Minutes of the SACRE meeting held at 6.30pm on Tuesday 20 February 2024 At Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, SM4 5DX

Present:

Group A	Christian, Other Faiths and Beliefs	
Mr John Carter	Humanism	JC
Mr Mike Freedman	Judaism	MF
Mr Waleed Ahmad	Ahmadiyya Muslim Association	WA
Ms Kamontip Evans	Buddhism	KE
Group B	Church of England SDBE	
Ms Rachael Norman		RN
Group C	Teacher Associations	
Mr Dimos Kechagias	RE Teacher, Co-opted	DK
Group D	Local Authority	
Group D Cllr Laxmi Attawar	Local Authority Councillor	LA
•	•	LA KD
Cllr Laxmi Attawar	Councillor	
Cllr Laxmi Attawar Cllr Klaar Dresselaers	Councillor	
Cllr Laxmi Attawar Cllr Klaar Dresselaers In attendance	Councillor Councillor LA Adviser; Education Inclusion Head of	KD
Cllr Laxmi Attawar Cllr Klaar Dresselaers In attendance Keith Shipman	Councillor Councillor LA Adviser; Education Inclusion Head of Service, Merton Vicar, St Peter and St Paul's Church,	KD

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

1. Welcome by Vice-chair Mr John Carter

JC, standing in for Chair GM, welcomed the SACRE members and guest Fr David Pennells, Vicar of Mitcham Parish Church. He also welcomed Mr Ranjith Ratnasingham, who was deputising for GM.

2. <u>Presentation by John Shelley, Local Area Designated Officer for the London Borough of Merton</u>

JS talked to the members about the role, functions and range of powers of the LADO and described the department's activities in Merton. He said the department was keen to hold more multi-faith briefings and encouraged representatives to contact him to organise one of these. He said that every religious organisations should have an effective child protection policy and safeguarding procedures in place, even if it perceived that it had minimal contact with children. He said he wanted to be able to identify and link with Designated Safeguarding Leads in different faith groups and explained that it was a statutory requirement for youth groups to have a DSL, whose training should be kept up to date, and who should be in regular contact with the Local Authority. JS's PowerPoint slides included links to useful policy and procedures templates provided by the NSPCC. It also included contact details for the Merton LADO and MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) departments, as well as to free training courses and materials, including a brochure on ensuring after-school clubs and activities for children were safe. The slides were circulated to all members following the meeting.

JS thanked the members for listening: the SACRE members thanked JS, discussed his presentation and asked several questions.

Q – Regarding your point that you are not getting a lot of referrals from faith groups, it that a small percentage?

A – Yes – most referrals involve past abuse. Apart from these, last year we probably had about eight or nine referrals from faith groups, out of 360.

Q – Do you have any sense that there are certain areas that are off the radar regarding adequate safeguarding coverage?

A – For me, it's about knowing what's out there – knowing who the DSLs are for faith organisations, then bringing people round the table and making sure that people understand their responsibilities. Not all groups have a formal safeguarding structure, so it's not necessarily clear who you involve. So all groups need to ask themselves: do you have a DSL?

RR said that at the temple there was a Designated Safeguarding Lead and a deputy. All members of the management team had safeguarding training. The temple had a written safeguarding policy and procedures which were reviewed annually. It had a retained legal advisor for safeguarding. Safeguarding matters were reviewed as part of management team meetings. All of the temple's teachers had DBS or Enhanced DBS certificates. He was not sure about other organisations in the same faith, but the temple was very structured in what it did.

KS said that in his experience he had found the LADO department and its clear process very useful for resolving problems involving tricky or long-term allegations.

JS said that the Merton LADO offered training quarterly and would be happy to organise a bespoke multi-faith training session. He said that MSCP (Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership) training was also available at any time via the website www.mertonscp.org.uk/training/ and that anyone could sign up for this.

KS thanked JS for his very valuable presentation and asked the SACRE members to pass the contact details for their safeguarding leads on to the clerk for forwarding to JS.

ACTION

This part of the meeting ended at 7.00pm.

3. Apologies for absence

There were apologies from Usaama Kaweesa, Geetha Maheshwaran, Ro Maybury and Farrukh Ahmed. All were accepted.

4. **SACRE Committee administration**

Committee vacancies

DP was in the process of being nominated by Southwark Church of England Diocese to fill the Group B Church of England vacancy on the Committee: RN said it was expected that he would be adopted in the position at a meeting of the Schools Committee on 7 March. Ro Maybury had not heard from the potential Free Churches candidate. KS said that he had not heard from Church of England member The Revd Andrew Williams for some time: RN and DP said they would try to contact him. The clerk had contacted Sharon Doherty at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Southwark regarding the RC vacancy and would follow this up. There had been no response from the NEU or the NASUWT. The members agreed that teaching union recruitment could be raised at one of the RE teachers' sessions: at the next RE teachers' meeting School Improvement Adviser Ewan Morrison could explain the role teaching representatives play on SACREs and ask if anyone might be interested in filling the vacancies. It was agreed that the Chair or Vice chair could attend to explain more about SACRE's work. Members were welcome to attend all RE teachers' meetings. KS would contact EM to organise a meeting.

ACTIONS

Four-yearly review of the SACRE constitution

The Merton SACRE Constitution had last been reviewed in 2020: the recommendation stated in the Constitution was that it should be reviewed every four years. The 2020 constitution had been amended to stipulate the number of Church of England representatives in Group 3. The SACRE members discussed the Constitution and agreed that no changes, apart from that of the review date, were currently necessary. They approved the Constitution.

Remembering Rodney Kay-Kreizman

The members remembered Rodney Kay-Kreizman, NUT member of Merton SACRE for many years, who had recently died at 88. JC said he had been a teacher at Rutlish school and had been a very energetic and engaged contributor, as well as being a talented violinist and a committed left-winger.

5. Minutes from the SACRE meeting on 14.11.23

The Minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

6. Actions from the SACRE meeting on 14.11.23

<u>Action 1</u> – The Action was complete: DK's presentation on RE at Ricards Lodge had been circulated.

Action 2 – The Actions were complete and had been discussed at item 4.

Action 3 – It was not known if the Abbotsbury school Cultural Ambassadors had visited Wimbledon Temple. The members agreed to continue to support the programme: KS reminded everyone there was an open invitation to visit the Cultural Ambassadors' events and meetings.

ACTION

Action 4 – KS asked the members to note that Rachel Bowerman had now left the service. The new Head of School Improvement was Clare Dudman, who would attend a future meeting of Merton SACRE. The Council had been particularly interested in discovering the hours of RE taught at Raynes Park Secondary School as the agreed syllabus appeared to be taught only though drop-down days. It was agreed that the Chair should write directly to the school to ask how RE teaching was achieved. ACTION Action 5 – The action was open: the members discussed the Judaism exhibition and agreed that it should go ahead. KS and MF said that the exhibition, which had been created by the Board of Deputies, would have to be booked and volunteers arranged to

staff it and act as guides. He said that while Wimbledon would struggle to provide enough volunteers to cover the period of the exhibition, Kingston and Sutton synagogues might be able to help. MF would contact Education Officer Anna Silver at the Board of Deputies to check when the exhibition was available. A summer term booking now looked likely. KS would book the Chaucer Centre, close to several local schools, once dates were known.

ACTION

<u>Action 6</u> – The issue of SACRE visits to faith assemblies was on the Agenda and would be discussed at Item 8.

Action 7 – Year 12 Interfaith Project visit to Abbotsbury school – the action was open: KS said he would discuss dates for the visit, scheduled for summer 2024, with the Head Teacher.

ACTION

Action 8 – A potential RE syllabus revision would be discussed at Item 10.

Action 9 – The Action was open: KS would send the National Citizens' Service Israel-Palestine dialogue training day materials to the clerk for circulation. He said that all Merton schools had received these materials as part of the weekly briefing sent to all Head Teachers.

ACTION

Q – Do you know how schools are dealing with this issue at the moment, with or without these resources?

A – It is an incredibly live subject for the children. We recently held a Children's Parliament here, for the Year 6 children, and it was the third-highest topic on the agenda for them. For the secondary schools, the issue is the way in which the children access a very narrow and repetitive set of information about what is going on in Gaza, though the lens of a social media algorithm. Mobile phones and social media bring things closer very quickly, heighten fears and tensions and bring conflict into classrooms, making things very difficult. Schools are having to help children to see what else is going on. It's not uncommon, from the conversations we've had, for the children not to know why the Israeli Army has gone into Gaza: they don't know anything at all about the October 7 Hamas attack.

A – At school we did have some reaction, but we managed this following DfE guidance on how to approach sensitive topics. We met with the heads of History, RE, Sociology, Geography and the HT and mapped where in the curriculum we could have specific, fair discussions about the conflict in an appropriate way. We have a huge majority of Muslim students at the school, but very few Jewish students. However, we are not running away from it. We present both sides fairly to the students and they feel very supported. We have Muslim and Jewish RE ambassadors at school and they are working very hard together for common ends. The students have had many questions, some very challenging, but we have given them space and encouraged them to ask anything they wanted to. The team of subject specialists responded really well and it was very beneficial to students; they learned a lot.

A – School is really important at this time, as it gives young people the space to think things through. It's difficult for all of us to understand, but school plays a crucial role. Some 6th formers have gone on protests in central London. Others have channeled that need to do something by volunteering for charities.

Q – Has there been any more news from the Synagogue about how people are feeling?

A – No, the sense is that there is quite a range of feelings and, as in all communities, whatever the issue, the more difficult the issue, the more variety there is in the way people think about it. Probably the majority are very pro-Israel but very unhappy about the way things have happened, but it's not something you talk about much – talking about it leads to arguments. In terms of it being a religious community, the conflict is not a religious issue and does not get rolled into the religious side.

7. <u>Matters arising from the meeting on 14.11.23 not covered in the minutes</u> There were no matters arising.

8. SACRE members' visits to schools

Three schools, Ricards Lodge, Benedict Academy and Abbotsbury Primary School, had responded to an e-mail from KS to say they would like to welcome SACRE members to observe faith assemblies and RE lessons. Two secondary schools had said that autumn would be more convenient for a visit than spring or summer, as school halls would be in use for exams then and assemblies would be held online. KS was happy for members to contact schools directly. The SACRE members discussed how to proceed. DK suggested that SACRE contact one of Ricards' feeder schools, Bishop Gilpin CoE Primary School. WA agreed to visit Benedict with KE and would contact the school to arrange this. DK would contact and visit another of Ricards' feeder schools. KE would visit Ricards Lodge. RN said she would be visiting a Bishop Gilpin assembly on behalf of the CoE so could combine this with a SACRE visit. JC would arrange a visit to Merton Park primary. DP would organise a visit after he had been approved as a Merton SACRE member in early March.

9. Year 12 Interfaith project

KS said 20 students, 19 girls and one boy, were taking part in this year's project. The initial meeting had taken place at the Civic Centre. The students had then visited DP at St Peter and St Paul's Church in Mitcham, followed by a session on Humanism the Civic Centre and a visit to the Shree Ghanapathy Temple with SACRE Chair GM. KS said that most of that year's participants were from Raynes Park and St Mark's schools and that most were Hindu. Muslim and Christian, KS and JC agreed that the Humanism session had been very interesting. It was the first time they had asked the students to discuss Humanism: they had split into groups and rotated round the humanist representatives to hear their personal stories about how they had come to Humanism, some from backgrounds of faith. In the discussion afterwards the students said that talking to the delegates had been a very powerful experience and they had appreciated the opportunity to listen to people whom they would not normally have met. KS said they had also found the Hindu temple very beautiful and sensory. That session had also discussed questions about doubt and certainty. KS said that attendance had not been consistent – though this had not been entirely the students' fault - which had sometimes made things difficult. The students would visit the Ahmadiyya Mosque the following week.

KS said that the Interfaith project was becoming a natural part of what SACRE did, which was very positive. He said that DK had taken photographs of the sessions held so far and asked DK if he could send these to the clerk for circulation.

ACTION
KS said that following the session at the Ahmadiyya Mosque, the students would visit Wimbledon Synagogue, then the Buddhist temple.

10. Merton SACRE syllabus review

JC said the council had discussed a potential syllabus review at several previous meetings. KS said that members had been asked to read the Merton RE syllabus (available online or as hard copy) in preparation for the meeting, and also to refer to the Merton SACRE-commissioned 2023 schools syllabus survey, which had collected feedback about the syllabus and its use in local primary and secondary schools. KS said the syllabus was about 100 pages long and was formed of two parts, the Syllabus and accompanying Guidelines. He said the syllabus had been written over the years by SACRE and was very detailed compared to many used nationally. This version was a development of the previous version, with revisions going back around 15 years to the original.

KS said the Syllabus had last been updated in 2016-17, with added information and resources at the back, such as a guide on how to organise school RE trips, as well as a glossary of terms compiled by each faith group and a statement from each. The review had included an Ahmadiyya statement; a new unit on Humanism had also been added to the secondary syllabus.

In responses to the 2023 syllabus survey, schools had said they liked and used the Merton syllabus. They had said it gave them the confidence that they were not getting it wrong, but that they wanted some flexibility regarding how to use the units. Two primary schools had asked to be able to teach Buddhism: they were advised that they could, basing this on the content in the secondary syllabus.

KS said there was a national debate around this conventional type of syllabus, versus the worldviews type, which was potentially more issues-based. KS said he had still not seen an example of a worldviews syllabus.

JC said that there were various definitions of what a worldviews syllabus was, but his understanding was that it developed ideas on how individual perspectives, bias and prejudice influenced personal outlooks and beliefs.

Some of this had been discussed by the Commission on RE in 2018, but central government had not approved the incorporation of this approach.

JC said that it was now the law that a SACRE could not exclude a person with non-religious philosophical convictions. However, he said Merton SACRE had a very good record for cohesion, inclusivity and humanist representation at many levels, having had a Humanist on the council for a long time. He said the RE community was generally unified in that it wished to see representative, balanced syllabuses of religious and non-religious world views. However, most syllabuses were not balanced and not in conformity with the law since 2015, because most did not give equal footing to religious and non-religious world views. JC said that the Merton secondary syllabus had only a single, optional single KS3 unit for humanism, whereas in Hounslow, Humanism featured in the list of units from Early Years all the way up to KS4.

He said that the amount of work in producing a worldviews syllabus would be phenomenal and that it might almost a step too far, provided there was good teaching in good, specialist RE departments committed to a rounded curriculum and that this allowed young people to engage with the complexities of belief, avoided stereotyping and allowed them to contribute to an informed debate. He said that strictly speaking, the syllabus was not representative. However, in practice, it was, due to initiatives like those SACRE had been discussing that evening.

JC said that in this sense, the challenge was more a structural one. Merton's syllabus was a proper programme of study, only one level up from a lesson plan, and much more detailed than most he had been able to review. He said that as such it should be regarded with a certain amount of reverence and respect for the success it had had, as it made life so much easier for the teachers.

KS said that historically, Merton SACRE had written the syllabus for non-qualified teachers, particularly in primary, where specialist RE teachers were very rare. So the more specific SACRE was, the more reassured it could be that what was being taught was accurate. This level of detail was one reason why the Local Authority had decided to retain the SACRE syllabus. He said it was true that Sikhism and Buddhism were not represented in the primary syllabus, along with Humanism.

Q – One of the big challenges is the question of what has to go if Humanism, Sikhism and Buddhism are added?

- A The setup of a SACRE syllabus needs to be centred on faith groups existing in the community, and if that community has very few Sikhs and Buddhists, they slip down the priority list.
- A All advice is that SACRE has to take account of local demographics, not that it has to be proportionately representational.
- A The clever thing about SACREs is we have a way of developing the syllabus in response to any local demographic changes. It's a balance between representing local views and equality of representation. We have units though the Key Stages (such as Special People, Special places, Belonging, Creation, Identity and additional study units) where we could introduce the three additions. The other option would be to produce supplementary guidance to the directory, creating additional study units on Humanism, Sikhism and Buddhism.
- Q We could write some units, then ask schools to find way of putting them in, but this might slightly undermine quality. In Years 3 and 4, There are two terms that have no units: these are left free for schools to create their own as they think appropriate. We could fill those gaps by saying, here are two units we think should be in there. In some of the more generic units, it would be about giving suggestions about how they could teach Humanism, Sikhism and Buddhism by weaving them through these.
- A One thing we have discussed is to make sure the syllabus acknowledges the diversity within religious traditions as well as the sub-groups within traditions adding more on denominations within faiths.
- Q This is a huge amount of work is there any merit in producing units schools can choose to use only if they want to?
- A There are two terms with no units, so optional units could be included.
- Q I'm not happy, as this would not be dealing with each unit on an equal footing, which does have to be borne in mind. We do have the right to prescribe and we have to have regard to diversity of viewpoint.
- A There is also the danger that if the units are optional, schools might miss something out. From a teacher's point of view, I think that producing a supplement might be the best option. The survey said that people were happy with the syllabus, so we can add supplements to address and cover the issues.
- A-I would be happy with that. My only fear would be that it might risk slightly undermining the balance and excellence of the syllabus, as the question would be where to fit these in.
- Q To sum up the discussion so far, we don't want to make wholesale changes to the syllabus, but we would like to institute a programme of modification. It would not be feasible to produce several new units immediately, but we could produce an ongoing programme of updates which would satisfy the need to review the syllabus on a five-yearly rotation. To do this we would have to agree a method for a gradual process of modification.

A – So as a SACRE you are saying that after taking into account information from teachers and schools, you would like to endorse the syllabus as it is for the next five years. However, you do want to add new units to fill gaps, or rewrite elements in a rolling review. New units would have to be agreed by each of the four groups during a SACRE conference, which would be held during a SACRE meeting.

Q – Is there a point at which this also has to go to the Council for official approval? Would we have to do this every time we made a change?

A – SACRE recommends the Syllabus to the Local Authority. To agree the last review, we held a meeting at the Civic Centre. SACRE split into its four groups to agree the changes, then the Director of Education came in and SACRE submitted to them what had been agreed. It's in the power of the Director to approve any changes. However, a rolling review would need the same formal process for each review.

KS said he would check the process with the council's legal department. **ACTION**

KS said that the SACRE members would have to draw up a list of which units they wanted to look at and in what order or priority, and decide who would do this. He said it would also need to agree a method of work. During the previous review a sub-committee had written each unit. KS, together with the Chair, had been involved weekly in producing a rewrite. Each leader from each faith background had then had to endorse and agree that unit. KS said this was not straightforward, as it involved drafting and redrafting and took time.

The SACRE members agreed to look at Humanism and Buddhism first, as without a member for Sikhism, it would be more difficult to create this unit. They agreed to create addendums on Humanism, Sikhism and Buddhism particularly for the primary syllabus, where these did not currently feature, then to move on to the secondary syllabus.

The Chair asked everybody to prepare for the review by reading the syllabus to see where there was any room to include new material. KS said that both the Chair and Vice-chair had the power to convene sub-committee meetings, which did not have to be quorate.

JC proposed that the members move to a formal agreement.

SACRE agreed unanimously:

- To retain the Merton Agreed Syllabus for five years.
- **ACTION**
- It further agreed to adapt the primary RE syllabus to include teaching units on Humanism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

 ACTION
- It agreed to establish a sub-committee to produce the additional units.

 ACTION
- SACRE further agreed to review existing units at secondary level to discover if there was
 an opportunity for more comparative teaching on denominations within faiths and to
 introduce a mandatory, rather than optional, Humanism unit.

 ACTION
- SACRE members agreed to meet RE leads from the three Merton secondary schools known to use its syllabus, Ricards Lodge, Rutlish and Raynes Park, to talk about how the syllabus works in the three schools. The members agreed that KS should also ask Harris Academies in Morden and Merton if they would like to be involved.

 ACTION

1	1	T	r	a	i	n	i	n	a

The Chair said that NASACRE were offering a training course on Tuesday 12 March 2024 from 7-8pm, titled "Convening an Agreed Syllabus Conference – legalities and processes". He asked the SACRE members to tell the clerk if they were interested in attending.

12. <i>i</i>	An۱	Oth	er B	Busir	ness
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There was no other business.

13. Next meetings

Tuesday 2 July 2024 at 6.30pm at the Shree Ghanapathy Temple Tuesday 12 November 2024 at 5.00pm at Raynes Park High School

JC thanked everyone for their attendance. The meeting ended at 9.00pm.

Approved	Date
John Carter Vice-chair	

Summary of Actions from the Merton SACRE meeting on 20 February 2024

Action	ref	description	by	date
1	2	Pass contact details for faith groups'	SACRE	ASAP
		safeguarding leads to the clerk for	members who	
		forwarding to Merton LADO John Shelley.	represent faith	
			groups	
2	3	Contact KS to attend an RE teachers'	Chair/Vice-chair	ASAP
		meeting to explain the work of SACRE, with		
		a view to recruiting teachers to fill NEU and		
		NASUWT vacancies.		
3	3.2	Visit Abbotsbury School's Cultural	All members	Ongoing
		Ambassadors meetings and events: contact		
		Head Teacher regarding dates.		
4	4	Write to Raynes Park School to ask how RE	JC	ASAP
		teaching is achieved in the school.		
5	4.2	Hold Judaism exhibition in the Merton	KS/MF	ASAP
		Chaucer Centre during a week in summer		
	4.5	2024: organise volunteers and school visits.		
6	4.3	Discuss dates for Year 12 Interfaith project	All members	By end of
		visit to the Abbotsbury Cultural		spring
_		Ambassadors in summer 2024 with HT.	1/0	term
7	4.4	Circulate the Israel-Palestine dialogue	KS	ASAP
0	_	training day materials to all members.	A II	0
8	5	Use contact details supplied by KS to	All members	Ongoing
		arrange informal SACRE visits to faith assemblies.		
^	6		DK/clerk	ASAP
9	6	Circulate photographs from recent Year 12 Interfaith events to all SACRE members.	Dryclerk	ASAP
10	9	Double check process for LA approval of the	KS	ASAP
10	9	redrafted SACRE syllabus with Merton	No	ASAF
		Council's Legal department.		
		Council's Legal department.		
Action	ref	Syllabus review Actions	by	date
		-		
1	10	Retain the existing Merton Agreed RE	All members	2 July
		syllabus in substance for another five years.		2024
2	10.2	Adapt primary RE syllabus to include	Appointed sub-	2 July
		teaching units on Humanism, Sikhism and	committee	2024
	10.0	Buddhism.	10/1/0/01/4/1	1015
3	10.3	Establish a sub-committee to produce the	JC/KS/GM/AII	ASAP
4	46.1	additional units.	members	1005
4	10.4	Re-read the existing secondary units with a	All members	ASAP
		view to introducing more comparative		
		teaching on denominations within faiths and		
		to the introduction of a unit on Humanism,		
	10.5	on an ongoing review basis.	All mambara/ICO	ACAD
5	10.5	Meet RE leads from the three Merton	All members/KS	ASAP
		secondary schools known to use the Merton		
		Agreed Syllabus, Ricards Lodge, Rutlish and		
		Raynes Park. Ask Harris Academies Morden		
		and Merton if they would like to participate in		
	1	the ongoing syllabus review.		ı

Appendix A - Merton SACRE members as at 20 February 2024

Group	Name	Initials	Title/organisation	Start date
	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
Α	Mr Farrukh Ahmed	FA	Islam	27.06.23
	Mr Mike Freedman	MF	Judaism	Pre-2016
	VACANCY		Roman Catholic Church	
	Mr Ajaib Singh Bahra	ASB	Sikhism	Pre-2016
	Mr Waleed Ahmad	WA	Ahmadiyya Muslim Association	4.10.16
	VACANCY		Church of England	
В	The Revd. Andrew Williams.	AW	Church of England	10.10.17
	Ms Rachael Norman	MC	Church of England	11.2.20
	VACANCY		NEU	
	Mr Dimos Kechagias	DK	Co-opted	21.03.23
C	VACANCY		NASUWT	
	Ms Ro Maybury	RM	NAHT	6.7.21
	Cllr Laxmi Attawar	LA	Councillor	Pre-2016
D	Cllr Klaar Dresselaers	KD	Councillor	5.07.22
	Cllr Usaama Kaweesa	UK	Councillor	14.11.23

Groups

A - Christian, Other Faiths & Beliefs

B - Church of England

C - Teacher Associations

D - Local Authority