS	Sunni Islam	-
	Mr Mike Freedman	MF	Judaism	Pre-2016
	Ms Clare Bennett	CB	Roman Catholic Church	00.05.22
	Mr Ajaib Singh Bahra	ASB	Sikhism	Pre-2016
	Mr Waleed Ahmad	WA	Ahmadiyya Muslim Association	4.10.16
B	Mrs. Jane Savill	JS	Church of England	10.10.17
	The Revd. Andrew Williams.	AW	Church of England	10.10.17
	Ms Rachael Norman	MC	Church of England	11.2.20
C	Ms Debra Beale	DB	NUT	21.2.17
	VACANCY		NASUWT	
	Ms Ro Maybury	RM	NAHT	6.7.21
D	Cllr Laxmi Attawar	LA	Councillor	Pre-2016
	Cllr Klaar Dresselaers	KD	Councillor	30.5.18
	Cllr Mike Brunt	MB	Councillor	6.7.21

Groups

A - Christian, Other Faiths & Beliefs

B - Church of England

C - Teacher Associations

D – Local Authority