

LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM

Minutes of the Lewisham Agreed Syllabus Conference

which was held on Monday 7th November 2016
at Emmanuel Pentecostal Church, 374 Lee High Road, London SE12 8RS

Present:

GROUP A	Vallipuram Bala (Hinduism)	
	Luke Donnellan (Humanism)	
	Nigel Desborough (Independent Evangelical)	
	Rt Rev. Monsignor Nicholas Rotherham (Roman Catholic)	
GROUP B (The Church of England)	Shaun Burns	Revd Juliet Donnelly (Deputy Chair)
GROUP C (Teachers)	Kim Knappett (ATL)	Pamela Phillips (NAS/UWT)
	Karen Hansen (NUT)	Judith Purkiss (Lewisham Headteachers & Deputies)
	Claire Adams (NUT)	
GROUP D (The Local Authority)	Councillor Jacq Paschoud	Councillor David Britton
Others Present:		
	Denise Chaplin (RE School Improvement Officer)	
	Stephen Sealy (SACRE clerk)	

The meeting was quorate and began at 6.35pm.

Cllr Britton informed the committee that his wife had recently received a rather serious medical diagnosis. He requested that the committee pray for this situation but also advised that he would be leaving the meeting early

1 Welcome and introductions

Apologies were received from Dr Dabestani (Baha'i), David Hutchens (Buddhism) who is unable to attend on Mondays, Nick Hughes (Free Church AoG), Carol Bostridge (Free Church – Baptist) who is suffering with a bad back, Layo Afuaye (Pentecostal), Gurbakhsh Singh Garcha (Sikhism), John Goodey (Primary Teacher), Councillor Hilary Moore who is attending training elsewhere, and Kate Bond who had three meetings to attend.

Denise advised that Gerald and Joan (Judaism) may be unable to attend and that Vallipuram Bala's daughter may attend, late, in his place.

2 Minutes of previous meeting

It was noted that Kate was representing the Executive Director of Education, rather than serving in this position as mentioned in the list of those present.

The comment attributed to 'Simon' (that 'focus was needed') on the third paragraph of page three was made by Shaun.

The statement in the eighth paragraph was made by Karen Hansen, rather than Juliet.

Luke advised that the first paragraph on page 4 (Section 5 – Humanism in an Agreed Syllabus) be corrected by the striking out of the words "acknowledged that the case... new to RE but".

There was a motion to accept the minutes as accurate, subject to these changes.

Matters arising from that meeting not on the agenda.

There were none.

3 Agreed Syllabus plan of action

Denise referred the committee to the landscape-oriented 'Overview for Lewisham Agreed Syllabus Revision' sheet.

She stated her desire to keep a record of where the committee was at with regards to progressing these actions.

She explained the document, commenting that if action is agreed in the meeting, this would be added to the second column. She commented that the failing of the deadlines by the EYFS was probably effected by the personnel change within the Lewisham EYFS team.

She committed to keep the document up-to-date, emailing this periodically to the committee or bringing to the meetings.

She suggested that the committee consider whether to add marriage within the faith sections (Key Stages 1 & 2) if the themed unit of weddings was coming out.

She reported that all Christian groups will be asked to consider how Christianity is presented in the document, and requested that committee members check websites and resources as specified in the second column, recommending any new ones that they feel of worth and appropriate.

She added that a function of this document was to serve as an aide memoir.

It was agreed that Agenda point 5 would precede agenda point 4.

5 Working Party arrangements for KS3 including consultation with schools/teachers

It was reported that a meeting had been organised at the Hindu temple for KS3 teachers and members of the ASC / SACRE.

Denise commented that a difficulty with KS3 is that the syllabus has been written for a three year KS3 while the length of KS3 actually varies across schools, with some beginning their GCSE programme in Year 9. This has a significant impact on the ability to teach the required syllabus content.

The working party would be a cross-borough one involving the Lambeth and Greenwich SACREs and teachers also with the intention of producing draft ideas to be taken back to the

boroughs' respective Agreed Syllabus Conferences. It would be interesting as the SACREs would not necessarily have the same faiths represented.

Referring to the section in the Overview document, Denise clarified that this represented the existing syllabus.

In response to a question from Luke, she explained that the changes listed were not the only changes proposed but that, once discussions were held, changes coming from these discussions would be reflected in the document, meaning that it will, by nature, evolve.

6 Any other business

Syrian Refugees

Councillor Britton asked for some assurance that the faith traditions of the immigrants that each borough was expected to accommodate would be taken into account. Denise explained that Citizens UK would be holding a meeting at which this point would be raised.

7 To agree a date and venue for the next Agreed Syllabus Conference

Denise suggested that it may be useful to have a primary as well as Special Schools meeting.

After some discussions about a suitable day and date for the meeting (including a suggestion by Councillor Britton for a Saturday meeting), it was agreed that the next SACRE meeting be held on the 8th March 2017.

It was agreed that the next Agreed Syllabus Committee meeting would be held on the 23rd February.

Kim requested that an email be sent out specifying all of the dates.

Denise will ask Gerald if the synagogue could be used again for the February meeting.

Juliet added that the use of Trinity for the 8th March meeting should be fine, but that she will confirm this. She committed to email Denise with the address, parking facilities etc.

4 Replacing the KS2 Weddings Unit – further work towards changing this unit

Denise summarised the 'Families and relationships' document, explaining that these units were based on the old QCA-produced units, as teachers preferred this style for the RE units. She reminded the committee that pupils who were considered able in RE may not be able in other subjects.

She suggested that there be no more than three learning objectives for any new sessions, suggesting that there may not be teacher buy-in for more objectives.

At 7.05 Vallipuram Bala arrived.

Denise explained that teachers will probably rewrite the suggested teaching activities as they know their pupils and these are not statutory.

She suggested that Sessions 3 and 4 remain together to enable expanded / research work to be undertaken. She added that sections 5a and 5b were left in case teachers wanted pupils to do a research project, but that there may be 5c, 5d etc. if the pupils were directed for these sections.

Sher reminded that committee that this was scaffold learning.

Shaun reported that there had previously been general discussion on updating the unit but also about ensuring that it remains an RE unit.

Councillor Britton advised that the committee would be breaking off into smaller groups later but suggested that they first together identify the key questions, pointing out that he felt the theme of commitment was missing.

Nick communicated his ambivalence with the word 'family' feeling that this was already too emotive while conceding that all kids are part of a family.

Nigel questioned the breadth of the unit, asking whether the word 'relationships' was too broad. Denise advised that it needed to make sense to the pupils in the class.

Claire remarked that this would look different to each child, to which Shaun added that there was a journey being made through the unit.

In response to a question by Councillor Britton, Luke clarified that the age group being targeted was seven to eleven year olds. Denise further clarified that KS1 was the group they were looking at, which Councillor Britton remarked was significant, adding that 'family' needed definition.

Denise explained that this was about a family celebration and activities that took place in a place of worship including celebrating with the wider faith community.

Luke suggested that weddings be used as a base and then built around, rather than starting again. He felt that there was positive content in the existing document. Nigel added that he felt it had a clear focus, being both doable and interesting.

When asked why the Weddings Unit had become of concern, Denise explained that since the units was written gay marriage has become accepted but that resistance to gay marriage by some faith and belief communities had led to questions about how this unit might be more difficult to teach.

Councillor Paschoud remarked that everyone is in a family but that weddings was more abstract. She expressed doubt that same sex marriage would be avoided by merely not calling the unit 'weddings'.

Shaun added that it would be wrong to avoid these issues, but that commitment needed to be central to this.

Nick Rothon suggested that, from his experience, children aren't as judgemental, to which Shaun added that classes are often considered a safe space.

Juliet suggested that commitment, or possibly 'celebrating love and commitment' was a better option than 'families' or 'weddings'

Luke expressed a concern about the use of broad headings when the substance was fairly focussed.

Councillor Britton suggested the question 'What makes a family?'

Nigel suggested 'What is a wedding?' Shaun suggested 'How do families celebrate commitment' was good, with Councillor Britton further suggesting 'Wedding ceremonies'.

With regard to Section 3 (Weddings within the Christian tradition, Councillor Britton remarked that Christianity doesn't equate to the Protestant or Catholic traditions but encompasses all of the other Christian groups.

Nigel raised the question "Who are the key people in the family?". He suggested that Section 1 was about what the family was, and Section 2 was 'who are the people around my family, and how do you identify these people who give it permanence'.

Councillor Paschoud expressed her difficulty with the idea of permanence, to which Nigel suggested that 'permanence' be left out, focussing instead on the key people.

Luke reminded that committee of the importance of not making value judgements. Shaun added that there was also a need to be sensitive to those whose parents were married but the marriage had broken down. Kim added that there would also be those whose parents' relationship breaks down over the course of these sessions.

Councillor Paschoud suggested that the theme of weddings actually appears safer than other themes that could be used. She recounted an experience of a boy being happy to discuss potentially difficult matters objectively but finding talking about his own experiences more difficult.

Claire remarked that it was for teachers to deliver these subjects sensitively, and that children will offer as much or as little as they feel comfortable with, speaking either from their own experiences or in the third person.

Juliet comments that falling in love was missing. Denise replied that there was a bit on talking about love, noting that young children's language about love is more sophisticated than before; Juliet added that children were talking about love in the playground.,

Councillor Britton suggested the following format:

- 1 What is family
- 2 Who are the important people
- 3 Why does this happen?
- 4 & 5 Different types of commitment ceremonies
- 6 How does it work?

Juliet expressed a struggle with the RE dimension of this. Denise replied that currently it was about what the different ceremonies have in common. Nigel reiterated that it needs to have an RE/beliefs focus.

Luke suggested than an approach may be how the relationships in one's family reflect on their relationships with others and the wider world.

Councillor Britton prompted the committee to think about what they want the children to emerge from these lessons knowing that they didn't know before.

Nigel offered that they want children to have a secure place. Shaun suggested that it was about what physically happens in ceremonies and what happens underneath that (the inner meaning for a believer).

Councillor Paschoud stated that the committee was missing the view that most faiths and beliefs feel that a long-term stable unit is a good thing, opining that people were often scared to express this. She added that that is to be admired and aimed for, and that the idea that commitment is a good thing is what the committee should be trying to teach the children.

Nigel added that wedding ceremonies are trying to do this.

Denise suggested that this could then be expanded upon to explain that promises are made but not always kept.

Referring to a couple who had only met ten days before they were married, Nigel suggested that helpful questions were, 'who creates this' and 'what is needed to produce this'.

Luke added that the role in families and the role of the child were significant also.

Claire reminded the committee that some of the learners would be just five years old.

In an attempt to conclude, Councillor Britton suggested that 'what happens and what it means' was the answer, proposing a reversion to what existed before but possibly expanded.

Denise explained that the unit would have included a research project whereby children would look for the commonalities in different ceremonies.

Luke suggested that, rather than being told 'here are the three to consider', the children should be allowed to choose which three beliefs they look into.

Councillor Britton then asked the committee to split into two groups, each looking at the six questions based on 'what happens and what does it means'.

At 7.55pm Bala left the meeting.

Juliet took the Chair and summarised that the ASC would stick with the weddings unit but made more inclusive. Shaun added that themes such as the promises people make would be included.

Nigel suggested the concrete concepts, such as 'this is a Hindu wedding' needed to be included also.

Councillor Paschoud commented on the topicality of intergeneration themes, and added that there was nothing to stop that being included also.

Luke commented that Humanism should be included, while Denise commented that in Buddhism, there was no common practice making the identification of standard practices difficult.

Nigel suggested that Section 6, "What do we know about weddings" should be earlier.

Luke suggested that sections 2 and 6 be swapped. Juliet added that Section 1 ('What special times have we shared with others') needed work.

Councillor Paschoud suggested that, although this was fairly 'wishy-washy', talking about how one celebrates things through life isn't a bad idea. Nigel added that positioning life stages such as starting school etc. on a developmental timeline sounded like a good idea, although Karen cautioned that this was a PHSE lesson.

There was considerable discussion with many ideas being suggested then a general discussion on Special times.

The group concluded that they wished to return to the original unit with some additions / amendments.

There was a possibility to exchange Session 6 with Session 2, and that session 3 would be an overview. Where the current document specifies two taught lessons on Christian weddings, with a visit to a church in the middle, Juliet questioned whether this visit was needed. Nick suggested that the visit was an alternative to inviting a minister into school. Denise commented that the visit adds valuable realism.

He questioned how many sessions were needed and how many religions/beliefs were needed to be looked at. Denise replied that one faith, in addition to Christianity, would be looked at, but that the same questions would pertain to all of the faiths. The unit could be expanded to a wider research project with more options. Members were in approval. Luke remarked that he'd like to see a humanist option included.

Nigel reiterated that the spiritual dimension should be evident in the units.

Denise commented that love and commitment were currently in sessions 3 and 4. Nigel added that these could be reinforced at session 6.

The group will revisit this .