

LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM

Minutes of the Lewisham Agreed Syllabus Conference

which was held on Wednesday 21 October 2015 with a start time of 6.30pm at Trinity Secondary School, Taunton Road, Lee, London SE12 8PD

Present:

Group A

Luke Donnellan (Humanism)
Gerard Rose (Judaism)
Joan Goldberg (Judaism) *JGb*
Gurbakhsh Singh Garcha (Sikhism)

GROUP B (The Church of England)

Shaun Burns
John Goodey (*JG*)
Gail Exon

GROUP D

Councillor Jacq Paschoud (LA member)
Councillor David Britton (LA member, CHAIR)
Dinah Griffiths (School Governors, Primary)

Also Present:

Denise Chaplin (RE School Improvement Officer)
Stephen Sealy (SACRE Clerk - acting)

1. Welcome, Apologies for Absence

Councillor David Britton opened the meeting at 6.36pm.
Apologies were acknowledged from Kate Bond, Revd Juliet Donnelly and Karen Hansen.

3. Election of a Vice Chair for the ASC

Councillor Britton noted that a vice Chair needed to be elected.
Shaun Burns and John Goodey both declined nomination citing work demands.
The Chair suggested that Monsignor Nick Rothan might volunteer but acknowledged that this couldn't be progressed in his absence and particularly as the meeting was inquorate.
Concern was expressed for his wellbeing as he had not been present or in contact for some time.
Dinah Griffiths, the Chair of SACRE, volunteered to be the vice chair for this meeting, should one be required.

4. Membership

Denise Chaplin reported that three teachers had joined SACRE and the ASC but that unfortunately none were present.
She reported that she has pursued the Baha'i member but that he hadn't been seen nor had he responded to her emails. She also reported that Kate Bond would be representing the Children and Young People directorate at the meetings of SACRE & the ASC representing Sara Williams.

Gerald Rose questioned if there was a Baha'i meeting in the borough, and was given details of their meeting place. Gerald added that there was a Baha'i member on the Greenwich Faith Leaders Group who actually lived in the borough of Lewisham. It was suggested that DC send a letter to the Baha'i representative as an alternative means of contact.

Hindu representation was discussed and Dinah Griffiths suggested that Bala may have returned temporarily to Sri Lanka where he is involved in several charitable and educational projects. She updated the group that the Hindu group had suspended their use of the Goldsmith Centre due to asbestos being found there, and that they were often using the temple but were looking for other centres to use. She committed to contact Bala.

Gurbakhsh reported that Bala had posted on Facebook on the previous day which indicated that he was well.

5. Progress to date with consultations

5.1 Early Years Team

Denise reported that an early draft EYFS had been tabled months ago but that that she had upgraded this to include recent advice on British Values and emailed it to Lewisham Early Years consultants. She added that this would be brought back to ASC soon, and that British Values would be included in it.

Dinah G commended Denise for her training session on British values for Governors and recommended it to the meeting.

5.2 Lewisham's Young Mayor and Advisers

The Chair reported that he had met with a senior Young Mayor's adviser and has asked for their ideas. Denise added that she had met with the recent ex-Young Mayor and his advisers.

Subsequently she had sent six copies of the agreed syllabus disk for the young mayor's team to review. As the young mayor's personnel had been busy with the recent Young Mayor election no response had yet arrived but Malcolm Ball, the Young Mayor's Adviser had stated that the group would feedback after they had settled. DC expressed her hope that their input wasn't just a 'one-off'.

5.3 Lewisham Secondary Schools

Councillor Britton reported that he had researched the secondary schools' offer in terms of Religious Education from their school websites. The document entitled 'RE Schemes of work' and its tabular version ('Published schemes of work analysed and compared') were tabled.

He explained the 'Published schemes of work' document, highlighting the pattern in the information he had obtained and he suggested that this be used as a basis for then working out the bigger picture in terms of the schools' offer, and proposed the ideas of there being two religions and one theme on the Key Stage 2 curriculum. Denise queried how many religions comprised a theme.

Councillor Britton expressed the need for a program of study suitable for special schools. Dinah recounted how work done by Special Schools several years ago was exemplary and that they had been invited to the Agreed Syllabus Conference. Denise acknowledged that

there hadn't been much contact with Special Schools for quite a while due to their reorganisations and staffing changes.

Gerald Rose reported that many schools teach Judaism in year 8 and added that he had visited Brent Knoll on the previous Monday.

Denise introduced the 'Findings from initial secondary meeting' document. She explained that Dinah, Shaun and she had met with teachers from 3 schools at Prendergast, Hilly Fields. One had also been able to update them on activity at Sydenham, and that they had spoken about how Key Stage 3 is organised. The ASC heard that currently there was virtually no Religious Education in year 11 at Prendergast as the students take their GCSE in year 10.

It was pointed out that if schools were squeezing Key Stage 2 into two years then the ASC needed to think about how they ensure Religious Education isn't disregarded further up the school. It was acknowledged that with core subjects demanding more time, there was a risk that Religious Education could be squeezed out somewhere. It was also necessary to consider how a KS3 programme could incorporate 2, 2.5 and 3 year key stage programmes.

Shaun explained that national politics explained the zero take-up of Religious Education at Knights Academy, adding that decisions about which years could access Religious Educations were made at a higher level than teachers'.

Denise clarified that the dropdown day issue related to Addey and Stanhope and queried if the website matched that they'd said. The Chair explained that the structure was two years plus one term, with a term for the bridging unit and Shaun clarified that there was a secondary part in the syllabus for secondary schools.

It was explained that the teachers at the meeting had reported that the bridging unit part 2 wasn't working in secondary schools, and suggested that this be dispensed with.

Councillor Britton expressed his dismay at the teachers' perception that most students had done little Religious Education in primary schools. He expressed the view that subjects were all studied through literacy, although John Goodey disagreed with this. Denise said it was important the ASC finds out what's really happening.

Shaun added that one school had reported being impressed with what new learners had learnt in their primary schools.

Gurbakahsh Garcha asked where the statutory duty fitted in. John explained that there was a curriculum whose onus to implement was with schools, and that church schools, unlike others, were inspected on their teaching of Religious Education.

Denise suggested that the British values agenda was again making the teaching of Religious Education more prominent, with Dinah adding that this varied from school to school.

John G commented that children think differently at differing ages, and that their ability to learn was being developed rather than their ability to remember knowledge in the younger years.

Councillor Paschoud remarked that the percentage of Lewisham children educated in faith-based schools had once been in excess of 40%. John G added that it was around 10% now.

Gerald explained that in some two form entry schools in his experience one class may know very little about Judaism while the other knew a lot, and concluded that the issue wasn't

merely a school-by-school one. Denise suggested that timing and separate curriculum planning could be a plausible reason for this.

Dinah reported that all schools have a collective act of worship, and commented that she had seen some fantastic work where students had presented a theme they had been studying in RE.

Shaun questioned how, given religious education's status as a statutory responsibility, the Local Authority could support them to support schools, and expressed the need for this conversation to take place with the local authority.

Denise explained that the 'Optional KS3 unit' document in the papers had been discussed at the initial secondary meeting and was favourably received. She explained that it was an adaptation of something originally written for Key Stage 2. She suggested that if thematic units were replaced, they should be given a 'broad brush' approach like this.

The Chair suggested that 'non-religious' should be changed to 'non-theistic'. Luke D expressed his view that Humanism was not a religion and his preference for the term 'world view' although he conceded the risk of an over-emphasis on definitions. Denise commented that 'non-religious world views' was common parlance nationally, to which Luke D agreed.

Denise commented that the Agreed Syllabus was not in some places explicit enough, particularly KS4. She explained that whilst HMI had stated that it was acceptable for schools not to follow the Agreed Syllabus, NASACRE has been pursuing this advice and reminds SACREs and ASCs that there is still a statutory requirement for Religious Education to be taught at Key Stage 4. In Lewisham's syllabus this is detailed as being an accredited examination course. She remarked that the messages from HMI and OfSTED were not always aligned with the legal requirement and expressed concern that they may therefore be giving the message that 'it doesn't matter if your school doesn't meet statutory requirements'.

She reported that David Hampshire, Chair of NASACRE, had asked her if Lewisham SACRE had been advising schools not to teach citizenship, as a Lewisham teacher had reportedly said that Lewisham SACRE had advised not to teach this. Denise wondered whether this was due to a misunderstanding as both SACRE and she never advise schools on citizenship.

Dinah reported that there was a desperate need for the teachers they had met to meet other Religious Education teachers as they felt quite isolated. She added that the group should look at ways of facilitating these meetings more and suggested that the ASC process could start to create a teachers' network to enable questions to be directed to Denise and sharing and clarity to be sought.

Councillor Britton reported that in Hackney they had organised groups of Religious Education teachers to look at different themes, and that the meetings had always been well attended.

Denise was asked whether there had been governors' training for Religious Education in Lewisham's governor training programme. She said no but that information leaflets that the Religious Education Council had sent had been circulated to governors although she didn't know if these had been read.

5.4 Assessment advice

Denise reported that she and Shaun had attempted to update the Assessment Advice.

Shaun explained that education is currently in a post-level era, and that while an assessment system needs to be in place there was no need for the older levels. He explained that the assessment guidance in the Religious Education curriculum needs to be wider to cater both for schools adhering to levels and those not. He added that it was a work in progress.

Denise remarked that the teachers they had met were trying to create levels that relate to GCSE grades and that this seems to be the same in other subjects.

John G reported that most schools create criteria for each year group and then after a unit of work assess if students have met, exceeded, or not met national expectations. He explained the philosophy behind 'life after levels' as not being about micro defining levels but that by looking at a child's book and speaking to them one should be able to detect what they'd learnt. He commended its philosophy, but reported that a lot of schools have simply rejigged the levels against the National Curriculum. He explained that OfSTED/HMI were not looking for an alternative system of levels.

He further explained that there was a move from a numerical system with scoring to one that is criteria based, with children being tested against what they can do. He added that there was a group in Lewisham that's working on it across subjects. It was suggested that the RE advice be commented on by some of that group.

Gerald questioned the quality of comparisons that could be made when children move from Primary to Secondary or from school to school or even the comparisons between different subjects if each school is engaging by its own rules.

Cllr Paschoud commented that there was a concern about describing children who were below expectations.

John G added that in English and Maths parents are being presented with what their children need to learn but that for schools not following this practice, this would be a concern.

At 7.40 Gail Exon left.

6. Issues for the secondary curriculum

Councillor Britton stated that most of this point had been covered but summarised that while there was no pattern at Key Stage 4 (in the 'Published Schemes of Work analysed and compared' document) there is at Key Stage 3. He added that Key Stage 3 was the firmest part of the syllabus, so if the group could submit this on time then they could work forwards and backwards from this Stage.

Denise reported that she will have a meeting with Conisborough after half term and will raise it with their dept.

Shaun was asked how Key Stage 3 worked in Trinity and he said he would find out,

7. Future planning

Denise explained that the group needed to approach the Local Authority for money but that, before doing this, they needed to know what they need to do and how much it would cost.

Councillor Britton stated that everyone should look at the Key Stage 3 syllabus of secondary schools and invited the group for suggestions on how this should be allocated.

Gerald volunteered to go into Bonus Pastor.

Luke D queried how the process worked.

Denise explained that if many schools have shortened Key Stage 3 this may pose a problem as the syllabus had been written for a three year course of study. She asked the group what they thought about the existing content; whether it was right or too sophisticated; if it was fit for purpose; if it needed adjusting.

Dinah explained that in the past the conference would pay for teachers to come out of school to produce the syllabus. Denise remarked on the positive value of the discussions between professionals and believers in that set-up. Dinah suggested that a similar way may have to be found if big changes were to be made.

Denise said she would continue her dialogue with the Young Mayor's team. She remarked that the PDF version of the agreed syllabus was better than the Word version (which contained a few errors).

8. Any other business and information exchange

Denise asked if everyone had the reference handbook for SACRE members, and furnished JGb, LD and CJ with one. She explained that it was produced by NASACRE and was "very useful".

Cllr Paschoud explained that NASACRE had a session at the recent Labour party conference but that she had been unable to attend it.

Denise reported that she was facilitating training for SACRE members on the 10 November at the Civic Suite and that this was open to Lambeth and Greenwich also.

Dinah committed to find out about Monsignor Rotheron and Bala

(There are no points 9, 10 or 11)

12. To consider dates for:

12.1 The next Agreed Syllabus Conference

This was agreed for Thursday 25 February starting at 6.30pm at St John Baptist in Bromley.

JG committed to have a look at the Assessment Advice, after which he and DC would discuss this.

12.2 Training for new ASC members

Denise proposed that a ten-minute training sessions be added to the next agenda.

The meeting finished at 8.05pm.