

## **Bromley Sixth form conference - October 2009**

### **Background**

Members of Bromley SACRE decided that in order to highlight the work of SACRE to schools, pupils and the wider community and become a more proactive group it would be a good idea to start a Youth SACRE.

The annual SACRE budget did not allow for holding the sort of conference that was envisaged and so a bid was put in to the NASACRE/Westhill Trust awards for that year. The original proposal can be seen below and we were pleased when we heard that we had been granted the full award.

### **Bromley SACRE Proposal for the NASACRE/Westhill Awards**

Bromley SACRE has representatives from five of the six major faiths, missing a Buddhist rep. There are few places of worship for 'other' faith groups, making it difficult for schools to make visits to places of worship and to find visiting speakers. It is also a borough where the majority of people are generally deemed to be white Christian or of no faith. There is no interfaith forum in place. Bromley SACRE therefore feels it is very important for young people in Bromley schools to be made aware of the faith practices and issues related to people other than Christians. Over the next twenty years it is likely that the population will change and become more diverse and that issues will need to be addressed relating to community cohesion and diversity.

### **Proposal**

In order to alert the young people of Bromley to the need for an understanding of diversity we propose to hold a sixth form conference for pupils in Year 12.

The working title of the conference is '*Faith Numbers*', taking the idea of the newly released film 'Numbers'.

The day will start with a montage of ideas from films which depict the future, i.e. Twelve Monkeys, Terminator etc. Groups of pupils will then make a list of the key issues they think will be important in this country in 25 years time, when they are in their forties.

The workings of a SACRE will be explained briefly and then faith representatives from Bromley SACRE will present their ideas on the issues for people of their own faith in 25 years time. For example, will faith be more or less of an issue, will society be more secularised or polarised into groups related to faith. What problems might there be, what do they fear etc.

The pupils will be able to ask questions and will then be asked to consider what the government/Bromley Council/Bromley SACRE should be doing now to make community cohesion a reality in the future and to improve interfaith relations in Bromley. These discussions will be facilitated by young people from the faith communities.

After feed back from this activity we will hold a mock SACRE meeting with selected pupils taking different roles and discussing an issue that needs to be addressed now. As a result of the conference we hope to be able to start a Youth SACRE for Bromley which would be able to work with the SACRE

committee in future. During the day we will be looking for interested volunteers to be members of this.

The last activity will be to consider what hopes for the future of interfaith relations might be put into a time capsule to be opened in 25 years time.

## **Costs**

The venue for the conference will be the EDC in Bromley and Bromley SACRE members will be involved in the planning, the presentations and in finding youth members from their place of worship to facilitate the break out groups. A maximum of eighty pupil delegates will be involved with twenty adults bringing the number to one hundred. The cost of this day will be £400 for the venue plus £800 for refreshments including lunch. A cost of £60 will be put aside for thank you tokens for the youth facilitators. Money for materials will come to £40.

This comes to a total of £1300 for the day

SACRE members will give their services free and the RE adviser's time will be covered as part of the work programme for the year. Any other costs will be covered by Bromley SACRE budget.

Once we had received the notification of the award the RE adviser, Penny Smith-Orr and the Chair of SACRE, Martin Sweet announced it to the members and organised a meeting with the secondary teacher representatives to work on making a day conference for Year 12 students.

The first meeting was at Bullers Wood School on 29 June 2009. At this meeting various ideas were put forward which would keep the interest of the students and although the spirit of the proposal did not change it was decided to make the theme concentrate more on working towards a cohesive society for the future which might be achieved if the 16 and 17 year olds of the present had an input into making decisions now.

It was decided to use the ward map of Bromley broken into small 'islands'. The main activity would be group work using scenarios made up by the teachers to decide how to organise rules and ways of living on the 'island'. These islands would then be joined together to make up a map of the borough of Bromley and discussions on how a larger area could be organised allowing for the fact that there are different groups with different needs, expectations, traditions and faiths involved.

The adviser sent out invitations and outlines of the day to all the seventeen secondary schools in the borough. A couple of schools were on half term and another problem we encountered was that the new system of 'rarely cover' started in September 2009 which meant that some teachers were unable to leave school for the day so were unable to bring pupils. Eventually seven schools took part with a final number of 55 students at the conference. The seven schools were; Bishop Justus C of E, Bullers Wood, Cator Park, Coopers, Newstead Woods, Priory and St Olaves.

The teachers volunteered to devise the scenarios for the island activity. It was decided to involve the faith representatives on the SACRE committee by asking them to produce information on the faith stance taken with regard to the scenarios.

Two short film presentations were organised by the adviser to show various different possible futures and encourage pupils to take part in the decision making process. One entitled 'At now, change the future' and the second, to be shown at the end of the day, entitled 'what could you change?' Also a short talk on the particular statistics of the London borough of Bromley was devised using the One Bromley website.

One teacher devised a starter activity and it was decided to colour code this activity so that the students would work in groups that were mixed rather than school groups. It was decided that the Chair of SACRE would lead a session on what a SACRE actually is and a series of questions on issues that SACRE has addressed was devised. During this session the students were to be invited to join a youth SACRE and given some information on what that would involve.

Various domestic arrangements also had to be negotiated. The conference was booked to take place at the Bromley Education Development Centre and included a free lunch for all those involved. In the space of time between the bid being accepted and the conference the costs of the venue and lunches went up. But this was solved by using only the hall and one room, rather than having several break out rooms, although this meant that it was rather noisy during the group work sessions.

## **The Conference**

At the last moment two of the organising group of three teachers were unable to get out of school; however they were able to send students with another teacher. The third teacher was able to attend and presented the island session and feedback during the morning, while the adviser and the Chair of SACRE presented the afternoon sessions. In attendance, in addition to the participating students, were 9 accompanying teachers, the adviser, the diocesan adviser, the chair of SACRE and Tristram Jenkins from NASACRE. In the afternoon several members of the Bromley SACRE also attended and joined in the discussions on what a SACRE does and helped with the pupil activity on the sort of issues that arise in SACRE.

The following shows the finalised agenda for the conference which was entitled 'Knowing' with the idea that knowing helps you to make a difference. The first film session involved clips from 10 films showing various futures, some more sci-fi than others, and really engaged the student's interest.

## **Agenda**

### **Aim**

- To understand the importance of decision making and forward planning in order to ensure a cohesive society in the future.
- To start a youth SACRE in Bromley

09.30	Registration and Starter Activity
10.00	Introductions Short film 'Act Now, Change the Future' - discussion of ideas presented and reasons why planning for a cohesive society is important
10.30	Pupils, in mixed groups, design way of life on an island starting with the moral code needed to live together in a cohesive society. Throughout the task pupils will be guided with scenarios helping them to consider religious, ethical and political issues
12.00	Feedback from groups on decision making process, problems incurred and decisions made

12.30	Lunch break. (work will be displayed during lunch for use later on)
13.15	The importance of an overview and coherent policymaking. Statistics of Bromley Borough- i.e. faith groups, languages, age demographics, wealth etc What is SACRE? An invitation to join a new Youth SACRE for Bromley and how it would work
13.35	Pupils' Activity Questions that SACRE has had to consider, what would you do? e.g. How do you decide which religions to teach? Can my child wear a religious symbols?, should RE be taught in schools? How do you distinguish between magic and miracles?
14.05	Another short film; 'What could you change?' Thinking and planning for the future, Pupils write an advice slip for their future self
14.20	Round up of the day and Evaluations

The mixing of the students worked reasonably well and the feed back session on the work of how to devise rules for living was very lively and thought provoking. The different groups had come up with various ways to organise and to deal with the different scenarios. The questions were shown on a power point presentation with tabled information covering key religious beliefs, mainly provided by the faith representatives on the SACRE committee concerning each predicament. The students were told to make sure they read the faith information and listened to every group member's point of view before deciding on a solution.

The pupils used the faith information and their own ideas to come to the conclusions (Appendix 1) many of which were opposite views to another group. The feed back session was very lively with most of the students presenting the group ideas. Students were not afraid to give their opinions and to debate any challenge that occurred.

After lunch the islands were put together and the statistics of living and working in Bromley were presented. Students were encouraged to think of development on a larger scale and given statistics on population, life expectancy, employment and numbers of people in Bromley from each religious group and none.

Martin sweet then presented a session on what happens in a SACRE meeting and the students were invited to join the youth SACRE. They were then given a sheet with various questions of the type that SACRE has to deal with. (Appendix 2)

The answers to these were interesting and showed a lot of common sense. Some of these ideas will probably form the basis of discussions at the first meeting.

After this session the students were shown another film 'what could you change?' and then given the final which was to write a note to their future self.

'What should you remember, what needs to change, what needs to happen?'

These were fixed up on the map for all to see and are written below;

- Don't be afraid to speak your mind
- I hope you are doing something worthwhile with your life, don't forget the environment
- Religions should be in harmony, people should be able to fly,

- I should remember how great I am
- I want to make there be world peace
- Regardless of religion and race, 'all men are created equal'
- Stay cool; live every day as your last
- Recycle!
- Work hard and don't give up
- Decrease the number of people being killed by knife and gun crime. Decrease the level of pollution
- Knowledge is everything. Change; we need to become more cohesive; we need start listening and give each other respect
- Reduce pollution; don't take anything for granted
- Appreciate everyone and everything
- Recycle everything
- Football will become a proper religion
- In the future there will be no religion. Religion causes conflict! Without religion there would be less war and hopefully there will be flying cars
- Woo paganism
- I should remember where I was that day and how I survived. Something bad needs to happen to change everything
- The future is what we make it but we won't be there to suffer the consequences. Change- think of the next generation more!
- End third world debt
- Live each day as if it was your last
- Look forward try not to look back. Be positive not negative
- Remember it's ok to be happy and sad but try to stay positive. Don't be afraid to trust people. That's all you need to know.
- Note to self; don't trust technology, it hates you!
- Note to self; don't put too much trust in too many people. The way developing countries are treated. Better communication
- Don't take things for granted
- Live for today, not tomorrow
- Not to show off to other people and focus on yourself. Be more focused on your future.
- Don't be selfish
- To future, remember to live everyday as it comes. The way we treat the planet needs to change; we need to make this happen by understanding.
- Don't look back always look forward
- Stop using a car so much; walk to places
- People need to; learn to believe, care and communicate give and take. Believe in you, others, everything, no matter how ludicrous it may seem
- Find melody and tell her she is amazing and make the world hear her.
- Reach out in peace to people of other countries. Press for green political manifesto and vote for their candidates. Be constant in prayer.
- Live your life to the full.
- Note to self; work hard to gain what you want in life. Be less reliant on technology. Sustainable society; with less crime and conflict.
- End poverty
- The students were then asked to evaluate the day and indicate whether they would like to join the youth SACRE, twenty five of the students said yes they would, Some of the students were going to go back to school and share the day with others and see if they would also like to join.
- The results of the evaluations are in Appendix 3.

## **Conclusion**

The day took a lot of the RE consultants allocated time to organise and the cost was such that this could not be run again unless funding was sought from outside again in future. However if the day was to be repeated in a couple of years to encourage more students to join the youth SACRE it should be easier as the materials are all made. Thanks to Fiona Hawkes, Jed Stone and Alex Green from SACRE who gave their time so willingly. Working with the teachers on the SACRE committee was good and it was a shame that two of them could not get to the conference in the end and see the fruits of their work. The teachers who did come were very involved and worked well together and with the students to help make the day a success.

The students seemed to be appreciative of the day and were keen to articulate their opinions. Five students who did not have a teacher with them left at lunchtime.

it will be interesting to see whether the students do come to the first meeting of the Youth SACRE and whether the main committee will be able to assimilate their views in the future.

Looking at the evaluations it seems that the most enjoyable bit of the day was the lunch! The films were also highly rated although some students said they were scared by the possible futures they were shown. The Bromley statistics and the SACRE questions and answers had a mixed response but most students understood that they were there for the purpose of finding out about SACRE. Designing the island lifestyle was the most popular activity and comments showed that the students enjoyed interacting with new people as much as making the rules up. From the evaluations it seems as though we had a good mix of activities and that there was nothing so unpopular that we would remove it.

To finish, a quote from one of the evaluations sums up the spirit of the day;

'had a really interesting day, met loads of fantastic new people and opened my mind to new ideas!'

## **Thank You**

Thanks to NASACRE/Westhill Trust for the funding and to Tristram Jenkins for his input. Thanks also to the teachers, other adults and SACRE members who accompanied the students and worked with them. Thanks to the staff at the EDC for their help and patience and to the catering staff for providing the lunch which got the most 5's in the evaluations. Thanks also to Ted Smith-Orr who made the islands and worked out how they would fit together and to Richard Rodgers who produced the two films, without which the day would not have been as stimulating.