

## LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM

### Minutes of the Lewisham Agreed Syllabus Conference

which was held on  
Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2016 at St John Baptist C of E School, Beachborough Road BR1  
5RL

#### Present:

<b>GROUP A</b>	Dr Mehdi Dabestani Baha'i)	Sarwoar Ahmed (Islam)
	Vallipuram Bala (Hinduism)	Gerald Rose (Judaism)
	Luke Donnellan (Humanism)	
	Mohammed Barrie (Islam)	
<b>GROUP B</b> (The Church of England)	Shaun Burns (Diocesan Primary RE Adviser)	John Goodey (Primary Teachers)
	Revd Juliet Donnelly (Minister)	
<b>GROUP C</b> (Teachers)	Karen Hansen (NUT)	Pamela Phillips (NAS/UWT)
<b>GROUP D</b> (The Local Authority)	Councillor Jacq Paschoud (LA member)	Dinah Griffiths (School Governors SACRE chair)
	Councillor David Britton (LA member CHAIR)	Kate Bond (Representing the Executive Director of Children and Young People.)
	Councillor Janet Daby (LA member)	
<b>Others Present:</b>		
	Denise Chaplin (RE School Improvement Officer)	
	Stephen Sealy (interim SACRE clerk)	

These minutes follow the order in which the agenda points were discussed. Where the discussion didn't follow the order of the agenda, this is reflected in these minutes.

The meeting begun at 6.50pm.

## 2 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising not on the full agenda

Cllr Paschoud confirmed that the agenda was on the council website. However, Cllr Britton commented that the papers aren't posted in the councillors' brown envelopes.

Cllr Britton asked whether the committee accepted the 'minutes' of the previous meeting as an accurate record of the meeting. This was accepted. However, it was noted that the previous minutes should be referred to as 'notes' as there was not a quorum in attendance.

### 1 Welcome; apologies for absence

Apologies were accepted from David Hutchens (Buddhism), Joan Goldberg (Judaism), Gurbakhsh Singh Garcha (Sikhism), and Kim Knappett (ATL).

## 2 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising not on the full agenda

It was agreed that there were no matters arising not on the full agenda.

With regard to the record in section 3 that Claire Adams had “fallen out of contact”, Denise clarified that she had not contacted her hoping to see if she would attend this meeting.

With reference to Denise’s update in section 3 on the nomination of a new Baha’i representative, Dr. Dabestani confirmed that he was the new representative.

Notwithstanding the corrections above, the minutes of the last meeting were reflected as a true record of the meeting.

Shaun commended the clerk for the comprehensiveness of the previous minutes.

### **Confirmation of order of business for the meeting**

All assented to the order of business laid out in the minutes.

### **3 Election of a vice chair for the ASC**

Cllr Britton asked if there were any nominations for vice chair.

Denise asked Juliet if she would be interested in this position, explaining that this entailed standing in for the chair and that she would be bringing her experience in teaching and as a faith leader to bear on this tenure. Juliet replied that she’d need time to think about it.

Cllr Britton formally proposed that Juliet be considered for this position; which Gerald seconded. This will be revisited at the next meeting.

### **4 Membership**

Denise introduced a new member representing the Baha’i community. There are some vacancies still remaining which are being pursued.

Shaun said that Juliet had followed up Claire Adam’s non-attendance as she worked at the same school. Claire had stated her intention of attending this meeting, as she had stated with a previous meeting, although subsequently she did not attend. Shaun agreed to follow up Claire’s repeated non-attendance to see if she did still want to be one of the NUT representatives on SACRE.

There was general discussion on steps to fill some of the Christian vacancies.

There followed general concern about how the expected but as yet absent members could access the building. At this point John temporarily left the meeting to watch the door.

### **5 Training for ASC work**

Cllr Britton suggested that Denise offer a quick re-run of the training for ASC work.

Denise explained that the training slides she was going to run through were to be found on the NASACRE website, and she explained that all committee members have access to the password protected sections of the NASACRE website although the password is changed annually.

The ASC is a statutory body with a single task focus of working on the review and production of the agreed syllabus, running parallel to the SACRE.

She added that every local authority was required to have an ASC, and that minutes had to be provided for each of the meetings.

She further elaborated on the Powerpoint slides explaining the workings of the ASC, highlighting the following points:

Working parties need not be made up of all constituent groups but all sub-groups need to be representative of the 4 groups.

The personnel needn't be the same in the ASC as the SACRE but the same sponsoring groups need to be represented

Being co-opted for SACRE doesn't afford a member a place on the ASC.

It is the statutory responsibility of the local authority to provide funds and support for the work of the ASC.

One of the key messages of the ASC is that RE isn't a highly academic book-driven subject; it is about people representing their faith and / or belief communities.

A lot of authorities provide statutory information coupled with a second document containing non-statutory advice, a handbook or guidance. The ASC may decide on changes / additions to both.

## **6 Revised Early Years / Foundation Stage materials**

Denise reported that these had been developed in partnership with the EYFS team in Lewisham, who have approved them. She advised that these were the same 'shape' as the previous syllabus advice, explaining that page 6 stated the ASC philosophy as a precursor to the KS1 programme.

She explained that festivals were key in the EYFS, but that this advice recommended that providers select effectively as some settings may include so many faiths who celebrated so many festivals that it could be confusing to very young children. She commented on the diversity of communities represented in the LA and featuring in the ASC

Cllr Paschoud asked whether schools were advised to pick festivals from different faiths, to which Denise explained that the guidance covering this was on page 7.

At this point John returned.

Denise commented that the recommendation is that settings mark a maximum of six festivals, (possibly adding Mothering Sunday).

John remarked that it was important that children are also partaking in the festivals selected in their own faith communities and asked how the children's families' choices are dealt with. Cllr Britton replied that they have the right to withdraw.

Kate added that schools need to know that families are notified that they can withdraw their children from involvement in these events. It was agreed this would be in the revised introduction to the whole syllabus.

Gerald reported that a school had asked him to do a model Seder for them. He announced that the synagogue was conducting one on the 10<sup>th</sup> April, for which he had tickets.

Dinah commented that in her experience parents are often invited to attend the school to see presentations and to give information from their community and that this doesn't usually produce any problems.

Shaun emphasised the importance of flagging up point 6 to parents as regards to what RE is and what RE is not, so as to allay any parental worries about their children's participation in RE and to therefore try and minimise any withdrawals.

Karen added that the point that this was not worship but learning needed to be clearly conveyed.

Kate suggested that the document include a reminder note to schools at the front of the syllabus summarising the syllabus, what it's about and good practice.

Cllr Paschoud recounted the withdrawal of a large number of children from a school's Christmas dinner, suggesting that the number of families who would withdraw from festival activities may be significant. Juliet remarked that Christmas dinners are unrelated to Christmas as a religious festival. Denise added that Christmas incorporated dual identities of folk cultural tradition and a religious one.

Councillor Britton likened Christmas to the French Fete Nat, a non-Christian festival.

Kate remarked that the ASC needed to provide a policy framework, not tell schools what to do, but added that guidance on how to deal with families who withdraw may be usefully included in the introduction materials.

Denise suggested that a conversation on the non-Christian elements of the Christmas dinner could be held outside of the meeting.

At this point Bala left the meeting.

Denise summarised the document, reporting that there was a blank book list at the back of the document.

Kate commented that it felt helpful, being slim, accessible and not overly prescriptive. However, she wondered whether information at the beginning of the document (again possibly in the introduction to the syllabus) referring to the breadth of faith would be helpful, maybe pictorially represented.

Denise explained that such information was on page 4, although it didn't include specific beliefs/views.

Luke commented that there were quite a few places where the word 'religion' was used but felt that 'faiths' or, preferably 'beliefs' should replace this.

Gerald questioned whether a reminder of possible resources would be included; Denise confirmed that it wouldn't at this Key Stage. Gerald added that schools were not aware of the resources in the synagogue from the multi-faith centre which they could access.

Kate reiterated the view that the document needs to be slim but added that including a reminder to use 'hands-on' objects for young children and reference to the wide range of resources available should be considered.

Denise reported that she intended to circulate the document to schools and Cllr Britton suggested that she write a covering statement to accompany it.

Cllr Paschoud queried why there was emphasis on new babies arriving on page 17. Denise advised that this was simply an illustration.

Kate advised that Nikki from Chelwood Training School would be able to advise on the best way of sharing this with the wider schools, adding that if Nikki hasn't already seen the document, she needs to.

With regard to Cllr Paschoud's question, Denise advised that set texts weren't being referred to in the document; rather it was advising ways in which the books that schools have already could be appropriated to tie in with the syllabus advice.

It was agreed that Denise would contact Chelwood to ask for support in sending to schools and Early Years settings for pilot.

## **7 Existing KS 1-3 syllabus and discussion around proposals for a way forward**

Cllr Britton introduced the Key Stage 3 document, emphasising that this wasn't a syllabus but was a proposal he was bringing for members to consider.

He suggested that the best way to approach religions throughout these year groups was thematically, rather than the study of different religions in different years. Juliet commented that she thought the opposite was true.

Kate emphasised that the purpose of the group was to agree a syllabus that is flexible enough to enable one group to deliver it thematically and another as a modular program. Its concern was outcomes, not methods. She advised that in the authorities that she has served in, they have looked at what other local authorities have done.

Denise stressed that the result of this activity shouldn't be greater content and suggested the movement of the content into grids.

Cllr Britton reported that in the borough of Hackney, there was a small handbook of the syllabus supported by a large folder of support materials.

Kate emphasised that the council has only a small pot of money, and that the document created needed to be meaningful and adaptable for different schools. She added that they could then be signposted to a wealth of resources.

Shaun added that the document cannot be too woolly so that quality is maintained and assured, and endorsed Kate's point.

Cllr Britton invited the committee to review the document and to feedback any suggestions to him.

Denise asked if Cllr Britton had looked at the existing syllabus, to which he replied that he hadn't, looking instead at the schemes of work that schools were advised to teach. Denise suggested a useful approach would be looking at the existing syllabus and check its appropriateness, then Cllr Britton's document could be matched to this to see where it might radically change content.

Shaun expressed the need to also look at national RE documents to ensure its alignment with national expectations and benchmark quality breadth and depth.

John commented, in answer to a question from Kate, that his school, being a Cof E school, doesn't teach to the local syllabus, but rather being a Church of England school it follows the Southwark Diocesan RE Scheme of Work. Shaun added that, as Diocesan RE Adviser, he works closely with the Local Authority and also from having previously worked within the Local Authority there was some overlap between the LA and the Diocesan RE syllabuses. Pauline explained that in her (special) school, each year group is given a certain religious group to cover each half term.

Kate emphasised the importance of involving the schools, recounting that in Wolverhampton they had purchased a syllabus from another council and adapted it.

Shaun added that the RE Council National Curriculum framework, A Review of Religious Education in England, is the only new additional national document relating directly to the RE curriculum since the last syllabus.

Cllr Britton left the meeting temporarily at this point.

Denise added that the action taken for special schools differed from this, remarking that her biggest concern was that teachers wouldn't want to be prescribed to in relation to teaching styles.

Luke expressed that his major concern with the syllabus was the absence of references to humanism, adding that there needed to be extra provision for non-religious themes as children can take the GCSE but choose the areas of religion to study.

Cllr Britton disagreed with this point; drawing on an analogy of a history learner being obliged to study an element of geography as part of the history subject. He commented that Heads were too pushed to engage with delivering a non-compulsory subject.

There was a brief discussion about examinations boards' offer, which concluded with Denise reminding the committee that it wasn't for the committee to recommend which boards schools selected.

Dr Dabestani remarked that Baha'i wasn't represented, despite it having 7 million followers worldwide and, he added, being similar to Christianity in terms of its inclusion.

Cllr Britton invited Dr Dabestani to share information on the Baha'i faith via Dropbox.

Denise explained that in Lewisham schools students are recommended to study six major faiths although other syllabi around the country often focus on three with minimal engagement in others. She also commented how the study of faith would start with the child's own experiences and one would draw upon that, sharing other human experiences and then parallels would be drawn between these personal experiences and the way in which faith reflects these themes. She added that even though children weren't initially learning a lot about these faiths, it wasn't a superficial exercise either. The emphasis was on how the learning could be meaningful for the child rather than how many faiths could be covered.

Cllr Britton commented that Rastafarian also lacked exposure.

Luke reiterated that if Humanism is only included as an appendix, the view is suggested that it isn't as important as the six major religions. He cited a recent High Court judgement which suggested that the prevalence of a belief in any given locale, such as Humanist views, should be taken into consideration when determining what subjects should be studied.

Cllr Britton responded that there is a big difference between Humanism and atheism, which Luke commented was true largely because many who would label themselves Humanist aren't familiar with the term. Cllr Britton suggested that these labels were passed down from parents.

Kate concluded that the key focus was teaching children to value diversity and the view that there is no sole right way to do anything. She encouraged the committee to consider what is and what isn't working with teachers, using the existing Agreed Syllabus as a starting point, suggesting that the committee agree what a good syllabus would look like, possibly highlighting the three or four key features. She suggested that this be carried forward for a future meeting along with a consideration of how close to this ideal model the existing one is.

## **8 Progress on assessment guidance**

Denise commented that John, Shaun and herself had begun to carry out work on assessment post-levels. She proposed that they report back on it and bring a draft back to the committee table after they have convened with teachers.

Kate proposed that this meeting be postponed to allow teachers capacity to fully grapple with the impact of life without levels for Maths, English etc.

Denise explained that there was nothing nationally produced yet to guide schools in what RE post-levels looks like. Shaun said that schools needed some guidance as what assessment in RE could look like, but in a way that dovetailed whole school assessment. This would be a challenge as schools were now using so many different assessment models. The key was making a manageable and meaningful system of assessment in RE that would impact on the quality of RE being taught and learnt.

## **9 Any Other Business and Information Exchange**

Gerald reported that the synagogue was hosting a mock Seder at 5pm on 10<sup>th</sup> April, costing £8 per person. He invited the committee to take a flyer or purchase a ticket from him.

Cllr Britton suggested that the word 'mock' be changed to 'model'.

Gerald added that grape juice replaces the wine at this event.

Denise offered apologies for her being unable to attend.

Kate commended the committee for their demonstration of the three messages that Sara Williams and herself are promoting in the local authority; embodied by the words clarity, collaboration and courage.

## **10 Dates for future meetings**

The next ASC will be at Pastor Nick's church.

The next SACRE meeting will be at the Islamic Centre.

Arrangements for the Tuesday 13 September meeting will be decided at the next meeting.

Denise clarified that the meeting on March 8 at the synagogue was for both primary and secondary teachers. She explained that the committee's presence was not compulsory but that members may be interested.

The meeting closed at 8.35pm.