

**Minutes of the SACRE meeting held on Tuesday 6th July 2021 (6.00pm-7.50pm)
Held remotely because of Covid-19 restrictions**

Present Group A – Christian, Other Faiths & Beliefs

Mike Freedman (MF) – Judaism
Waleed Ahmad (WA) - Ahmadiyya Muslim Association
Kamontip Evans (KE) – Buddhism
John Carter (JC) – Humanism
Anne Judge (AJ) – Humanism (reserve)

Group B – Church of England (SDBE)

Jane Savill (JS) (to 7.40pm)
Andrew Williams (AW)

Group C – Teacher Associations

Debra Beale (DB) - NEU
Ro Maybury (RM) - NAHT

Group D – Local Authority

Cllr Laxmi Attawar (LA)

LA Adviser

Keith Shipman (KS) – Merton Education Inclusion Manager

Others

Elizabeth Nassé (EN) Clerk

The following documents were circulated prior to the meeting:

- Item 5 - SACRE final draft minutes 3.11.21 and 9.2.21
- Item 7 - Research review series_ religious education - GOV.UK (Ofsted)
- Item 10 - Hinduism-in-Reproject-report
- Item 11 - NASACRE report on SACRE Funding in England 2021
- Item -12 Interfaith Feedback

In the absence of a Chair, EN (clerk) chaired items 1 to 4 and KS chaired the remainder of the meeting.

ITEM	ACTION
1	<p><u>Protocol for holding the meeting remotely</u> The meeting was held with video, using Microsoft Teams. Votes were to be cast with a show of hands. All agreed that an audio recording of the meeting could be made using a Livescribe pen, as per usual meeting arrangements (to be deleted on agreement of the draft minutes).</p>
2	<p><u>Apologies for absence</u> Apologies for absence were accepted from Councillor Hayley Ormrod (HO), Rachael Norman (RN), Geetha Maheshwaran (GM) and Councillor Sally Kenny (SK).</p> <p>Standing apologies (because of difficulties accessing online meetings) were accepted from: Saleem Sheikh (SS) and Ajaib Singh Bahra (ASB).</p>
3	<p><u>Welcome and introductions to new members</u> KS welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>EN explained that the following representatives had been appointed by the Local Authority to fill existing vacancies:</p> <p><u>Group A – Christian, Other Faiths & Beliefs</u> Humanism – John Carter and Anne Judge (reserve) Buddhism – Kamontip Evans</p> <p><u>Group C – Teacher Associations</u> Ro Maybury (NAHT)</p> <p><u>Group D – Local Authority</u> Councillor Sally Kenny (in place of Mike Brunt) who had stepped down while Mayor of Merton (April 2021 to March 2022)).</p> <p>Everyone introduced themselves.</p> <p>The meeting was quorate.</p>
4	<p><u>SACRE membership admin</u> <u>Election of Chair</u> KS reminded members that a new Chair was needed to replace Mike Brunt. JS explained that MB intended to return to SACRE after his one-year term as Mayor and would be willing to resume as Chair, if elected at that time.</p> <p>EN reported that no nominations for Chair had been received before the meeting and invited nominations at the meeting. None were received. EN/KS explained that as an alternative to electing a Chair the Constitution allowed for the forming of an executive committee to carry out the role of Chair, comprising one member of each of the four representative groups. The executive committee would be required to approve minutes, set agendas, chair meetings etc.</p> <p>All agreed to form an executive committee with the following members: Group A – John Carter Group B – Andrew Williams Group C – Debra Beale Group D – Laxmi Attawar</p>

MERTON STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

ITEM

ACTION

Changes in membership – new members as noted in item 3.

Action: KS to contact Saleem Sheikh (current Vice-Chair) to see if he will be able to attend meetings once they return to being held in person.

KS

Thank you to AK

KS wished to note SACRE's thanks to Audrey King for her lengthy and committed service to SACRE as a representative for Humanism. KS noted that her efforts had resulted in Humanism being included as one of the nominated groups on SACRE (in Group A) and had ensured that Humanism was included in the latest (2017) agreed syllabus (for secondary pupils); two significant achievements.

5 Update on schools/education, RE coordinators' meetings – post lockdown

KS summarised Merton's current support for RE:

- Merton has an RE specialist, Penny Smith-Orr who leads on implementation of the agreed syllabus across the borough. This work is overseen by Ewan Morrison who is responsible for curriculum support across all subject areas.
- The RE lead runs RE coordinators meetings each term; these have sometimes been held in places of worship across the borough (facilitated by members of SACRE) but have been held online during the pandemic. Approximately 10-20 RE coordinators regularly take part; the group asks high quality questions about the syllabus.
- Sessions delivered by Equaliteach, looking at inclusion and RE; these have been provided over the last two years - 11 schools have taken part.
- Circulation of SACRE curriculum resources to schools.

KS added that the School Improvement team is also providing half day, curriculum sessions for other subject areas and will be extending these to RE. These have been very successful and well attended. Additional resources have been secured from the 'Attain board' to deliver these at Roehampton University. The sessions will aim to improve teachers' subject knowledge and delivery of RE. This support will be in addition to the regular RE coordinators sessions.

RM reported that her staff had attended the other curriculum sessions and feedback had been very positive.

WA asked whether SACRE members could attend any of the RE teacher support sessions.

Action: KS/EN to confirm and forward details to SACRE members.

6 Minutes of previous SACRE meetings – 3rd November 2020 and 9th February 2021

Members approved the minutes of the meetings held on 3.11.20 and 9.2.21. The minutes will be signed by a member of the executive committee when practicable.

7 Matters arising from the meeting 9.2.21 not completed or covered elsewhere

All actions had been completed or were followed up elsewhere on the agenda.

ITEM

8

Ofsted Research Review Series: Religious Education

KS explained that the Ofsted research report provides an in-depth study of what should be being taught in RE. The report identifies a need to develop the current two-part content of most syllabuses i.e. learning facts about religions, then reflecting on them, to include a third strand, 'ways of knowing' – understanding how knowledge about religions is known, including validity of information, accuracy, misconceptions, bias etc.

JC commented that both the Ofsted report and the Hinduism report (see item 10) highlighted that there was an issue with a quality curriculum not being transferred into high quality teaching.

KS stressed that training and building teachers' confidence was key to improving teaching. Often, non-specialist teachers lead on RE in primary schools and RE in secondary schools is often taught by non-specialist teachers (albeit led by RE specialists). It is however challenging to find time to train teachers.

Members discussed RE teaching further and identified that: -

- Poor knowledge of some religions and denominations could put some students off studying RE, if they feel their own faith has been misrepresented.
- It is important for teachers to recognise difference and similarities amongst faiths and denominations and understand the validity of the information they are using.
- The use of language can sometimes lead to generalisations about different faith groups.

KS explained that the agreed syllabus was designed to give a general understanding of a religion but not necessarily of the denominations within it.

KS commented that the move to this approach would be positive but challenging; SACRE's agreed syllabus may not be in line with the new Ofsted focus and there may be a need to consider the implications in the future.

9

Planning for syllabus review; including impact of Black Lives Matter (BLM)

KS informed new members about Merton's agreed syllabus which is available online or in hard copy.

KS reported that local teachers didn't currently have capacity to review the syllabus. KS added that 'RE Today' offer a review service but would charge Merton about £3500 for the review and would then charge schools a licence fee to use the syllabus.

DB/WA suggested that resources would be better spent within Merton and that any review should be carried out in-house.

KS explained that the current syllabus content had been reviewed by SACRE; two teachers had then further developed the language within the syllabus. The development work had been coordinated by the previous SACRE Chair and had been a significant amount of work.

ITEM

ACTION

After further discussion members agreed:

- An 'RE Today' review service of the syllabus should not be used.
- The Merton agreed syllabus is strong – there had been no negative feedback from schools to date.
- An Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) review or rewrite were not currently required; a briefer review (in light of BLM) was needed. The curriculum may need review rather than the syllabus, but examples or ideas could be added.
- Teachers may have more capacity in the Autumn term to undertake a review; an honorarium payment could be offered.

JC suggested that the review of the syllabus should also be used as an opportunity for teachers to self-evaluate the quality of their teaching of RE. All agreed that this should be managed into the review process.

WA asked how soon after an initial review the syllabus would need reviewing again and what had been the feedback on the syllabus so far.

KS explained that he had asked for feedback at one Primary and Secondary Heads meeting since the launch of the syllabus; no significant issues had been raised.

Actions:

- **KS to ask Primary and Secondary Heads and RE coordinators for feedback about the syllabus in the Autumn term.**
- **KS to ask two teachers to carry out an 'equalities' review of the syllabus in the Autumn term.**
- **All to consider whether a full ASC review (including changes to content) was needed later in 2022.**

10 Hinduism in RE in UK schools report

KS explained that the Insight UK report gave a view of the teaching of Hinduism across the country. Insight UK was aiming to link SACRE Hinduism reps across the country to improve quality of teaching of Hinduism; KS had informed them about Geetha Maheshwaran's (GM) membership of Merton SACRE.

JC commented that the report did not give a favourable view of the teaching of Hinduism and RM suggested that the report could have included references to alternative, more suitable resources that teachers could access.

KS explained that although GM had endorsed Merton SACRE's Hinduism resources, this could not be regarded as endorsement by all Hindu groups. LA added that there may also be regional variations, so the report may not necessarily reflect the teaching of Hinduism in Merton.

ITEM

11

NASACRE report on SACRE funding

JS explained that she had recently attended a NASACRE webinar on the funding of SACREs across the country.

JS reported that she had found that Merton SACRE appeared to be relatively well supported by Central School Services Block (CSSB) funding; not all SACREs receive the support of an LA officer or clerk.

NASACRE recommend that Local Authorities should allocate at least 2% of their CSSB funding to SACRE in order that SACRE can carry out its statutory duties.

JS added that if SACREs were being funded properly then academies should not be charged differently from maintained schools in accessing RE support from SACRE.

JS also highlighted that in 2020, 75% of Merton pupils took a full course GCSE in RE, whereas nationally only 39% of pupils took it.

KS commented that Merton had prioritised full course GCSE RE because the studying of it has been shown to have a positive impact on other GCSE subjects. Also, if GCSE RE declines, then Key Stage 3 RE also tends to decline. Merton's support of RE is strong (as discussed in Item 5).

JS recommended the NASACRE website as a useful resource.

Action: JS/EN to check whether a password is needed for members to access NASACRE website materials.

12

Interfaith dialogue project feedback

AW/KS explained that the project had facilitated private discussion on set themes amongst 6th Formers of different faiths from local schools (Ursuline, Wimbledon College, RR6 and St Mark's). Three sessions had taken place prior to lockdowns: - the launch at the Civic Centre and subsequent sessions at Mitcham Parish Church and the Ahmadiyya Mosque in Morden. Two further sessions had been planned at the Wimbledon synagogue and the Shree Ghanapathy Temple but were on hold.

LA observed that the feedback had indicated that whilst students had found the project useful it would have been improved by higher numbers of participants.

KS agreed that the first session had been more successful because of the high numbers and more diverse groups of participants.

RM suggested that a similar project could be run for Year 6 pupils within a school. AW agreed that this should be trialled in addition to completing the 6th Form project that was started in 2020.

KE commented that she had attended an Interfaith event in Wandsworth, and it had been very positive to hear from different age groups across many faiths.

ACTION

JS/EN

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ITEM		ACTION
	<p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AW/KS/RM to liaise about establishing a Year 6 interfaith dialogue project at Abbotsbury Primary School. • AW/KS to consider how to resume the 6th Form project when places of worship are fully reopened. 	<p>AW/KS/ RM</p> <p>AW/KS</p>
<p>13</p>	<p><u>Viewing a trailer of the Synagogue's online materials</u></p> <p>Mike Freedman explained that before the pandemic, the Synagogue routinely offered school visits lasting about 2 hours to groups of 30-35 pupils. Around 1500-2000 pupils visit in a typical year. During the visits volunteers explain what goes on in the Synagogue and about Judaism in general.</p> <p>In response to lockdowns the Synagogue has developed its own virtual tour of the Synagogue which is shared with schools via Zoom. The virtual visit is split into different sections and volunteers run live Q&A sessions between sections. The whole video lasts for about an hour and was produced in-house by the Synagogue. The video is accompanied by teacher notes for further discussion at school.</p> <p>MF explained that the first virtual tour had been delivered at the end of February and 13 schools (around 800 pupils) will have accessed it by the end of the Summer term.</p> <p>Members watched a short trailer from the virtual tour and agreed that it was of high quality. All agreed that that virtual tour would offer benefits post pandemic for example: not having to travel; attracting groups outside the local area, accommodating larger groups and being able to select particular areas of interest.</p> <p>KS thanked MF for sharing the trailer and added that other faith groups could consider producing something similar to broaden the offer to schools.</p>	
<p>14</p>	<p><u>SACRE annual report 2019-2020 – update</u></p> <p>KS thanked members for their comments and corrections on the draft circulated at the previous meeting. The final version will be recirculated once Mike Brunt has added an introduction.</p> <p>Action: JS/KS to follow up MB's introduction to the report and KS/EN to recirculate to members before sending to NASACRE and the DfE.</p>	<p>JS/KS/ EN</p>
<p>15</p>	<p><u>Future meeting - online / in person</u></p> <p>All agreed to hold the Autumn term SACRE meeting in person (provided Covid-19 restrictions are lifted) to make it more accessible to those with limited access to IT and as a public meeting.</p> <p>Action: KS to book the Civic Centre for the Autumn term meeting and all to consider hosting subsequent meetings at their place of worship or school.</p>	<p>KS/all</p>

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ITEM		ACTION
16	<u>Any other business</u> None.	
17	<u>Date of next meetings: -</u> The following proposed dates for 2021/2022 meetings were agreed: - <ul data-bbox="300 432 687 539" style="list-style-type: none">• Thursday 7th October 2021• Tuesday 8th February 2022• Tuesday 5th July 2022	

Chair of Merton SACRE..... *Ashe Wilkin* :

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

Final DRAFT