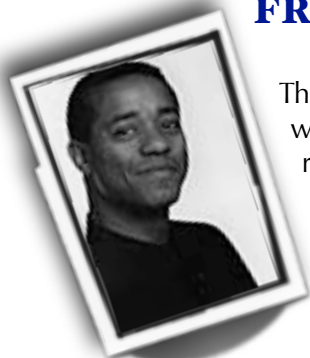


SACRE NEWS



Issue 34

FROM THE CHAIR...



The NASACRE AGM in May was well attended and well received. It marked the end of 12 months of intensive work on behalf of SACREs and in advancing religious education. It also marked the start of a new cycle of such activity. Following elections, NASACRE was pleased to welcome, **Nasr Emam**, **Elizabeth Sugarman** and **Denise Chaplin** as new members of the Executive and confirmation of **Jo Fageant** and **Michael Metcalf** respectively as Secretary and Treasurer.



Our new cycle of activity in RE is located against the background of major developments since the **EBacc** campaign of summer 2011. These must include the generally increased coverage of RE



in the media and the launch of the **All Party Parliamentary Group on RE** which took place at the House of Commons in June 2012. The REC is

providing the secretariat for the APPG and all SACREs are urged to encourage their local MPs to join the Group, the first of its kind for RE.

In this Issue

From the chair	p1
NASACRE AGM - 2012	p3
NASACRE priorities	p5
Launch of the All Parliamentary Group for RE	p6
Good RE supporting SMSC	p9
Leicester City RE conference	p11
Book Reviews	p13
Back Page	p18

There is disappointment in many quarters of the education world at the progress and outcome of the National Curriculum review. Many matters remain unsatisfactorily resolved not least the unanswered question of who exactly will this



curriculum be for. However, the REC (Religious Education Council) is driving forward the **RE Subject Review** as government is not resourcing that work. Member organisations, including NASACRE, have been asked to contribute to the cost and some financial support has been promised by charitable trusts and foundations. Expert witnesses were scheduled to be heard in August and September and the report is due to be prepared for consultation with the full REC in late autumn and after that with the wider RE community at the end of the December 2012.



SACRE members may not be aware of the **Hockerill Prize – for innovation in RE teaching sponsored** by the Hockerill Education Foundation in partnership with NATRE.

SACREs may wish to consider how to get information about the prize out to local schools and to encourage schools to apply!

NASACRE has worked closely with **NATRE** on a number of matters. These include persisting in attempts to get government to withdraw **Circular 1/94** on collective worship. A notable forthcoming NATRE event is the **north of England St Gabriel's conference for RE Teachers**



arranged for Bolton in 2013. SACREs within the region are urged to encourage local RE teachers to attend and to note that there is funding for 150 delegates.

Ofsted is undertaking a check on **Section 5 inspection reports references to RE** made under the new Framework. There is also the possibility



that a telephone survey might be conducted of schools not entering any pupils for RE. We await the outcomes of both these strands of work which are likely to be of particular interest to SACREs.

Pilots of the **RE Quality Mark** started in northwest England and East Anglia in the summer and the project website will be launched in September. Case studies are due to be published in the autumn and the London and SE England SACREs are hoping to receive a presentation on the progress of the REQM at their annual meeting in November.



Denise Chaplin is leading work for NASACRE in establishing a programme of **regional SACRE conferences** to provide support and training for SACREs. The conferences would take place in the autumn or spring terms so that they did not clash with the NASACRE AGM. The conferences



will provide a chance for real dialogue between SACREs in a region so that they could pursue common interests and concerns and also inform the NASACRE Exec of their views and needs. More importantly, in this time when local authority support services have been cut back so severely, they would develop delegates' awareness of good teaching and learning practice and give them the tools to take this information back to their SACREs. The conferences which will be very competitively costed and delivered on a 'break even' basis, plan to use regional faith venues and offer opportunities for real learning outside the classroom and/or inter faith dialogue for delegates. The first pilot conferences in Birmingham and East Anglia are already under consideration.

The new cycle of work looks like being no less interesting or demanding as the last!

Every best wish for the new academic year.

Bruce Gill

NASACRE AGM 2012

The NASACRE AGM took place at the Friends Meeting House, London on Wednesday 23rd May 2012. On a warm sunny day, over 90 delegates representing 73 SACREs met to experience what many felt was one of the best of such meetings for some time.

Keynote address



Professor Robert Jackson gave the key note address entitled '**RU 4 EC RE? Research and European Policy Making on Religious Education: Taking account of young people's views in developing the subject**'. He presented a thorough and well received account of some European and UK research giving young people's voices about RE and gave an outline of some of the Council of Europe's work on religion. He concluded by offering some thoughts on the development of a 'road map' for utilising the Council of Europe recommendation.

Of particular interest were research findings that students between the ages of 14 and 16 see the classroom as a 'safe space' for dialogue and they want more of a voice and aspire to peaceful coexistence based on knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews. English case studies from the Warwick 2010 research found that RE develops positive attitudes towards other people as well as self-reflection and personal growth including students' development as members of religious traditions. They appreciated direct contact with difference (visitors/visits) in their learning.

Professor Jackson also referred to the Religion and Society project of 2007-2012 which found that students developed appreciation of the faith positions of others. However, students also identified that RE lessons often fail to take account of diversity within religious traditions and often felt that their own traditions are stereotyped. They expressed discomfort at being used as representatives of their traditions in lessons.

Professor Jackson answered some questions from the floor but there was insufficient time to take the very many questions generated by his informative presentation.

The business meeting of the AGM followed with reports from the Secretary, Chair and Treasurer. Michael Metcalf, Treasurer, reported that 88 of the potential 154 SACREs had paid national subscription fees. It was noted that NASACRE's accounts are better than had been feared, but times are still very uncertain.

Jo Fageant and **Michael Metcalf** were elected unopposed to the posts of secretary and treasurer respectively and the meeting elected **Elizabeth Sugarman**, **Nasr Moussa Emam** and **Denise Chaplin** to the Executive. The Chair thanked **Julie Grove**, the outgoing secretary, for her work over several years and Bill Moore provided a vote of thanks to Julie for her inspirational long service and highlighted the great debt of gratitude all SACREs owe to her. She was presented with a small gift.

Announcements

Bruce Gill announced the publication on the NASACRE website of the discussion document [Collective Worship Revisited](#) and the information leaflet for academies entitled [About Your RE](#).

Denise Chaplin announced the NASACRE proposal to support regional SACRE conferences and asked for volunteers to pilot the project.

Sharon Artley announced the upcoming **remodelling of the NASACRE website** taking place between June and September. Thoughts and ideas about this were invited (and still can be sent to: chair@nasacre.org).

Michael Metcalf announced the winners of the awards for the Young people's SACRE projects: **Bournemouth, Greenwich, Islington, North Somerset, Somerset, and Suffolk**.

Keynote address



Lat Blaylock gave the second key note address entitled **SACRE + Teachers of RE = Good Learning** which was extremely well received. He began by talking about sacred spaces and acknowledging that the biggest gatherings in the world are religious e.g. the Kumbh Mela and Hajj. He highlighted that religious worship of this sort often takes place in the open/outside. He went on to speak about a project about learning events which has been a good way to reach hard to reach teachers i.e. those who never come or never manage to get out of school on CPD and described some of the effective activities used with students at these events.

Lat stressed the need for SACREs to work in partnership with schools on initiatives like this which enabled young people to engage in depth with interfaith dialogue. All the conferences have been the result of SACRE engagement. He showed examples of outcomes of the pupils' ideas and work at the conferences. Lat recognised that SACREs can get overwhelmed with maintenance issues but stressed the importance of them being more proactive and dynamic; getting involved with pupils in ways that make a difference. He suggested that the SMSC agenda and its resurgence in importance in Ofsted inspections is a possible driver to take RE forward.

His presentation continued with some examples of 'good RE'. He maintained that good support from SACREs for teachers will improve RE not so there are a few examples of excellent practice but good quality everywhere. He concluded that such SACRE projects matter. Great SACREs are critical friends to teachers.

State of the RE Nation address

Sarah Smalley presented the RE Council's assessment of the current position. New government policies have started to take effect and there are some difficulties as well as positives. She went on to explain:



- Over half of secondary schools are either or are in the process of becoming academies.
- A recent workforce survey into the number of teachers in secondary schools employed to teach RE and the hours they taught RE revealed an increase in both the number of teachers and hours taught but this did not however refute concerns about the subject's exclusion from the EBacc.
- The Government had suggested the number of places for teachers of RE had to be reduced. There had been a recent announcement of 50 more places but the threat of losing expertise within university departments remains a reality.
- NATRE (National Association of Teachers of RE) has taken a strong lead in gathering information from teachers on RE's exclusion from the EBacc. The evidence collected looked gloomy with a third of responding schools saying that they expected fewer pupils to be taking GCSE RS.
- Information from the AREIAC (Association of RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants) reveals a diminishing number of local authority RE advisers.
- NASACRE reports fewer SACREs have full support for their work so it may be difficult for SACREs to rise to the challenges given to the meeting by Lat.

On the positive side Sarah pointed to:

- The introduction of the RE quality mark – a wonderful scheme being trialled in parts of England. This will work like the arts mark award.
- The APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group) on RE bringing together MPs from across the party spectrum. Everyone should write to encourage their MPs to seek membership of the APPG.
- The REC review of RE which, it is hoped, will be helpful for the RE community (although it will be non-statutory and not have national authority).
- The fact that at the moment the RE community is better placed to face the challenges than has ever been the case before.

Alan Brine HMI joined Sarah in answering questions from the floor before the Chair drew the AGM to a close. The next AGM is scheduled to be in Birmingham on Thursday 23rd May 2013.

Bruce Gill and Jo Fageant

NASACRE Priorities

In recent years the NASACRE Executive have been keeping its priorities under regular review and adjusting and amending these in light of feedback from SACREs, changes in government policy and developments in the wider world.

Feedback from SACREs given at the AGM in May 2012 suggests that we need to focus on primary RE and training and on influencing school leadership on the importance of RE. **Other requests are for NASACRE to project religious education research**

evidence and outcomes to support a national way forward. There is also a strong and consistent plea for an emphasis on young people and children. On a more practical note there are requests for information and advice on what to do when SACREs 'go wrong'. Examples of the latter are cases of non-attending or unresponsive members, members who do not challenge or have drive and members who cause conflict by their personal or political agendas. Yet another strong plea is for opportunities for SACREs to share good practice and learn how other SACREs support the development of RE in their local area.

Against this background the current NASACRE priorities which will be reviewed in October 2012 include:

- **Producing and disseminating information about SACREs stating who we are, what we do and what we can do for our target audiences.**
- **Providing briefings for each SACRE Group and doing so in partnership with relevant sponsoring bodies**
- **Taking measures to raise the profile of SACREs specifically with school governors and headteachers, targeting national and regional forums.**
- **Collecting examples of good practice in RE and signpost these on the NASACRE website**
- **Planning a regional conference with a focus on establishing a youth SACRE or having such a focus for the 2013 AGM.**
- **Reviewing and refreshing our existing NASACRE advice on establishing Agreed Syllabus Conferences.**

The **All Party Parliamentary Group on RE** launched in June 2012 presents a wonderful new opportunity for SACREs to make their work known to local MPs and for NASACRE to brief MPs on the role of SACREs in promoting and supporting RE.

NASACRE has agreed and follows a protocol for members of the Executive. SACREs are welcome to view it on the website and where appropriate use it to draw up their own protocols for the behaviour and conduct of SACRE members in transacting SACRE business.

At present NASACRE is just about managing to continue to be financially viable with around 57% of SACREs paying annual subscriptions. This position is set to worsen as local authority spending cuts bite. Therefore, amongst those priorities already identified is the urgent need to identify new sources of income to enable NASACRE to continue to work on behalf of SACREs.

Finally, as a member of the RE Council, NASACRE is committed to working in partnership with member organisations within the RE community. Close partners in the RE world are NATRE and AREIAC with whom we are working ever more closely to lead the rethinking of links between RE and other educational or curriculum initiatives such as the academisation of schools or the future of the GCSE RS courses.

We are looking for efficient and economical ways to address these priorities and are confident that by listening carefully to what SACREs tell us we can do a good job for our member SACREs.

Please continue to feedback to us what you think you need from NASACRE as we are here for you!



Bruce Gill

Launch of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for RE



The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Religious Education was launched on Monday, 11th June at the House of Commons and was followed by an informal reception.

An APPG is a grouping in parliament comprised of politicians from all political parties and can include members of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords who meet together to discuss and promote an area of work or a particular issue of concern. Some relate to a particular country or subject - the topics reflecting parliamentarians' concerns. APPGs usually have officers drawn from the major political parties and aim to avoid favouring one political party or another, providing strength in depth and the ability to pass their messages across parliament. They discuss new developments and can invite government ministers to speak at their meetings.

APPGs allow campaign groups, charities, and other non-governmental organisations to become involved in discussions and influence politicians. Often a relevant charity or other organisation will provide a Secretariat for the APPG helping to arrange meetings and keeping its members informed of other initiatives. In this instance the Secretariat is being held by the REC.

The aim for the APPG on RE is to provide a medium through which MPs, peers and other organisations with an interest in religious education can discuss provision of the subject, promote a clear positive image of RE and advocate that all young people receive excellent RE teaching. Stephen Lloyd MP, the Chair of the group, reiterated the importance of this in his opening remarks of the launch after conducting the formal business of the meeting, which formally established the executive for the APPG.

Stephen Lloyd's introductory speech expressed the APPG's determined and enthusiastic intent to work in the interests of young people's right to excellent RE teaching. "*Rest assured,*" he

said, “that you have the support of many, many different parliamentarians from both houses across the whole political party spectrum, broadly speaking because, like me, they recognise that the teaching of RE in schools by trained, experienced RE teachers has a real and profound significance going forward.”

Four further speakers followed, the first of whom was Clare Dempsey, a sixth form student of philosophy and ethics from Birmingham and an experienced and passionate advocate for RE who produces blogs and videos. View her letter to Michael Gove in her blog: <http://06claredre.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/time-i-wrote-to-michael-gove.html>



Clare showed those present a powerful video she had produced that gave a taster of what RE contributed to a student's education – she then listed things she wouldn't have known about without RE, including the UK's parliamentary voting system, the work of Amnesty International and why some people don't believe in God.



John Keast OBE, Chair of the REC had the task of following Clare. He drew attention to the results of the recent YouGov study which shows that 63 percent of 18 – 24 year olds agree that religious education is relevant and should be taught in schools. He emphasised the importance of the APPG in ensuring the place of good quality RE in the curriculum, reminding those present that over 60 percent of all 16 year olds choose to take it at GCSE and the number studying it at A level has more than doubled in the last 15 years.

He pointed out that if these figures were to drop as a result of neglect for the subject, schools will not be able to recruit and retain specialist teachers and this will have a negative impact on how RE is taught.

The third speaker, Fiona Bruce MP, a deputy chair for the APPG, spoke passionately about the positive experiences of her own children in studying RE.



Finally Deborah Weston, secretary to the REC and a member of the NATRE executive board showed a NATRE video which provided a vibrant illustration of the nature of RE today, in the words of those who teach it and some of their students.



Guests then mingled informally and lively conversations took place between parliamentarians, school students, RE teachers and people from different faith and belief communities. Links were made between representatives of groups who would probably not normally come together but who are united in their resolve to ensure that all young people experience a personally inspiring and academically rigorous education in religious and non-religious world views.

The APPG will meet next in the autumn and the REC website will maintain up to date information for all member bodies.

SACREs whose MPs are already members of the group may wish to keep in touch with those members and support their work whilst those whose MPs are not members may want to write to their local MPs to encourage them to join or at least take an interest in the group. A sample letter that can be adapted to suit your purpose can be found on the REC's website.

Membership of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education

Chair: Stephen Lloyd (LD)
Deputy Chairs: Fiona Bruce (Con)
Mike Crockart (LD)
Mary Glendon (Lab)
Baroness Brinton (LD)



Other members

Tony Baldry (Con)	Alison McGovern (Lab)
Luciana Berger (Lab)	Seema Malhotra (Lab)
Bob Blackman (Con)	Paul Murphy (Lab)
Peter Bottomley (Con)	Caroline Nokes (Con)
Tony Cunningham (Lab)	Dan Rogerson (LD)
Philip Davies (Con)	Andrew Rossindell (Con)
Jim Dobbin (Lab)	Anna Soubry (Con)
Mark Durkan (SDLP)	Gerry Sutcliffe (Lab)
Mike Gapes (Lab)	Stephen Timms (Lab)
Damian Hinds (Con)	Lord Bates (Con)
Jeremy Lefroy (Con)	Lord Boswell (Con)
Edward Leigh (Con)	Lord Noon (Labour)
	Lord Singh (CB)



Denise Chaplin

How can good RE and collective worship support spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the school?



Alan Brine HMI, Ofsted's National Adviser for RE writes about SMSC in the new Ofsted inspection framework and the opportunities it offers.

Ofsted's renewed emphasis on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) provides SACREs with an **excellent opportunity to emphasise the key role of RE and collective worship in school life.**

A new Ofsted Framework for school inspection came into force in January 2012 and was revised in September 2012. There are changes to the way SMSC fits into the pattern of inspection. Previously, inspections required judgements on areas such as Every Child Matters and community cohesion which were sometimes difficult to disentangle from SMSC. **SMSC is now the key**

judgement relating to the wider aspects of pupils' personal development.

In the new Framework, inspectors judge the overall effectiveness of the school, taking account of four key judgements of achievement, teaching, behaviour and safety, and leadership and management. In addition, inspectors evaluate how well the school is promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. **The grade**

descriptors for overall effectiveness place a high profile on SMSC. For example, for a school to be judged good it should ensure: 'deliberate and effective action is taken to create a cohesive learning community by promoting the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development'.

The focus is clearly on the provision the school makes to promote SMSC referring to '**providing positive experiences through planned and coherent opportunities in the curriculum and through interactions with teachers and other adults**'. While the focus is on provision for SMSC, inspectors will also consider this dimension of pupils' development when judging their achievement. In addition, when judging teaching, behaviour and safety and leadership and management inspectors are asked to ensure the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

RE and collective worship can be beacons of excellence in promoting SMSC and play a major role in helping to embed good practice across the school

In the new Framework, **spiritual** development has a very distinctive flavour referring to pupils' ability to be reflective about beliefs, values and more profound aspects of human experience, using their imagination and creativity, and developing curiosity. There is a **strong emphasis linking spiritual development to learning.** These are characteristics

lying at the heart of good RE and collective worship. RE lessons need to model opportunities for pupils to ask questions, to have time to reflect on their ideas and to use a range of creative activities to express their ideas. Assemblies should be using genuinely stimulating resources and activities to promote curiosity and allow pupils the space to explore their own feelings and responses.



Moral development is about helping pupils to recognise the **difference between right and wrong and apply this understanding in their own lives**. RE lessons and assemblies can, for example, provide excellent opportunities for pupils to consider the moral teachings of different traditions and the way in which those teachings have impacted on the lives of individuals and communities.



Social development emphasises **developing pupils' social skills as well as helping them understand the communities of which they are a part**. Effective RE and assemblies can promote this by, for example, providing good opportunities for pupils to develop the skills of civilised discussion as well as considering the ways in which religions have, or sometimes have not, sought to resolve conflict and promote a respect for diversity.

There is a very strong focus on pupils' **understanding cultural diversity within the school and further afield** as 'an essential

element of their preparation for life'. In many schools RE and collective worship provide a major context for pupils to encounter and appreciate cultural diversity and, crucially, have first hand opportunities to meet with and talk to representatives from local faith communities.

How can SACREs help those with responsibility for RE and/or collective worship to take the lead?

- take the initiative and draw the attention of the wider school to the renewed emphasis on SMSC in the new Framework.
- help colleagues develop a **shared understanding of the language of SMSC**
- help colleagues to recognise that it is the **responsibility of all staff and of every subject**.
- encourage an **evaluation of opportunities** the school provides and **develop an action plan** to address any areas that might be less effective
- highlight that without **effective RE and collective worship** the school's contribution to SMSC will be significantly diminished
- finally, **make sure RE and assemblies are beacons** when it comes to providing opportunities to reflect, to use imagination and creativity, to develop curiosity, to explore the moral and social aspects of life, and to encounter and value cultural diversity.

Further information about the place of SMSC in Ofsted's inspection frameworks and guidance can be found on the Ofsted website:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/inspection-and-regulation-forms-and-guides>

Leicester City Annual RE conference



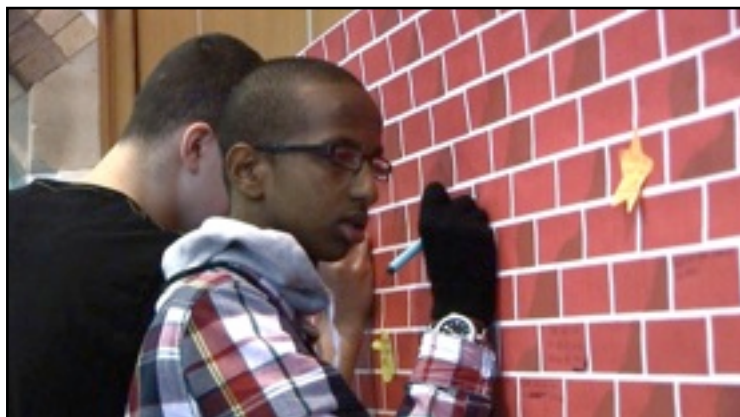
On Friday October 29th 2010 Leicester City's 2nd Annual RE Conference for gifted and more able students, entitled "One Leicester: Faith for the Future" was held at Holy Trinity Church in the city centre. 160 students and 30 members of staff from city schools attended. I also was pleased to be present as an observer and NASACRE link.

The conference was fully funded by a grant of £5,000 secured in June 2010 from the Westhill Trust via NASACRE to support the Leicester Youth SACRE in helping to plan and deliver the conference. The conference was presented to schools as an inspirational day of RE with a choice of twenty different seminars and eight lunch time



activities. The aim of the conference was for students to experience exciting RE first hand and to consider the positive difference that beliefs can have in our diverse society. The additional aim was to raise the profile of the SACRE and Youth SACRE. Members of the Youth SACRE planned and delivered three seminars. The seminars covered unfair trading today including a religious perspective, and a personal view of Islam and Christianity. Members of the Youth SACRE also spoke about the Leicestershire community cohesion youth charter and their contribution to this, and helped with a variety of lunchtime activities.

From the student evaluation forms many found the conference a fantastic opportunity to meet other young people their own age from across the different faith communities.



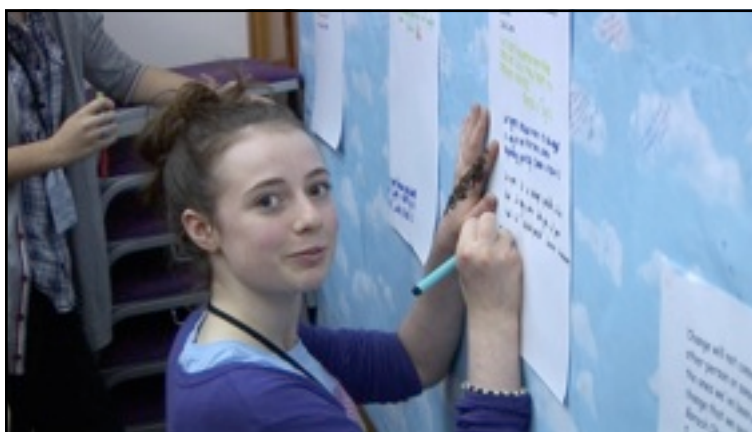
'I loved meeting and working with different groups of people and getting to know them'

'The best part of the day was finding out more about what other people believe'

As a second part of the project, and leading on from the conference, Youth SACRE members worked with a Schools Youth Worker from Holy Trinity Church and with Nick Hamer from Intrepid Media

to make a DVD. The DVD's purpose was to make a short promotional film promoting RE and the Youth SACRE in the city. Members would then go on to discuss why their faith is important to them and topical issues, with an eye to current GCSE RE syllabuses, and how their beliefs affected their moral decisions and judgments.

The DVD has duly appeared, after some delays, but with a high production quality. It is easy to navigate, and is intended to be available freely to Leicester City Secondary Schools as a teaching aid and introduction to important areas of discussion. An opening section introduces the Youth SACRE and some of its members. This is followed by a sequence of videoed conversations between



young people from a variety of faith and stance backgrounds.

Leicester City SACRE and Youth SACRE, together with RE Adviser and project leader Jill Carr, are to be congratulated on successfully completing their Award-winning project and on providing such an effective stimulus for promoting excellent RE within their schools.



Michael Metcalf



BOOK REVIEWS

Really Really Big Questions about God, Faith and Religion

Dr Julian Babbini (2011)

ISBN: 978-0753431511

Kingfisher /MacMillan [London] - RRP £10.86

and

Really Really Big Questions about Life, the Universe and Everything

Dr Stephen Law (2011)

ISBN: 978-0753417812

Kingfisher /MacMillan [London] - RRP £12.99



Throughout my career as an adviser, consultant and lecturer in religious education, I have observed many lessons in classrooms in and around London and beyond. Sometimes, it has been clear that many of the pupils have come from homes where religious belief and practice are important and often they have entirely secular backgrounds - but whatever the case, they invariably seem to me to be interested in religion and religious matters.

However, that interest is often slowly destroyed by the teacher, simply because the questions being asked in the lesson are not the questions the pupils themselves want to ask. When the teacher sets an agenda for learning which has no relevance for children and young people, RE can swiftly become a subject which fails to capture their imagination and leaves them feeling bored and disenchanted by matters which might otherwise have excited and enthralled them. So, I would argue that in many cases, the questions being asked by the learners are potentially far more challenging and of far greater merit than anything their teachers are able to put forward!

This is why I am such a passionate advocate of those pedagogies which put the learners' interests at the heart of RE and these two books are invaluable in enabling teachers to do just that. As their titles indicate, they are organised around a simple question and answer format, inviting children and their teachers to open their minds and prepare to explore big ideas by embarking on a thought provoking journey about God, religion and the meaning of life itself. Each book is organised into a series of chapters, and the individual chapters feature inter-related and provocative questions with a range of possible responses to each one. Readers are encouraged to reflect sensitively on these responses and to consider their own answers to them, enriched and informed by what they have learned about and learned from the answers given by others. The texts do not presuppose what the readers' answers will be and are entirely non confessional, so are perfect for use in the RE classroom and will be particularly suitable for Key Stages 2 and 3.

Both volumes are illustrated in an attractive and quirky 1950s retro style in bright and vivid colours. They feature intriguing quotations from Mahatma Gandhi to Homer Simpson, mind teasers to consider alone or with others, glossaries of key terms and suggestions for further reading, including books and websites. If you or the children in the schools served by your SACRE want to engage with big questions, such as: 'Can we prove God exists?', 'Can a baby have a religion?', 'Can I make something true by believing it?' or even 'Can the Virgin Mary really appear in a grilled cheese sandwich?' I hope you will be tempted to seek out these books for yourselves! I can certainly recommend them!



Lesley Prior

Website: Islam in Schools

<http://islaminschools.com/>

This new website has been produced by experts within the Islamic Society of Britain in a fresh and interesting way to appeal to the teacher and to the young person or child with an easily navigable site with a range of useful resources on Islam. As a Christian faith representative on a SACRE myself, as



well as teaching RE in a large culturally diverse city secondary school I can see the use of this website for both the SACRE member who wishes to learn more about Islam as well as for teachers and pupils.

The immediate impression is of a professional site with colour and friendly looking graphics of children at various points without being overbearing. It is easy to navigate the green and purple coding on the tool bar which loosely divides the website into two main areas. The text is easy to read and block text is on a plainer background. Each part of the tool bar is a part of a geometric shape that snakes around the edge of the page so it is easy to direct a pupil or find the parts more for adults. In a heading such as 'What do Muslims believe in?' there are some clear paragraphs in each subsection and a 'click and learn zone' with vocabulary.

As another example, the 'Living Together' area gives teaching with useful quotes on topics including subsections on Neighbours, One World, Women's Rights and Racism that could be easily used especially in Key Stage 3 with lower secondary students. It would be ideal for using in an investigation or research project. I look forward to the 'click and learn' having even more parts added. Some of these are particularly aimed at pupils of a younger age and some are primarily focused at Muslim young people, so it is an authentic resource from within part of a religious community. At various points on the site, it is made clear that Muslims come from variety of cultures and backgrounds and so some practices around life events will vary, as religious teachings are mixed with local cultural customs. It is good to hear some short songs from Dawud Wharansby Ali and have some small games from Islamic Relief linked in.

The 'Virtual Classroom' showing the contribution of Islam to everyday living is included and would be particularly useful in key stage 2 and 3 as an introductory activity. Sarah's Eid movie with simple graphics explains the spirit of Eid in a simple story and is a charming explanation for very young children. The Mosque mix and match on screen is an activity that has been produced at two levels



making a fun activity about the parts of a mosque. The 'Art Gallery area' would give teachers ideas of appropriate artwork in interpreting Islam from previous primary classroom Islamic Awareness Week contributions. In due time the next competition will go live.

The 'Download teaching resources' section contains ideas that have originally used by Muslim presenters in schools and give good examples of assembly or classroom presentation ideas. Some of these exemplify how a visitor in school could talk on a theme e.g. the environment, with primary children. Members of SACREs who are faith representatives of any religious tradition, could find this part of the site useful for stimulus when preparing their own presentations and teachers could find ideas to adapt in their own context.

Through this website, the Islamic Society of Great Britain has made a significant contribution to developing greater understanding and awareness of Islam in a way that is accessible and appropriate to the British pupil or interested adult. There is something here for the youngest infant pupil to the more senior SACRE member!

Elizabeth Wayne Member of Leicester City SACRE and Head of RE, Soar Valley College Leicester.

The Young Atheist's Handbook

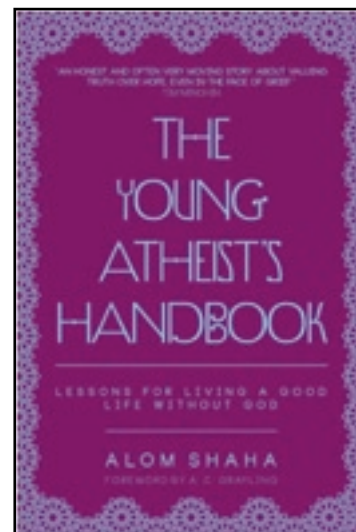
"Lessons for living a good life without God"

Alom Shaha (2012)

ISBN: 978-1849543118

Kingfisher /MacMillan [London] - RRP £12.99 or £8.54 [Kindle]

Alom Shaha is currently a Physics teacher in south London. In this book he describes his journey from a Muslim Bangladeshi home background to his "coming out" as a fully fledged atheist. It is an engaging story, written with good humour and perceptiveness. I read it with much curiosity, and with a growing respect for the author's candid and sincere sharing of his inner life. While the book does not have the melodrama and public notoriety of, say, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's "Infidel", there is no doubting the struggles Alom Shaha has had to face, both internal and external.



At one level, then, this is a very readable personal memoir. At another level it is, and is meant to be, a manifesto for atheism. It is offered as a teaching resource for schools; also available is an accompanying aid for using it in group/class discussions. The book seems most suited to the upper years of secondary schools for several reasons, e.g. the intellectual depth and maturity assumed, the cultural/social knowledge and awareness required, and some "purple" passages which could raise a few eyebrows in a younger context.

The book would work well as a text which individual pupils could read privately and discuss, but I think it would need a skilled teacher to use it successfully as a textbook for a group or class. Such a teacher would need in addition to be thoroughly equipped intellectually to engage with, and provide some counter-balance to, the one-sided approach presented in the Handbook, so that pupils are given a fair opportunity to evaluate the material and the propaganda for atheism in an open-ended way. Alom Shaha would surely wish for nothing less.

I have to confess that I was more interested in the author's interaction with his home background, and his insights into issues of identity and culture, than in his setting out a range of reasons for atheism, which were all rather familiar to me – however, they did stimulate my own thinking, and they will not be so familiar to many school pupils. These sections are not by any means comprehensive introductions to areas of major philosophical/theological debate, but they could well be used to lead into a more inclusive and comprehensive treatment.

Just a few pointers might be suggested here towards the counter-balancing I would advise. Alom Shaha makes much of the link between home nurture and subsequent religious identity and affiliation, but he seems unaware of how ambivalent or even non-existent this link has become within the nominally Christian indigenous community, and is dismissive of the increasing number of young people today who have freely chosen to become Christians. He discounts out of hand the extensive evidence for the experience of "God" by many people of different ages and backgrounds.

Alom Shaha's model for the exegesis of sacred texts would seem to be Quranic, perhaps inevitably, and he has not fully tapped into the two centuries and more of the intense scrutiny of the Bible which the European Enlightenment initiated, and which has brought about new awareness of the varieties of

Biblical material, and therefore of structures of understanding and interpretation. There are very many Christians today for whom the authority of the Bible does not depend on its supposed historical and pre-historical accuracy, nor on its literal application at all points.

It is a pity that the author chooses to focus on the negatives of the Ten Commandments, rather than on the positives of the Shema and the teaching to love one's neighbour as oneself. He thereby fails to do justice to the depths and dignity and subtleties of the Judaeo-Christian ethical tradition, and to its continuing central role in shaping and informing the moral fabric of our society. Incidentally, the dilemma of Euthyphro (does God determine goodness, or does the idea of goodness exist of itself) is for me a non-problem, as I see goodness as being intrinsic to God.

Similarly, further thoughts could be offered on the so-called "problem of evil". Much suffering is undoubtedly traumatic and horrendous, and the humane response to seek to prevent or mitigate suffering is a duty upon us all. On the other hand, there is no such thing as a human right to be protected absolutely from suffering, and indeed the capacity to suffer might be said to be an essential attribute of being human: I suffer, therefore I am, or perhaps better, I am able to suffer, to feel pain, therefore I am: *pati possum, ergo sum*. Only the angels supposedly know joy without pain, light without darkness.

"Physical" evil (e.g. earthquakes, eruptions, plagues, famine) is arbitrary, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and clearly "unfair": some people are lucky, and some are not. However, we are learning that these natural disasters are a by-product of the cosmic and geo-physical conditions which were necessary to bring about the complex sequence of "Goldilocks" moments which enabled life itself to begin, and human life ultimately to emerge. Does the gain outweigh the pain? Could we realistically conceive of a "better" world, with sentient beings comparable to ourselves, but with less suffering? It's at least worth debating.

One final point. The Handbook contains no hint of the tsunami of post-modernism which has so altered the intellectual landscape in recent decades, nor does it acknowledge the quest among young people stubbornly to seek and explore realities and experiences beyond the limits of rational, tangible, scientific truth. Alom Shaha's frank and honest account of his own quest has avoided these distractions. His pilgrimage has led him, regretfully not towards a blessed vision of the Celestial City, but rather into the no doubt welcoming but somewhat more mundane embrace of the British Humanist Association.



Michael Metcalf (retired Anglican priest and educationist; Chair, Staffordshire SACRE)

NASACRE AGM - 2013

A date for your diary - Thursday 24th May, 2013

Further details will follow

BACKPAGE

SOME DATES FOR YOUR DIARY ...

September

1st	Christian	Harvest Festival [date varies]
1st	Sikh	Installation of the scriptures
5th	Zoroastrian	Fravardin Mah Parab
11th	Rastafarian	Ethiopian New Year's Day
17th	Jewish	Rosh Hashannah starts
19th	Hindu	Ganesh Chaturthi
20th	Jain	Paryushan
20th	Japanese	Higan
20th		REC Board Meeting
23rd	Japanese	Shuubun No Hi
23rd	Pagan	Autumn Equinox
26th	Jewish	Yom Kippur
29th		Micaelmas

CALENDAR OF FESTIVALS



Dates for this Backpage are provided by the **Shap Working Party**. If you would like your own e-calendar or a Wallchart for your home or institution, for an excellent price, please see the Shap website at www.shap.org or contact Shap at

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

We are re-developing the NASACRE website and would welcome your thoughts and comments as users of the website on what you would like to see on a redeveloped site. Comments, thoughts or ideas to web@nasacre.org.uk



Please check your SACRE details and if necessary update the membership section and add to the exemplar documentation. Contact us at web@nasacre.org.uk

Contributors:

BRUCE GILL, JO FAGEANT, ALAN BRINE, MICHAEL METCALE, LESLEY PRIOR, ELIZABETH WAYNE

SACRE News: the newsletter of the National Association of SACREs, published termly. The opinions expressed in articles are those of their authors and not necessarily of the NASACRE Executive. For details see the website. Copies of this e-newsletter may be distributed to SACRE members but content may not be altered or adapted unless specifically stated.

This Autumn issue is edited by Sharon **Artley** and Paul **Hopkins**. Newsletter design by MMI web - www.mmiweb.org.uk
