

MERTON STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Minutes of the SACRE meeting held at 6.30pm on Tuesday 23 July 2024

At the Shree Ghanapathy Temple, 125-133 Effra Rd, London SW19 8PU

Present:

Group A	Christian, Other Faiths and Beliefs	
Mr John Carter	Humanism	JC
Ms Kamontip Evans	Buddhism	KE
Group B	Church of England SDBE	
Ms Rachael Norman		RN
Revd David Pennells	Vicar, St Peter and St Paul's, Mitcham	DP
Group C	Teacher Associations	
Mr Dimos Kechagias	RE Teacher, Co-opted	DK
Group D	Local Authority	
Cllr Laxmi Attawar	Councillor	LA
Cllr Klaar Dresselaers	Councillor	KD
In attendance		
Keith Shipman	LA Adviser; Education Inclusion Head of Service, Merton	KS
Mrs Shelley Ward	Guest, representing Free Churches	SW

The meeting was quorate, as at least one member from each Group was present.

1. Welcome

Chair GM welcomed the SACRE members and guest Mrs Shelley Ward, prospective SACRE member for Free Churches: GM said there would be a guided tour of the Shree Ghanapathy Temple after the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

There were apologies from Clare Dudman, Usaama Kaweesa, Ro Maybury, Mike Freedman and Waleed Ahmad. Farrukh Ahmed was absent. All apologies were accepted.

3. SACRE administration

Vacancies

DP had been nominated by the Anglican Diocese of Southwark to fill the Group B Church of England vacancy on the Council. KS also said that Church of England member the Revd Andrew Williams would be stepping down from SACRE due to ill

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health. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Southwark had not yet responded to queries regarding the RC vacancy. The clerk would follow this up. **ACTION**

There had been no response from the NEU or the NASUWT regarding Group C teacher vacancies. At the February 20 SACRE meeting, the members had agreed that teacher recruitment should be raised at an RE subject leaders' training meeting. Three subject leaders' meetings had now been organised for autumn: these would be held online. It had been agreed that the Chair or Vice-chair could attend to explain more about SACRE's work and encourage attendees to fill the vacancies: KS reminded all SACRE Members that they were welcome to attend the RE teachers' meetings. **ACTION**
KS had contacted new RE Adviser Ian Nicholson, replacing Penny Smith-Orr, to organise the meetings and would ask IN to attend to explain the role teaching representatives play on SACREs. The Clerk would circulate dates and meeting links. **ACTION**

Cllr Usaama Kaweesa had stepped down from SACRE following his appointment to the position of Cabinet Member for Children's Services. KS would advise the LA regarding a replacement Group D member. **ACTION**

4. Minutes from the SACRE meeting on 20.02.24

The Minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

5. Actions from the SACRE meeting on 20.02.24

Action 1 – The Action was complete: the clerk had circulated contact details for Merton Local Area Designated Officer John Shelley.

Action 2 – SACRE members' attendance at RE subject leaders' meetings had been discussed at Item 3, above.

Action 3 – The Year 12 Interfaith Dialogue Project students had not visited Abbotsbury school to meet its Cultural Ambassadors. JC said he had visited the school and spoken to the children involved: he had been impressed by their knowledge. KS reminded the SACRE members that the programme had now involved two cohorts at Abbotsbury, and was how the pupils ensured that children from all religious and cultural backgrounds felt part of the school. KS said he would contact the Head Teacher at Abbotsbury with a view to including this in the ID Project programme in 2024-25. **ACTION**

Action 4 – SACRE had wished to find out how many hours of RE were taught at Raynes Park Secondary School, as it appeared to be taught only through drop-down days. KS had contacted the school and found it had undergone a major change of RE personnel and policy since spring. RE had been taught in conjunction with History, but the Head Teacher had said this was no longer the case and that a new head of RE would be starting in September, with a new RE timetable. She said the school would be delighted to welcome SACRE to visit the department.

Q – Do they need any support?

A – In the Syllabus Review Actions from the February 20 SACRE meeting, we agreed to ask the three Merton secondary schools that must use the Merton SACRE syllabus if they would like to participate in the syllabus review. We also agreed to invite the Harris academies, which I have done. I have two people coming from Raynes Park, two from Rutlish, and DK from Ricards Lodge, so we have a supportive meeting set up. As far as we know, Harris Morden does use the syllabus, but we don't know about Harris Merton or Wimbledon: we await their reply.

Q – Are the academies less likely to reply to your e-mails about the syllabus? This is an awkward issue because as a committee, despite our statutory responsibility and accountability for RE under the law, it's as if we don't quite know where we stand with some schools.

A – I have written to the HTs to ask them if it is used. In my wider role in Inclusion, I have conversations with the Harris academies about pupils, but on issues like this, where a

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school does not have to follow the syllabus, I don't know if it has one. My understanding is that the responsibility in an academy lies in its agreement with the DfE: this says what it must deliver. Different schools became academies at different times and so have different letters of agreement with the DfE: what they must deliver varies and they are not answerable to the LA in same way as maintained schools. It's an unclear picture, as the Ofsted RE Report, which we will discuss during the meeting, says.

Action 5 – The action was open: MF had e-mailed to say he would follow up organisation of the Jewish Living Experience exhibition in autumn term. **ACTION**

Action 6 – Interfaith Dialogue Project – the Action had been discussed at Action 3, page 2, above.

Action 7 – The Action was complete: KS said that the Israel-Palestine Dialogue Training Day materials had been circulated earlier that day.

Action 8 – SACRE visits to school Faith Assemblies: details of schools that would welcome visits from SACRE members had been circulated. KE had attended an assembly at Holy Trinity Primary School. The assembly had discussed showing kindness to refugees and also the spirit of the forthcoming Olympics: KE said it had been a beautiful assembly. RN had carried out Statutory Inspections at Priory and Bishop Gilpin as part of her job. She said assemblies at these and at St Mark's were secure. The Priory had been e-mailed but had not responded: KS suggested trying again, asking for the message to be directed to the Head Teacher. Harris Morden and Harris Merton's primary school had invited SACRE to attend an assembly: GM would contact Harris Merton Primary in September. She said she had given a workshop on Hinduism and meditation to Years 7 and 8 at Harris Morden. **ACTION**

Action 9 – The action was complete: photographs from Year 12 Interfaith Dialogue Project events had been circulated to members, with several included in the Merton SACRE Annual Report.

Action 10 – Check process for LA approval of the redrafted SACRE syllabus with Merton Council's Legal department: KS had one more question to ask the LA legal department regarding the correct process for the proposed SACRE syllabus redraft: he would check this detail and report back to the Chair.

Syllabus revision actions

Action 1 – The Action was complete: the SACRE members had approved the retention of the Merton Agreed RE Syllabus for another five years.

Action 2 – The Action was in progress: the SACRE members had agreed that the primary RE curriculum would be adapted to include units on Humanism, Sikhism and Buddhism. JC would produce the Humanism unit, DK the Sikhism unit and KE the Buddhism unit. KE said she had a set of slides on Buddhism which could be used to teach at KS1 level. **SYLLABUS REVIEW ACTION**

KS reminded the members that in addition to this work, SACRE had agreed to make sure the syllabus acknowledged the diversity within religious traditions, adding more on denominations and varying beliefs within faiths. GM would review the Hinduism section as part of this exercise. **SYLLABUS REVIEW ACTION**

Action 3 – Establish a sub-committee to produce the additional units – the members agreed that this would be JC, GM, KE and DK, with contributions from other members. It was agreed that the sub-committee would meet at Ricards Lodge school, hosted by DK, at a date to be arranged. **SYLLABUS REVIEW ACTION**

Actions 4 and 5 – KS said that these Actions went together: the members had agreed to re-read the existing secondary units in the syllabus with a view to introducing more comparative teaching on denominations within faiths. They had also agreed to introduce a mandatory secondary unit on Humanism. As discussed at Item 5, page 2, above, they would meet with the teachers teaching the syllabus to talk to them about what worked in the secondary syllabus and what they might like to change about it.

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6. Matters arising from the meeting on 20.04.2024 not covered in the minutes

There were no matters arising.

7. Merton SACRE annual report 2022-23

KS said that he had included the Mayor's event for former SACRE member Saleem Sheikh in the report, although this had not taken place within its timespan, as he wanted to commemorate the occasion as soon as possible. He drew the members' attention to the section reporting on the Interfaith Dialogue Project events and locations, with photographs. He said that different students appeared in almost every photograph and that the inconsistent attendance was due to the pressures on 6th form students, which included exams, work experience and trips.

Q – How do students join the project?

KS said he e-mailed HTs and heads of 6th form, then followed these e-mails up with calls: the major administration issue was reaching and making contact with the students, but once they knew about the programme, they wanted to be involved. In 2022-23 there had been students from Ursuline, St Mark's and Wimbledon College. In the present year, students had come from Ricards Lodge, Raynes Park and St Mark's.

The Abbotsbury Primary School Year 6 Cultural Ambassadors project had also been included in the Report.

KS said he had included Ofsted's comments on RE at particular Merton schools where available.

Regarding the 2022-23 RE GCSE results, KS said there two things to note. Fewer students, 70% of Year 11 pupils, had sat the exam, a fall from 87% in 2021-22. He said that this percentage was nonetheless quite high compared with the national figures. He said that the reduction might be due to Merton schools no longer teaching a short GCSE RE course. Some schools, such as Harris Morden, also taught RE as an optional course. Harris Academy in Wimbledon had been teaching Year 11 for the first time in that year and might also be offering optional RE.

However, KS said the GCSE results were a very good story, particularly where schools were entering all students, with lots of high grades awarded.

In terms of A levels, the numbers entered were very low, although A-level entries had risen from 25 to 31. Those students studying philosophy also covered religion and ethics as part of their course.

There had been no determinations regarding collective worship.

The members thanked KS for his work on the report: JC pointed out that Merton consistently produces an Annual Report, whereas many SACREs did not. He said that the report would be analysed by NASACRE, and the results would be used to decide how SACREs would be financed.

The members discussed the question of finance. JC said that accountability and commitment could be problematic, as money allocated to SACREs was not always spent as it should be. He said this varied from borough to borough and while Merton SACRE was well supported, this was not the case everywhere.

Q – What are the finance issues?

A – There is a block of money specifically allocated for the running of SACREs, but we don't see it because of the way different authorities choose to divide and allocate it.

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Q – Can we ask for the financial situation to be explained to us?

A – SACRE is listed as one of the duties of a Local Authority so it comes under the grant the LA receives, but this is an unspecified amount – NASACRE has a formula to say what this should be, though I have never seen a figure: I can ask. **ACTION**

A – Money is particularly required when you revise a syllabus, as you need money to fund research, design and printing, and it absolutely has to be available in order to pull people together to work on the revision.

A – It's interesting that we don't know.

A – In Merton, the funding has historically been spent on the LA's SACRE co-ordinator, on the RE adviser, on the clerk and on the cost of keeping the SACRE page on the Merton Council website updated. When we last revised the syllabus, we budgeted ahead, as this involved a huge amount of work and we knew we would need money for printing and production costs and to support meetings and conferences, as well as extra funding for the clerk, as there was lots of proofreading. I could amend the Annual Report with a paragraph explaining this.

The members agreed.

ACTION

KS said that SACRE had agreed that the Chair and Vice-chair would meet the Director of Children's Services annually to present and discuss the Report. He said that this would be new Executive Director Beverley Hendricks.

ACTION

The report would be amended with the new paragraph on SACRE finance and the updated Merton Council logo, and would be sent to NASACRE.

ACTION

8. Ofsted Religious Education subject report, April 2024

The members discussed the report.

Q – The report is fascinating regarding laying the right foundation and building on existing learning, so you receive a benefit when you go into the subject matter later on.

A – Ofsted's position is that curriculum should be incremental, though this report reads quite negatively. It asks if RE teaching gives children sufficient knowledge to navigate their way through a multi-faith and belief world, and the answer it gives is "no." However, the question regarding the syllabus is "Could it?" Is there enough time in the syllabus to achieve this? Ofsted is right in saying that where we are isn't good enough, but if this report concerned any other subject, such as History or Geography, could everything they recommend be implemented? It looks unlikely. Also, the report does not seem to recognise that RE has a different role from other subjects, in that it reflects all the children in a class, which probably isn't so much the case in other subjects. I could not find a reference to the way in which RE reflects and supports the beliefs of children with any or no faith background in a community.

A – In terms of Ofsted methodology, Ofsted doesn't do RE deep dives unless it chooses a research school, and it probably excluded faith schools, which follow their own curriculum. So if it used entirely non-faith schools, this would have affected the results.

A – One of the things I have enjoyed most about SACRE membership has been attending digital conferences together with other SACRE members and with Ofsted representatives. At these, the RE community comes together and says: this is what we want from RE, but although the will, knowledge and documentation are there, leadership has not happened.

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A – The role of SACREs in determining the RE syllabus locally is mentioned on page 8 of the report, which acknowledges the complexity of the system given the increase in multi-academy trusts. The new government is also trying to decide what it wants to do regarding academisation.

Q – Should SACREs be saying this to Government?

A – Yes, would be something to say to the say to Director when we meet, as this is a messy situation: there is a national RE curriculum that academies don't have to follow. We could lobby politically. What has worked previously on other issues is having an MP who wants to champion the subject, and then getting it into a Private Members' bill.

The members noted that the role of the Secretary of State for Housing and Communities normally includes responsibility for faith engagement: the current Minister is Angela Rayner.

9. The Religious Education Council's Religion and Worldviews approach to RE toolkit

A new worldviews-based tool kit for curriculum writers had been launched earlier in the year and was available at <https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/rwapproach>. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the next SACRE meeting. **ACTION**

10. Merton SACRE Syllabus review

KS reminded the members of the decisions taken at the 20 February meeting. He said that if SACRE had decided to create a completely new syllabus, a conference would have been needed. However, as only certain areas of the syllabus were being changed, he did not think a conference would be necessary. He said that to ratify the revised syllabus, SACRE would have to recommend it to the Director of Children's Services for formal adoption in a Children's Services meeting.

He said that apart from the areas of content for revision, SACRE would need to consider elements of the Syllabus's design. He said that the Merton Council logo on the front cover would need to be updated and that SACRE might consider a change of colour for the cover. The members agreed to change this from purple to green. They further agreed to update the logos representing the religions in Merton where necessary and to change the arrangement of the logos so that these were laid out in a circular rather than a hierarchical design. Chair GM would also write a new introductory letter.

KS reminded members that the previous meeting had agreed to add units, produced over a period of time.

DK said that even revision would take some time: he had begun the section on Sikhism, but was still working on Key Stage 1.

Q – We had discussed approaching the syllabus slightly differently by using a comparative approach, rather than addressing religions as a simple progression of one religion after another. This would be quite a challenge in terms of curriculum design but might have more appeal when teaching younger children. Could we ask new RE adviser Ian Nicholson for his advice on this?

A – We could, but we would have to pay for his services.

Q – There is also the question that if we put something new in, what has to come out?

A – That might not be such a problem, as we do have space for additional units.

Q – From pages 15-20, the syllabus has a section featuring an amazing data-based review of religions in Merton – will this not need updating?

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A – Yes – the Resources section on page 176 will also need to be checked to make sure these and the web links are still current and correct.

RN volunteered for this task.

SYLLABUS REVIEW ACTION

The members discussed the Syllabus revision process and agreed that a representative from each religion would check the relevant pages for their faith, from page 150-on, to check if the teaching resources were still up to date and to amend these where necessary. The members agreed they would read their sections and feed back amendments before the next meeting on 12 November 2024.

SYLLABUS REVIEW ACTION

KS reminded members that hard copies were available from his office at the Civic Centre. They further agreed that as SACRE leaders would be meeting secondary RE leaders in September, as discussed on page 2 of the Minutes, they could ask about any particular things the teachers would like to see included in the syllabus.

SYLLABUS REVIEW ACTION

11. SACRE members' school visits

This had been discussed at Item 5, Action 8, on page 3 above.

12. Year 12 Interfaith Dialogue Project

DK said that as the project had been so successful that it would be good to try to recruit more students for 2024-25.

Q – Have you interviewed previous students for feedback?

A – Yes, we have statements from previous students, which we use for recruitment: we have had recruits who have joined following recommendations from older students.

KS asked the SACRE members who had been involved in the 2023-24 project for their feedback and the members discussed the project.

Q – I would be happy to go to schools to talk about the project.

Q – We can use the autumn meetings with the RE leads to engage pupils from schools that have not previously been involved.

Q – Do pupils do recorded interviews? We do video interviews with older children leaving our Sunday School and play these on our YouTube channel.

A – I think the most important thing is getting the adults to pass the information on to the children: once they know about it they want to do it. The other problem is maintaining a consistent group – mock exams, trips and work experience mean that we have to accept that we the whole group will not be able to attend every time.

Q – A number of students interested in Sikhism requested that we include a visit to a Gurdwara, though this would have to be in Tooting or Wandsworth, as there is no Gurdwara in Merton.

KS said he would set dates for 2024-25, including a scheduled meeting of the IF Students and the Abbotsbury Cultural Ambassadors, and circulate these. **ACTION**

13. NASACRE training and updates

KS encouraged the SACRE members to make the most of the training webinars on offer on the NASACRE website. He also said that RE Hubs www.re-hubs.uk was also a source of useful local RE information and resources.

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14. Any Other Business

SACRE member Mike Freedman had forwarded resources, including at PDF to support teaching Judaism, from the Board of Jewish Deputies: the clerk had circulated these.

15. Dates and venues for 2024-2025 meetings

Tuesday 12 November 2024, Raynes Park School, 5.30pm

Tuesday 25 February 2025, Mitcham Parish Church, 6.30pm

Tuesday 1 July 2025, venue and time to be agreed

Tuesday 4 November 2025, venue and time to be agreed

GM thanked everyone for their attendance. The meeting ended at 8.00pm.

Approved.....

Date.....

Geetha Maheshwaran, Chair

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Summary of Actions from the Merton SACRE meeting on 23 July 2024

Action	ref	description	by	date
1	1	Contact RCAOS to follow up sourcing of a Roman Catholic member for Group A.	Clerk	ASAP
2	2	Introduce Merton SACRE and raise the NEU and NASUWT vacancies at three online RE subject leaders' training meetings: invite new RE adviser Ian Nicholson to explain the role.	Chair/Vice-chair/All members	Autumn 2024
3	2.2	Circulate dates and links for autumn RE subject leaders' training meetings.	Clerk	ASAP
4	2.3	Advise Local Authority regarding recruitment of a new Group D Labour Councillor to SACRE.	KS	ASAP
5	2.4	Contact the Head Teacher at Abbotsbury Primary School to set a date for a meeting of the Abbotsbury Primary School Cultural Ambassadors with the Year 12 Interfaith Dialogue Project students.	KS	ASAP
6	3	Follow up organisation of the Judaism Living exhibition in the Merton Chaucer Centre in autumn 2024: organise volunteers and school visits.	MF/ KS	ASAP
7	3.2	Continue to contact schools on circulated list to arrange SACRE members' attendance at faith assemblies.	All members	Autumn 2024
8	4	Ask LA for an explanation of how Merton SACRE is funded.	KS	12 Nov 2024
9	5	Add a paragraph to the 2022-23 Annual Report outlining how SACRE funding is spent.	KS	ASAP
10	5.2	Meet new Executive Director of Children's Services for Merton, Beverley Hendricks, to present and discuss the Annual Report.	GM/JC/KS	ASAP
11	5.3	Send amended Annual Report to NASACRE.	Clerk	ASAP
12	6	Discuss REC's Religion and Worldviews toolkit at next SACRE meeting.	All members	12 Nov 2024
13	7	Set and circulate dates for Interfaith Dialogue Project events in 2024-25.	KS	ASAP
Action	ref	Syllabus review Actions	by	date
1	3	Produce primary RE syllabus units on Humanism, Sikhism and Buddhism.	JC/DK/KE	12 Nov 2024
2	3	Adapt existing secondary units to enable more comparative teaching on diversity and varying beliefs within faiths: review Hinduism unit as part of this exercise.	Sub-committee members/GM	12 Nov 2024
3	3	Syllabus review sub-committee to meet at Ricards Lodge School to discuss production of the additional units.	JC/KE/GM/DK	ASAP

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4	7	Organise update of pp.15-20, the data-based review of religions in Merton, in the Merton RE Syllabus.	KS	ASAP
5	7	Check Resources content on p.76 of the Merton RE Syllabus and update where necessary.	RN	ASAP
6	7.2	Check the relevant pages for each faith, p.150-on, to ensure the teaching resources are still up to date. Feed these and any other amendments back to the Syllabus sub-committee before the 12 November meeting.	Relevant SACRE faith representatives	ASAP
7	7.3	Ask teachers attending RE subject leaders' autumn meetings what they would like to see included in the Syllabus.	GM/JC/all members	Autumn 2024

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Appendix A – Merton SACRE members as at 23 July 2024

Group	Name	Initials	Title/organisation	Start date
A	Ms Kamontip Evans	KE	Buddhism	6.7.21
	VACANCY		Free Churches	
	Mrs Geetha Maheshwaran	GM	Hinduism	Pre-2016
	Mr John Carter	JC	Humanism	6.7.21
	Mr Farrukh Ahmed	FA	Islam	27.06.23
	Mr Mike Freedman	MF	Judaism	Pre-2016
	VACANCY		Roman Catholic Church	
	VACANCY			
	Mr Waleed Ahmad	WA	Ahmadiyya Muslim Association	4.10.16
B	Revd. David Pennells	DP	Church of England	11.07. 24
	VACANCY		Church of England	10.10.17
	Ms Rachael Norman	MC	Church of England	11.2.20
C	VACANCY		NEU	
	Mr Dimos Kechagias	DK	Co-opted	21.03.23
	VACANCY		NASUWT	
	Ms Ro Maybury	RM	NAHT	6.7.21
D	Cllr Laxmi Attawar	LA	Councillor	Pre-2016
	Cllr Klaar Dresselaers	KD	Councillor	5.07.22
	VACANCY	UK		

Groups

A - Christian, Other Faiths & Beliefs

B - Church of England

C - Teacher Associations

D - Local Authority