

Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC)

Thursday 27 June 2019 at 4.30 pm
Board Room 2 - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley HA9 0FJ

Membership:

Chair: Basma ElShayyal (Chair)

Advisers:

- Roger Butler
- Lesley Prior

Councillors:

- Cllr Tariq Dar
- Cllr Orleen Hylton
- Cllr Neil Nerva

Representatives of:

- Local Authority
- Church of England
- Brent's other faiths and denominations
- Teachers unions

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Agenda

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Date of the next meeting: Thursday 27 June 2019



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MINUTES OF MEETING OF AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE
7 March 2019
Brent Civic Centre

Start: 16:35

Attendees:

<p>GROUP A <i>(A committee of persons representing such Christian denominations and other religions and denominations of such religions as, in the opinion of the authority, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area)</i></p>	<p>Basma ElShayyal (Chair, Sunni Islam) Bhupinder Singh (Sikh) Farjad Farid (Bahá'í)</p>
<p>GROUP B <i>(A committee of persons representing the Church of England)</i></p>	<p>Laurence Hillel (Vice-Chair, Church of England) Rev. Steve Taylor (Church of England)</p>
<p>GROUP C <i>(A committee of persons representing such associations representing teachers as, in the opinion of the authority, ought to be represented, having regard to the circumstances of the area)</i></p>	<p>Sean Cremmin (Teachers' Union)</p>
<p>GROUP D <i>(A committee of persons representing the authority)</i></p>	<p>Cllr Neil Nerva Cllr Orleen Hylton Cllr Dar Helen Tulloch John Frankis</p>
<p>In attendance:</p>	<p>Roger Butler (consultant) Abraham Wilson (observer - Baha'i) Joe Kwateng (Brent Council – Governance Team)</p>
<p>Apologies:</p>	<p>Ian Slade Gillian Crow Malcolm Deboo Mark Newton Sarah Lane Cawte Helen Mooney</p>

1. Welcome and apologies:

- Apologies were not reported
- The Chair welcomed everyone and thanked officers for arranging for the meeting to be hosted at Brent Civic Centre.
- The Chair informed members that this was the last meeting for Laurence Hillel (Vice-Chair, Church of England) and having expressed her appreciation on behalf of the Committee for Mr Hillel's support to SACRE, presented a token of gift. Mr Hillel reciprocated the felicitations.
- Revd. Laurence was formally thanked for his long service to SACRE in particular and for his interfaith work in Brent schools in general; and Revd. Steve was welcomed as his replacement
- The Chair then introduced Rev. Steve Taylor (Church of England).

2. Minutes of the last meeting:

- The minutes of the previous ASC meeting held on 30 October 2018 were approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising:

The Chair ran through the actions noted at the previous meeting and commented on the following:

- That a web link to the current Agreed Syllabus has been shared.
- The Chair had circulated an electronic copy of the current agreed syllabus was circulated to officers and SACRE members as promised during the last meeting.
- Mr Singh expressed satisfaction with the web link.
- Mr Wilson suggested a poster display of various groups and together with the representatives.
- The Chair decided to revisit Mr Wilson's suggestion under AOUB

4. Brent Schools Religious Education Curriculum Research

Arising from the action point at the last meeting, Mr Roger Butler (Adviser to SACRE) was asked prepare suggestions for discussion. The Chair invited Mr Butler to present his findings.

Mr Butler started by saying that by law all local authorities must review their agreed syllabuses at least once every five years. Whilst Brent's current agreed syllabus had served the borough's schools well for nearly seventeen years, but there was now a consensus among teachers, representatives of different religious communities, and Brent Council, that the time has come to revisit the

place of RE within the curriculum of the borough's community schools (and any other schools that currently follow Brent's syllabus and wish to continue so doing). He noted the ever decreasing importance of religion in the lives of so many young people in England but emphasised the significant need for religion to be taught and studied in its own right within the curriculum of secular schools. In this way RE would instil in young people the importance of promoting peace, co- existence, and cooperation between all the peoples of the world, hence promoting peace, harmony and understanding rather than hostility and misunderstanding between different religions.

He realised the pressures on the school curriculum, however this was not a valid reason why schools should concentrate on the major religious traditions in the UK such as just Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. To do so would be very unfair on the children and families of smaller religious communities who would go through their school careers learning about, and perhaps celebrating, Christmas and Easter, Ramadan and Eid, Divali and Holi, and never once being able to talk about, and have classmates learn about, their holy days and festivals. Furthermore, the smaller religious traditions in Brent have unique and important beliefs and practices that will challenge some of our taken-for- granted presumptions about what religion is, and allow us insights into how a wide range of religious people see the world and human existence in different ways.

Mr Butler referenced his report drawing attention to religious faiths, their contributions and challenges to our society. He also gave an insight into some of challenges facing RE teachers and invariably rely on coordinators or heads of department who were unlikely to have read the full document but rather simply home in on the key stages they teach. He continued that if the new Brent agreed syllabus was to be taken seriously in our schools then it was imperative that the ASC and SACRE lobby the Local Authority to ensure that teachers had opportunities to learn about the new syllabus and received adequate support in identifying appropriate resources to teach it.

The Committee heard that the agreed syllabus conference could help teachers by being clear as to what religious education was intended to achieve in schools and producing an agreed syllabus that allowed teachers freedom to teach in ways they feel comfortable with, giving them scope to be innovative, within a broad framework of what was required to be taught. SACRE could then offer teachers the advice and guidance with regard to appropriate teaching methods and materials as well as facilitate visiting speakers to come into schools and/or to help organise visits to places of worship.

In conclusion, Mr Butler identified the following five keys to good RE as amplified within his report findings:

1. Emphasis on empathy, but also on rational thinking
2. A syllabus of Religious Education clearly relevant to our time, our pupils, and their families, but also realistic from the point of view of our teachers and schools.
3. Adopting a hermeneutic approach to religious study.

4. A phenomenological approach to religious study
5. The importance of community schools (and academies without a religious character) adopting a clearly secular approach to RE.

In the ensuing discussions, members focussed on how best to progress religious education in schools and the process of delineating faiths as minor or major within the school curriculum. Mr Butler advised that new and contemporaneous syllabus should be generated as well as teachers should be properly trained and adequately resourced to take on their RE teaching roles in our schools.

In welcoming the report by Mr Butler, the Chair stated that ASC should hold on to areas of positive practice including the key aspects which were felt to be both important and relevant and updating them where possible. She advised that the work should be continued and circulated to colleagues for feedback in advance of the meeting in June 2019

ACTION:

- That preparation of the work on Brent Schools Religious Education Curriculum Research should continue and be circulated to colleagues for feedback in advance of the meeting in June 2019.
- That the Governance Team look into the possibility of holding future meetings at the Civic Centre.

End: 5.30pm

Notice of Next Meeting: Thursday, 27 June 2019 - 4.30pm

BASMA ELSHAYYAL

Chair

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted



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for Education

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Date: 22 March 2019

Dear Paul

Compliance with the duty to teach Religious Education

As discussed when we last met, I have spoken to a few representatives of SACREs over recent months about what can be done about schools that are failing to meet their obligations to teach RE – whether that is in accordance with an Agreed Syllabus or, in the case of academies and free schools, in line with their funding agreements.

I thought it might be helpful if I set out what we expect of state funded schools and the steps to follow if these expectations aren't met.

The requirement to teach RE

SACRE members will be familiar with the requirements on maintained schools, including the duty on those without a religious designation and voluntary controlled schools to follow the local Agreed Syllabus.

Under the terms of their Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State, all academies (including free schools) must provide RE for all their registered pupils from age 5 to 18, except for those whose parents exercise the right of withdrawal. Each academy's funding agreement should be published on its website, but can also be found on DfE's '[Compare Schools](#)' website (once you've found the school, select the 'workforce and finance' option and scroll down to the funding agreement. The requirement to teach RE is set out in the 'supplementary funding agreement' for each school and also in newer 'master funding agreements' at multi-academy trust level).

Generally speaking, academies with a religious designation (except ex-voluntary controlled schools) must teach within the tenets of the faith specified in their designation. They may, in addition, provide RE that is in line with a locally agreed syllabus and teach about other faiths if they choose. Academies with no religious designation must teach RE that '*reflects that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain*'. Academies are free to follow a locally agreed syllabus if they choose to.

Unlike an agreed syllabus, funding agreements do not provide further detail of the RE to be taught. However, we would expect that all schools provide pupils with a curriculum that is high quality and promotes progression through the key stages, including in RE. The non-

statutory guidance for RE (2010) also states that head teachers should ensure that *'the subject is well led and effectively managed, and that standards and achievement in RE, and the quality of the provision, are subject to regular and effective self-evaluation.'*

Agreed syllabuses and requiring schools to teach an accredited qualification

The issue of requiring schools to teach an accredited Religious Studies qualification is one that has come up recently and, if this is a requirement of an agreed syllabus, it's important that wording is carefully chosen. For example, I've seen variations of the following text in agreed syllabuses: *'It is a legal requirement and an entitlement that all students (other than those withdrawn by parental request) study RE at Key Stage 4 through an accredited course....'*

This wording implies that it is a legal requirement to teach a RS qualification – whereas, in my view, the law does not directly state this ie. legislation *doesn't* specifically require schools to teach RS. Neither does it require each agreed syllabus to specify that schools must teach a full or short course RS GCSE or other accredited qualification. However, the law does require relevant schools to follow the agreed syllabus. So, if an area's syllabus says that an accredited RS qualification must be taught, then a school may be in breach of *that* statutory duty (ie. to follow the agreed syllabus) if it doesn't do so.

It is also the case that, if a school is required by the agreed syllabus to teach a RS qualification at key stage 4, and enters its pupils for this at the end of Year 10, it should still be teaching RE in Year 11. Otherwise, it does not meet the duty to provide RE as part of its curriculum to *'all registered pupils at the school'*.

Handling reports that a school is not meeting its duty to teach RE

Where a school appears to be failing to meet its obligations – either to comply with the agreed syllabus or to meet funding agreement requirements to teach RE – we would expect the LA or SACRE to follow this up; and to refer the case to DfE if it cannot be resolved locally.

I'd recommend starting by contacting the school, outlining details of concerns and asking for comments. This allows the school an opportunity to correct misconceptions, provide clarifying information, or to resolve an issue. I'm also aware of cases where an LA officer or SACRE member has visited a school to discuss an issue in person to help them assess whether it is complying with the agreed syllabus.

If talking to the school hasn't resolved the issue, the LA or SACRE should refer the case or any queries to my team via CurriculumSupport.TEAM@education.gov.uk , providing details of the issue and with copies of any related correspondence or emails between them and the school.

I hope that this is helpful.

Best wishes

Neil Lawson