

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
Coopers' Company & Coborn School, Upminster
10 July 2014 (8.30 - 9.35 pm)**

Present:

**Representing other
Christian and religious
denominations
(Group A)**

Dr John Lester
Mrs Christine Seymour
Mrs Pamela Coles
Mrs Jenny Fox
Pastor Aloysius Peter
Saddhabhaya
Mr John Smailes
Mr Nasir Mubashar [NEW]

**Representing the
Church of England
(Group B)**

Mrs Susan Freeman
Mrs Stephanie Ellner

**Representing the
Teaching
Profession
(Group C)**

**Representing the
Local Authority
Councillors
(Group D)**

Gillian Ford
Jason Frost
Dilip Patel
Alex Donald

Councillor Wendy Brice-Thompson (co-optee), Mr Daniel Hugill (Secondary Advisor) and Mrs Judith Payne (HSIS – Primary Advisor) were also present.

SACRE had agreed to hold its 2014 summer external meeting at Coopers' Company & Coborn School at the invitation of the Interfaith Forum and the meeting commenced after the conclusion of an extremely interesting debate between Saddhabhaya (Buddhism), the Revd. Dave Tomlinson of St Luke's, Holloway (Christian), Joel Ilse (Judaism) and Shahnawaz Haque (Muslim), the topic being: 'Should ideas of earthly justice be based on ideas of heavenly justice?' The debate provided SACRE members with a fine example of interfaith interaction involving the different perspectives and philosophies of four of the world's leading Faiths.

At the conclusion of the debate – and after questions had been put and responded to, all present were invited to share in refreshments provided by the school. On returning to the hall, the Chairman thanked Mrs Usher for welcoming SACRE to the school, for allowing it to be part of the audience at the debate and for providing such a pleasant repast.

He then announced that unfortunately, SACRE could not conduct its formal business (such as signing the Minutes) because it was not quorate – there being no representative from the Teacher and Head Teacher Group present. He added that general business could be conducted and said that those elements which could not be dealt with would be addressed at the next meeting. He extended a welcome to those who had attended for the Interfaith Forum and who wished to remain and see what SACRE did.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Kevin Walsh, Mrs Dawn Ladbrook, Mr Kamal Siddiqui, Mr Nick Hills, Ms Linda Munday and Councillor Meg Davis

1 **NEW OR SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Nasir Mubashar who was attending his first SACRE as a representative of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. In addition, he extended a warm welcome to the newly elected councillors who were likewise attending their first SACRE meeting.

2 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2014 could not be signed, but the Chairman asked whether there were any matters arising from them which might need attention. There were none.

3 **UPDATE ON SCHOOL ACTIVITY**

Primary:

In the academic year 2013 – 2014 the usual network meetings had been replaced with a full day conference for both pupils and RE co-ordinators led by RE Today consultants, Fiona Moss and Deborah Weston who were also leading on the review of the RE syllabus. Mrs Payne referred members to a flyer about the conference:

Secondary:

Mr Hugill had submitted the following report in which he informed SACRE that interest concerning RE had been received from the following senior schools: Hall Mead, Coopers' Coborn, Gaynes, the Sacred Heart of Mary and Champion. He hoped that this would deepen and that others would be persuaded to join them, but it was early days yet.

This group not only supported the teaching of RE, but provided mutual support and was now planning a conference for teachers from across London.

This process was also involving teachers from Southend, and Tower Hamlets. A grant application had been submitted to Culham St Gabriel's Trust for funding. He added that it was hoped that this day conference would involve work with religious/academic experts and follow-up visits for the teachers visiting each other.

4 **NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Mr Hugill's report was that:

Exam Reform

The DfE had accepted the case for the reform of GCSE and A level examinations in the subject on the same time-scale as EBacc subjects such as History and Geography, with first teaching from 2016. The RE Council's Qualifications Committee brought together a strong team of stakeholders representing member organisations for advisers, higher education and SACREs and teachers. NATRE had five members of

the Executive serving on it and they were supported by a reference group of representatives from organisations and communities of religion and belief.

Ofsted

The 2013 Ofsted RE report, ***Religious Education: Realising the Potential*** continued to inform discussions about future and quality of RE.

The recent Ofsted inspections in Birmingham (connected to what had been termed “Trojan Horse”) had highlighted the contribution that high quality RE could make to a broad and balanced curriculum (and had highlighted some places where they saw it as lacking). In the light of these inspections HMCI Michael Wilshaw had emphasized that Ofsted should inspect for a broad balanced curriculum when in schools. This should be an aid to those fighting for RE provision in their schools.

RE Regional Strategy Pilot

This strategy to ensure that there were more robust arrangements for training and supporting teachers of RE was based on Recommendation 4 of the RE Council’s Review of Religious Education. The RE Council and NATRE - working in collaboration with Culham St Gabriel’s - were implementing a pilot version of the strategy which they hoped would help teachers of RE to develop a regional strategy in their own area, adapted and suited to their own professional development priorities. Culham’s St Gabriel’s was currently inviting expressions of interest.

RE Expert Advisory Group (EAG)

It had been established as part of the RE Council’s Curriculum and Assessment Committee and with the support of the DfE it would work alongside similar sector-led groups for other curriculum subjects.

Secondary Survey

NATRE had launched its fifth annual survey on RE in secondary schools in England and urged all those who taught RE to complete it. Responses would provide invaluable detail to inform ongoing campaigns to secure the place of RE in the curriculum in all types of schools in the face of significant challenges from changes in the curriculum. As a “thank-you” for completing the survey, NATRE was offering a £5 voucher to use on any RE Today publication. The code needed to redeem this voucher was given at the end of the survey. The deadline for completion was 25 July. Members were urged to encourage any secondary teachers they knew, to complete it.

APPG

Had recently published a report on RE and community relations. It would be meeting again later in July to review progress since the publication of its first report, *“The Truth Unmasked”*, in March 2013 on teacher training and supply. This was something NATRE continued to campaign and lobby the DfE about.

Birmingham Commentary of the Religious Education Council’s (REC) Review of Religious Education

SACRE's clerk circulated a commentary from Birmingham SACRE on the RE Council's Review of Religious Education. The REC had responded in full to this (along with other member organisations). It was felt that this criticism was:

“from a small and unrepresentative minority (though some have parliamentary connections which tends to exaggerate the significance of their criticism). The Catholic Education Service, the Church of England Board of Education and the Muslim Council of Britain, to mention but a few of our member bodies, remain firmly behind the Review. It is important to remember that the Review was an RE Council project, not funded by government, which could not possibly command the total agreement of all members of our member bodies. It is the outcome of a consultative process as our funding allowed, and authorised by the RE Council Board. The Review lays the foundation for further work by the RE Council working in partnership with the Department for Education, who have also welcomed the Review, and with member bodies and others. Arguing well into 2014 about something that is now over and complete seems counter-productive and is potentially damaging to RE”

<http://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/about/chairs-blog/2014-02-01/forward-together-united>).

At the conclusion of his report, the Chair proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Hugill for all the work he had put into his support for Secondary education across Havering and the appreciation SACRE had for his input into its meetings.

5 UPDATE ON AGREED (JOINT) SYLLABUS CONFERENCE

Mrs Payne reported that to date two meetings had taken place (and various members of the Havering and Redbridge SACREs had been present at both. She referred to the update provided by Fiona Moss and Stephen Pett and informed SACRE that there was a move to remove levels (of study) from the new syllabus as well as end the Key Stage statements in order to make the syllabus more flexible and fluid.

She raised the matter of copyright and said that this was an area which needed to be looked at to ensure that the Authority retained control over its use. The Syllabus would be the central portal for RE teachers and access to it would be password protected. The Chairman agreed that it was important to protect essential knowledge. In addition, the borough's census was being used to identify what the demographic spread of faiths and religions currently was.

A member asked how many people were involved and was informed by Mr Hugill that there were essentially two principal writers, but in addition there were a further six Primary and five Secondary members of staff involved in the drafting of the syllabus, but that the draft would have to be considered by both SACREs and accepted by them before anything could be published. When asked when it was anticipated that the new syllabus would be published he said that in his opinion it would be spring 2015. Mrs Payne added that provision was being made to ensure that Special Schools and Early Years' representatives were consulted to ensure those areas were incorporated.

6 UPDATE ON THE MICHAEL EDWARDS AWARD

SACRE was informed that there had been a disappointing response to the invitation to Primary Schools to take part in the Award. No applications had been received. The question was posed whether the Michael Edwards Award had ceased to have any significance for schools, teachers or pupils. It was suggested that it might be time to think of something new to engage children and students across the borough's schools – especially in light of the pressures being brought to bear on RE. Whilst it was true that there were centres of excellence where the teaching of RE was strong and vibrant, there was a danger that apathy could grow if there was nothing challenging or stimulating to ensure that all areas were engaged.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman observed that he had not attended the NASACRE Annual General Meeting because he considered that the cost (£95.00) was not justified. Mrs Payne said that there were administrative costs and that such costs would be covered. Asked about a budget, she replied that a budget per-se did not exist, but that “funding would be made available on application”. She took the opportunity to announce that this was her final SACRE as she would have retired by the autumn term but that a successor would be found to continue to support SACRE as Primary Advisor.

The Chairman proposed a vote of thanks for all her hard work and contribution over the years and wished her well in her retirement.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were asked to consider a date for the autumn meeting. The preferred dates put forward were either 23rd or 22nd October.

[**NOTE:** Subsequent to the meeting it was discovered that the above dates could not be reserved and so a new date was obtained: Thursday 9th October and members notified]

Chairman