

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education held on 14 October 2015 at 6.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Yash Gupta (MBE) and Tunde Ojetola
- Committee A:** Mrs S Lawson, Free Church Christian Member, Mrs Shepherd, Roman Catholic Member (Left at 7.10), Mr P Anderson, Free Church Representative
- Committee B:** Rev. J Guest, Mrs M Taylor (Left at 7.29) and Rev. D Bates
- Committee C:** Ms A Jellicoe
- Committee D:** Councillors Yash Gupta and Tunde Ojetola
- Apologies:** Ms N Fawell and Councillor Martin Kerin
- In attendance:** Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills
Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the meeting the Chair informed those present that the previous Chair Jack Misra had sadly passed away.

8. Minutes

The Minutes from the previous meeting held on 15 July 2015 were approved, subject to minor typographical errors.

9. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

10. Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared

11. A New settlement Religion and Belief in Schools

The Chair of the Council welcomed all to the meeting and explained the meaning behind the additional meeting. He continued to explain that just because a person has no religion; didn't mean that they were not spiritual.

It was discussed that organised religion within different faiths had different effects on people and within schools Ofsted assessed Collective Worship.

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education explained to the Council that in June 2015 Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead published the pamphlet "A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools". She continued to advise that their proposals had been widely recognised and had even added to the important debate on the law as it related to Religious Education; Members were advised that the law in relation to RE hadn't been amended significantly since 1944.

Recommendation 2 *"Consideration be given to using the phrase 'Religious and Moral Education' rather than 'Religious Education' in describing this part of the statutory curriculum"*

Members discussed the recommendation and in doing so commented that some schools and academies use the name 'religious studies' rather than 'religious education' as they taught students different religions and beliefs. It was further commented that pupils were taught religion as children this knowledge and understanding in all walks of life and it was about engaging them with the subject.

It was mentioned that to learn about religion you had to learn from religion and different faiths. The Chair of the Council stated that although Collective Worship was taught within schools; it was usually included as part of assemblies and not within the classroom.

The Council discussed how young people were keen to explore and learn and how this could be achieved in a number of different ways including reflection which could be spiritual or religious. It was commented that schools may choose to teach a moral framework so that it was not just included under the external framework of Religion as the two could be very different.

Another member suggested that the subject be renamed to Religious and Cultural Studies but this was considered to be too broad a title.

Recommendation 3 *"The Religious Education syllabus in county and voluntary controlled schools should no longer be set by a system of agreed local syllabuses, but by an agreed national syllabus which would have a similar legal status to the requirements of other subjects in the National Curriculum."*

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education sought Members thoughts on the recommendation which asked for a national syllabus to replace the current local syllabus.

The Strategic Lead, School Improvement and Skills commented that he felt the recommendation was controversial; he further stated that he was surprised the decision to have a national syllabus was not already in place.

During discussions Members commented on the following points:

- Should a national framework be established, it would need start with the basics; highlighting the starting points;
- Topics in relation to diversity should be included; and
- A common syllabus should be introduced with a guide produced for teachers.

Councillor Gupta enquired as to whether faith schools would be included under a national framework. The Associate Adviser for Religious Education explained that faith schools were exempt from current frameworks as they followed their own. It was further explained that faith representatives assisted with the syllabus for faith schools.

It was mentioned that should there be political involvement with a national syllabus, the media and different faith groups will hold the government accountable.

Members discussed that GCSEs had been revised with member organisations of the RE Council from faith groups working together to write material to support for examination boards. It was further discussed that with different examination boards schools would compare the papers as to which exam their students should take.

It was commented that pupils should be leaving school with an understanding of the differences and similarities of religions.

Recommendation 4 “The nationally-agreed syllabus would be determined by the Secretary of State in agreement with a newly created ‘National Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (NASACRE)’ comprising experts on religion and education, and after formal consultation and input from the relevant established professional bodies and representatives of religions, humanism and other belief systems. This nationally-agreed syllabus should be reviewed every 5/7 years.”

Members stated that it was import to have an agreed syllabus and for the importance different religions to be taught. It was mentioned that the code of conduct for religion should be taught to pupils.

It was further discussed as to the idea of tolerance, it was important to teach about kindness and loving thy neighbour at the same time Members highlighted the importance of zero tolerance of intolerance such as faith hate crime.

Recommendation 5 “The government discusses with the faith school providers, including academies and free schools, the merits of voluntary-aided and foundation faith schools adopting this nationally-agreed syllabus and, on the basis of such discussions, considers legislating to require all maintained schools to adopt this syllabus.”

Members stated that they agreed with recommendation 5 in that all relevant faith groups and educators are included in discussions.

Recommendation 6 *“The government also discusses with faith school providers including academies and free schools, the importance of making a distinction within schools between religious instruction, formation and education, including agreement that religious instruction (even of a kind which does not include coercion, or distortion of other religions or beliefs) does not take place within the school day.”*

It was commented that Members felt they required further information as to how the government would carry out this recommendation.

Recommendation 7 *“In addition, the government discusses with independent schools whether they should adopt this nationally-agreed syllabus and, on the basis of such discussions, considers legislating to require all schools to adopt this syllabus.”*

Members felt they had covered this recommendation within earlier discussions.

Recommendation 8 *“If these changes are agreed, the right of parents to withdraw their children from the Religious Education part of the curriculum should be abolished.”*

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education informed Members that this recommendation followed recommendation 6.

Members were advised that currently parents needed grounds to withdraw their child from lessons however this would be completed by simply writing to the headteacher; the Associate Adviser for Religious Education further advised the Council that children were withdrawing from school trips which were related to Religious Education.

It was commented that to give children a broader education it was occasionally needed to visit certain places, an example of this was the Holocaust; as it gave pupils an added experience to studying the religion.

Recommendation 9 *“The legal requirement for Religious Education at Key Stage 5, after the age of 16, should be removed and that, within the context of a general reform of the curriculum at Key Stage 4, consideration should be given to modifying the legal requirement for Religious Education to a wider study of religious, spiritual, moral, ethical, social, and cultural values.”*

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education explained that this was a legal requirement with 18year olds having the option to withdraw themselves; at present students within sixth forms could not withdraw themselves from the subject unless they were over 18.

The Chair commented that Religious Education should be the most exciting subject as you learn who you were as a person.

Members were notified that the subject was the fastest group subject within the last 4 years; with a raise in the amount of students taking the subject at GCSE, 6th form entries had been steadily increasing for the last decade and there had been a drop with the amount of students studying Theology and Religious Studies at degree level.

Recommendation 10 *“All faith schools, and possibly all schools in receipt of state funding, clearly advertise and explain the kind of religious (or non-religious) ethos and formation which they offer, so that prospective parents and pupils can make informed choices.”*

Members commented that faith schools received state funding and the public had a clear understanding as to the religious education being taught to students.

Recommendation 11 *“The local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) are given a new role which includes participating in the consultations about the content of the national RE curriculum, helping local implementation of the national RE syllabus, promoting community cohesion and educating for diversity, and advising on local availability of religious instruction.”*

Members were notified that the views of all local RE Councils (SACREs) would be heard and included within any consultations.

RESOLVED:

That SACRE discussed the recommendations of the report in relation to the Thurrock context.

12. Any Other Business

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education advised all Members of the following:

- Youth Conference was taking place on Thursday 10th December being held at the Culver Centre, commencing at 9.30am – 3.00pm;
- The Chapel at the South Essex College was soon to be completed;
- Thurrock Faith in Action was taking place on Thursday 19th November being held at the Gateway Centre in Stanford Le Hope, commencing at 4.00pm

The meeting finished at 7.50 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**