

**London Borough of
Redbridge - Standing
Advisory Council on
Religious Education
(SACRE)**

**Briefing paper on
SIKH APPEARANCE
AND IDENTITY**

(DECEMBER 2015)

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Background notes

(Numbers in brackets refer to 'further explanatory notes', pages 10-11)

Brief history

1. The history of Sikhism can be said to have started with the life and teachings of Nanak (1469-1539) who was born in that part of the Panjab region of north-west India which now lies within Pakistan. (1) Nanak's parents were Hindu. At the age of 30, he had a spiritual experience which convinced him that he had been given a divine commission to preach about the presence and nature of God. In time, a group of disciples gathered around him: the word 'Sikh' means 'disciple'. Nanak's disciples regarded him as their 'guru' (a word meaning 'spiritual teacher') and so referred to him as Guru Nanak. The number of Guru Nanak's disciples grew and so began the Sikh community.
2. Guru Nanak taught that, whether people in his society of that time were Hindu or Muslim, they should live honest lives and be true to the one God. He also taught that a person could serve God within ordinary, daily life. So, for example – contrary to what some people believed at the time – a person did not have to leave home and family to become fully devoted to God.
3. Before Nanak died, he appointed one of his closest disciples, Angad, to be the next Guru of the Sikh community. Angad, in turn, appointed a successor. In all, there were ten human Sikh Gurus, each appointed by his predecessor:

1	Guru Nanak Dev	1469-1539	
2	Guru Angad Dev	1504-1552	(Became Guru 1539)
3	Guru Amar Das	1479-1574	(Became Guru 1552)
4	Guru Ram Das	1534-1581	(Became Guru 1574)
5	Guru Arjan Dev	1563-1606	(Became Guru 1581)
6	Guru Hargobind	1595-1644	(Became Guru 1606)
7	Guru Har Rai	1630-1661	(Became Guru 1644)
8	Guru Har Krishan	1656-1664	(Became Guru 1661)
9	Guru Tegh Bahadur	1621-1675	(Became Guru 1664)
10	Guru Gobind Singh	1666-1708	(Became Guru 1675)

4. Each of the Gurus is associated with particular periods or events in the evolution of the Sikh community. For example, it was the fifth Guru, Arjan, who compiled an early collection of sacred writings. The building which is now commonly known by non-Sikhs as the Golden Temple of Amritsar, but referred to as *Harmandir Sahib* (2) by Sikhs, also owes its origin to this Guru.
5. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, was notable for a number of reasons. Firstly, he created the Khalsa or community of initiated (3) Sikhs. In 1699, he called a great meeting of the Sikh community in the city of Anandpur. According to the traditional story, he asked for five Sikhs who would give their lives for their Guru. The five men (4) who offered their lives were baptised by Gobind Singh and wore five distinguishing marks of the baptised Sikh – the Five Ks (so called because they each begin with the sound 'k' in the Panjabi language: see note 14). The Guru himself was baptised by the five whom he had baptised. Many men and women were baptised that day and all took on the responsibility of wearing the Five Ks. Guru Gobind Singh said that, in order to show their equality and unity, all Sikh men would have the name *Singh* ('lion') and women *Kaur* ('princess'). He also said that, after his death, the Sikh community should no longer obtain their teachings from a human guru. Instead, religious authority would reside in the Guru Granth Sahib the Sikh scripture containing the original writings of the Sikh Gurus. The temporal authority would reside in the Sikh community (the

Panth). Thus, Sikhs refer to their sacred book as a Guru – the *Guru Granth Sahib* (5) – and, because they regard it as a living Guru, continue to give it the honour that they would have accorded to the human Gurus in their day.

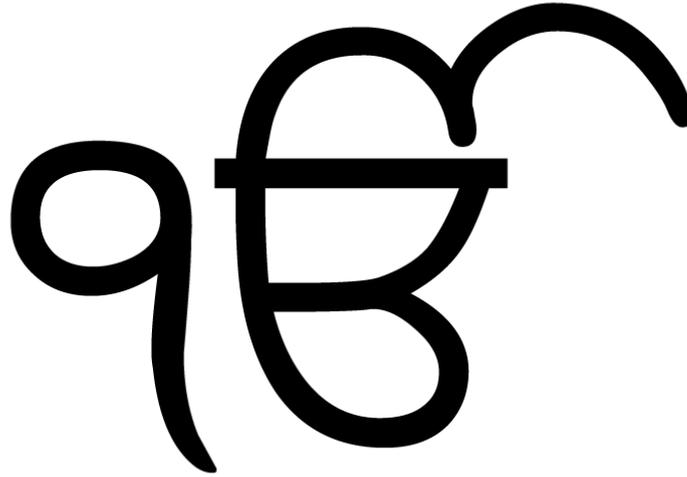
6. The Sikh connection with Britain was a direct result of British rule in India. As disciplined soldiers (the term 'soldier-saints' has sometimes been used by Sikhs of themselves), Sikhs gained the respect of the British. The Sikhs and British also clashed, however, as in the Anglo-Sikh Wars of 1845-46 and 1848-49. The film *Gandhi* depicts a well known episode – the Jalianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 – when troops under the command of the British General Dyer fired on a crowd, including many Sikhs, which had gathered in Amritsar. (6)
7. The partition of India in 1947 was particularly troubling for Sikhs in that their homeland, the Panjab, was divided between the new states of India and Pakistan. Many Sikhs died as they fled eastward from Pakistan to India. The well-known Sikh journalist and writer, Kushwant Singh, graphically portrayed this in his novel *Train to Pakistan*.
8. The struggle on the part of some Sikhs to obtain their political rights in the Panjab brought the Sikh community into worldwide focus in the 1980s. The Indian army stormed the precincts of the Golden Temple of Amritsar in 1984 and many sacred buildings, such as the Akal Takht which stands near the Golden Temple, were heavily damaged. Many Sikhs were killed, including the leader of the group seeking their rights, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.
9. There are about 20 million Sikhs in the world today, 16 million of them living in or near the Panjab. There are sizeable Sikh communities in countries such as Canada and Singapore. The largest Sikh community outside India is in Britain. Though the first Sikh *gurdwara* (place of worship) was in Putney in 1911, most Sikhs came to Britain in the 1950s and early 1960s. In Redbridge, there are approximately 14,000 Sikhs, approximately one in sixteen of all Redbridge residents. There are about 420,000 Sikhs in England and about 460,000 in Britain as a whole. (7)

Beliefs

10. Sikhs believe in one God to whom they refer by a number of words and phrases, such as: *Waheguru* (Wonderful Lord) and *Sat Guru* (True Guru). Many of the central Sikh beliefs about God are seen in the *Mool Mantar* (Mantra), an important prayer which many Sikhs recite daily:

"There is one God,
Whose Name is Eternal truth,
The Creator,
Without fear,
Without hate,
Immortal,
Beyond birth and death,
Self-existent,
Realised by the Grace of the Guru."

The first two Panjabi words, *Ik Onkar* ("There is one God") can often be seen written in a Sikh gurdwara: on the canopy above the Guru Granth Sahib, for example. This reminds Sikhs of their belief in the oneness of God.



Ik Onkar

11. Basic to Sikh belief is the idea that it is important to show service (*sewa*, pronounced 'say-vah') to others. Both men and women serving food to others, for example, demonstrate this in a Sikh gurdwara. Within the Panjab, Sikhs set up hospitals for the same reason.
12. The Sikh Gurus taught that social status had no bearing on attaining liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth. This rejection of the religious significance of *caste* is demonstrated in Sikh *gurdwara* practice in a number of ways. Anyone entering the worship hall will be offered *kara parshad*, a sweet food made of clarified butter and whole wheat flour, to show that all are equal. Again, the holding of *langar* – communal eating – is an important part of *gurdwara* life. All those visiting a *gurdwara*, be they Sikh or not, will be given the opportunity to eat with others. *Gurdwaras* always have an area where food is served and eaten, all sitting together on the floor to demonstrate their equality (8). This area is called the *langar* and the food which is served is always vegetarian (no meat, fish, eggs or gelatine). Because food is offered at no charge, *langar* is sometimes translated as 'free kitchen'.
13. The issue of who can truly be called a 'Sikh' is much discussed. Both 'particular' and 'general' approaches can be adopted. The 'particular' approach, that adopted by orthodox Sikhism, is that 'Sikhs' are those who are *amrit-dhari* - who have taken *amrit* (9) and thereby become members of the *Khalsa* (see notes 5 above and 14 below). Other Sikhs, who might wear some of the Five Ks, are thus 'aspiring' or *sahaj-dhari* Sikhs. The 'general' approach, one which is often taken by non-Sikhs, is that those who are born into Sikh families can be termed 'Sikh' – or that those who call themselves such are Sikhs. (10)

Practices

14. The wearing of the Five Ks (see note 5) is fundamental to Sikh identity. Those Sikhs who choose to undergo the rite of baptism/initiation (referred to as 'taking Amrit'), thereby becoming members of the *Khalsa* or Sikh 'brotherhood' (11), are making a public commitment to follow Sikh faith and practice with total devotion. One way in which this is expressed is by

wearing all of the Five Ks. As expressions of Sikh identity, the symbolism of each of the Five Ks can be interpreted in different ways. For example, the wearing of:

kesh (uncut hair) can be said to represent devotion to God (in that it demonstrates an unwillingness to tamper with that – the hair – which has been given by God);

the **kangha** (wooden comb worn in the hair) can be said to represent a disciplined way of life;

the **kirpan** (sword) can be said to represent the obligation to help others and preserve truth and justice (12);

the **kachhera** (13) (under-shorts) can be said to represent the desire to live a chaste and modest life; and

the **kara** (steel wrist bangle) can be said to represent the strength of the Sikh community (*Panth*) and a reminder for the individual to do good deeds.

15. Though *amrit-dhari* Sikhs (see note 13 above) will wear all of the Five Ks, *sahaj-dhari* Sikhs might only wear some of them, such as the *kara* on their right wrist. *Amrit-dhari* Sikh men will not cut their hair and will wear a turban, but *sahaj-dhari* Sikhs might not follow this practice. Some *sahaj-dhari* Sikhs wear miniature versions of the *kangha*, *kirpan* and *kara* on a necklace.
16. The turban, with which many Sikh men cover their hair (gathered into a topknot on top of the head) is not itself one of the Five Ks but is an integral part of Sikh identity. The right to wear the turban (formally called a Dastar, colloquially called a *pag* – a shortened form of *pagri* - in Panjabi) has often been fiercely fought for by Sikhs. There is no religious significance in the colour of the turban though some Sikh groups do wear particular colours or tie the turban in a distinctive manner. However, just because a turban is being worn does not necessarily indicate that a person is Sikh, *amrit-dhari* or otherwise. Many *amrit-dhari* (baptised) Sikh women will also wear a turban for the same reasons as *amrit-dhari* Sikh men.
17. The *gurdwara* (literally, 'door to the Guru') is the Sikh place of worship as well as the centre of Sikh community life. It is sometimes referred to as a 'Sikh temple' though some Sikhs object to this. In the Panjab, there are many famous Sikh *gurdwaras* which are associated with particular events in Sikh history. For example, a *gurdwara* stands over the spot in Anandpur where Guru Gobind Singh inaugurated the Khalsa Panth in 1699 (see note 5).
18. *Gurdwaras* will be found wherever there are communities of Sikhs. In Britain, the first *gurdwaras* were rooms or buildings which had been taken over for this purpose. As Sikh communities grew and prospered, purpose-built *gurdwaras* began to be built as well as other buildings to house Panjabi and music classes.
19. A Sikh *gurdwara* will often be recognised externally by its flagpole on which flies a triangular flag (the *nishan sahib*). The flag, usually usually saffron with a blue *khanda*; a Sikh symbol upon it. The *khanda* consists of three weapons traditionally associated with Sikhism: a *khanda* (double-edged sword), a *chakka* (steel ring like a quoit), and two *kirpans* (single-edged swords, representing *miri* and *piri*, spiritual and temporal authority).



Nishan Sahib with khanda symbol

20. Within the *gurdwara*, there will be a worship hall in which people gather to hear extracts from the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh holy book, being read or sung. In the worship hall, the main focus is the *Guru Granth Sahib* which is placed on a raised platform and has a canopy over it. Sikhs entering the worship hall will bow before the holy scripture, kneeling and touching their forehead on the ground, and will give an offering of money or food which can be used in *langar* (see note 12).
21. Though the Gurus rejected caste as a thing of religious or spiritual significance (see note 12), in terms of culture and tradition the family group into which Sikhs are born – a *Jat* Sikh family, for example – can have social significance. This can affect the choice of marriage partner, for instance. Again, when *Ramgarhia* Sikhs predominate in a particular *gurdwara*, this building might be named a *Ramgarhia Sikh gurdwara*. (14) For Sikhs brought up in Britain, the family group to which they belong might be of declining importance.
22. The Sikh community celebrates a number of festivals during the year. These festivals might be *gurpurbs* – anniversaries of the birth or martyrdom of one of the ten Gurus – or traditional festivals connected with significant events in Sikh history.
23. *Gurpurbs* that are commemorated within all Sikh communities include the Birthday of Guru Nanak, the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan and the Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh. (15) The principle activity associated with a *gurpurb* is a continuous, unbroken reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. This is called an *Akhand Path* and takes 48 hours, the ending of the reading coinciding with the anniversary itself.
- Festivals which are celebrated by Sikhs world-wide include *Baisakhi/Vaisakhi* and *Diwali*. The festival of *Baisakhi* celebrates the founding of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 (see note 5). At Bandi Chhor, Sikhs recall an event in the life of the sixth Guru, Hargobind Rai, who was released from prison but managed to secure the freedom of 52 Hindu princes from imprisonment at the same time. (16) *Diwali* commemorates the day when the Guru reached Amritsar and the people lit up the whole city with thousands of candles and lamps.
24. The Akal Takht Sahib (the primary governing body for Sikh religious affairs) instructs that the *Guru Granth Sahib* must not be present where alcohol, meat or tobacco is

served or consumed. The Guru Granth Sahib must not be taken to hostels, banqueting suites, clubs or public houses. No one under the influence of intoxicants is allowed to enter a Gurdwara

Sikh appearance and identity: questions and answers

In framing answers to the following questions, advice has been sought from local and national Sikh bodies. Please see 'SACRE briefing paper 3: an introduction' on the front inside cover.

What are the Five Ks and why are they special to Sikhs?

See notes 14 – 15, page 4.

What does the law say about a Sikh wearing a *kirpan*?

For information about the *kirpan*, one of the Sikh Five Ks, see note 14, page 4.

Sikhs are aware of the concern that non-Sikhs might have about Sikhs, particularly older Sikh pupils, wearing a 'weapon'. They are also aware of the significance of the *kirpan* in Sikh history and religion. In response, the Sikh community in Redbridge has, in consultation with the police and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), issued the document *The Wearing of the Kirpan by Sikh Pupils: Guidelines for Redbridge Schools* (see Appendix 1, pages 14– 15). These guidelines, and the preamble which precedes them:

- place the *kirpan* in the Sikh context;
- explain that wearing a *kirpan* is within the law because it is worn for religious reasons;
- state that only *amrit-dhari* Sikhs (see note 13, page 4) have to wear a *kirpan* but that few pupils will be *amrit-dhari*;
- insist that Sikh pupils who have taken *amrit* (see reference note 9, page 10) inform school as soon as possible and produce documentation to certify this;
- outline safeguards that *amrit-dhari* Sikhs can be expected to adhere to – such as fitting a retaining strap preventing the *kirpan* being easily withdrawn from its scabbard;
- suggest sanctions in case of the guidelines being flouted; and
- suggest an insurance indemnity which parents of *amrit-dhari* pupils would be willing to sign.

If a person not entitled to wear a *kirpan* comes into possession of it by whatever means and causes injury to others, the appropriate criminal charges could be laid against that person rather than the *amrit-dhari* Sikh who had been wearing it. In such circumstances, the school is advised to seek advice from the local education authority.

Why do many young Sikh boys wear a piece of material over their top knot?

Children who are not yet capable of tying a turban might wear a piece of material over their topknot. A *rumal*, like a handkerchief, is the name given to a smaller piece of material. Sometimes, a larger piece of material - a *patka* - covers the whole head. A Sikh sportsman might be seen wearing this.

The tying of a boy's first turban is a special event in a Sikh family.

Is it imperative for Sikhs to leave their hair uncut?

Amrit-Dhari Sikhs will not cut any hair on their body. This is because they believe that humans should not tamper with that which has been given to them by God.

What is the significance of the turban for Sikhs?

See note 16, pages 4-5.

The turban was already an honoured style of headwear for men before the time of the Sikh Gurus. Turbans are still worn by communities other than Sikh.

However, the turban has been likened by Sikhs to a crown. It is an essential part of a male Sikh's dress for a number of reasons. (17) For example:

- it defines Sikh identity, as given by the tenth Guru (see note 5, page 2);
- it protects the *kesh*, one of the Five Ks (see note 14, page 4);
- it is worn to protect the head from injury; and
- it is worn for reasons of hygiene – that is, it keeps the hair clean.

If an incident happened in school where a Sikh child's turban was interfered with, the school might wish to inform parents.

Can a school ask a Sikh child to remove the *kara* (steel bracelet) during sports or any other activities?

See note 14, page 5.

Please note - A *kara* is not an item of Jewellery a high court ruling confirmed the right of a Sikh school girl to wear the *kara* at school.

As one of the Five Ks, the wearing of the *kara* is associated with Sikh identity. However, there is no rule about what size a *kara* should be and different sizes might be worn by Sikhs.

If a school is concerned about the health and safety implications of a *kara* being worn - during sporting activities, for example – it might consider the following:

- requesting that a smaller *kara* be worn;
- requesting that the *kara* is moved up the arm and protected in some way (by covering it with a tennis sweat-band or a bandage, for instance).

Even though some Sikhs will be seen to take off their own *kara* on occasions, schools would be unwise to insist on the outright removal of a *kara*. If there is concern, the parents or the local *gurdwara* should be consulted.

What is the Sikh view on the Five Ks or other artefacts being used in the classroom as a teaching aid, and how should they be kept?

Sikhs would never want any of the Five Ks abused, even for teaching purposes.

Ideally, Sikhs would like an *amrit-dhari* Sikh to show pupils one or several of the Five Ks (or, strictly speaking, the *Four Ks*, as the *kesh* – uncut hair – cannot be shown in the same way as the

other Ks), because he or she would accord the honour due to them. In the likely event that no such person is available, Sikhs would ask that:

- examples are handled with care;
- it is explained that the Five Ks are special for Sikhs, and reasons given; and
- examples are stored carefully and preferably in a place where no-one has smoked.

Why do Sikhs use the names they do?

For the second names, *Singh* and *Kaur*, see note 5, page 2.

The first names which Sikhs use can apply to either sex and many have religious connotations. For example, the name *Harmander* can be either a man's or woman's and means 'House of God' (see note 4, page 2 and explanatory note 2, page x).

The traditional naming ceremony involves the father and mother, together with the young baby, going to the *gurdwara*. They stand in front of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy book, and a page is opened at random. The first letter of the first verse on the left-hand page is taken as the first letter of the baby's name. If, for example, it is the Panjabi equivalent to 'H', then the name *Harmander* might be chosen; if it is the Panjabi equivalent to 'P', then the name *Panjab*. And so on.

What are the rules about girls' clothing and modesty?

Apart from wearing *kachera* (see note 14, page 4) and a turban, there is no restriction or requirement for Sikhs as to dress. A Sikh woman may or may not wear a turban but it is expected that she keeps her head covered by means of a scarf - a *chunni* (sometimes also called a *dupatta*) - when in the *gurdwara*, in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib* (and in the presence of older relatives, for example). Both sexes must not wear dirty garments and must be modest in their dress and appearance. For this reason, some Sikh families would prefer their daughters to wear trousers rather than a skirt.

What are the rules about the wearing of school uniform and colours?

Sikhs are insistent that:

- turbans are not replaced with caps;
- the *kara* is not prohibited; and
- *amrit-dhari* Sikhs wear a *kirpan*.

However, there are no restrictions regarding the colour of school uniforms. There would be no problem, then, if a school asked that a child's turban be in the colour of the school uniform.

What are the rules about food, hygiene and eating out?

Sikhs are not permitted to eat either *halal* or *kosher* meat – that is, derived from either the Muslim or the Jewish way of killing animals. (Neither are *amrit-dhari* Sikhs permitted to take alcohol, tobacco or drugs.) It is the norm for *amrit-dhari* Sikhs to be strict vegetarians and promote this within the family.

To aid unity and family life, Sikhs are encouraged to eat as a family unit, in a clean environment, free from interruption and onlookers. In that the school eats as a unit, there is no problem in Sikhs pupils taking school meals.

What do Sikhs feel about joining in non-Sikh festivals?

Sikhs treat all religions with respect and that they can all provide paths to God: each religion is a boat on the ocean of life. Guru Nanak taught that, if people were Hindu, then they should be good Hindus; if Muslims, they should be good Muslims. There is no tradition of Sikhs seeking to convert others to Sikhism.

Therefore, there would be no problem in Sikh children joining in with particular festivities. If a Sikh child was a pupil at a Roman Catholic school, for instance, some parents might not mind him/her attending Roman Catholic service but not mass, though an *amrit-dhari* Sikh would almost certainly not do this. Neither would Sikh parents mind their children visiting different places of worship.

What involvement can Sikhs have in collective worship and RE?

Sikhs would have no objection to their children taking part in either activity.

What is the Sikh view on the provision of sex education within the school curriculum?

There should be no reason why Sikh parents would object to this, providing that it was placed in a moral framework. There would be no objection to including information about contraception.

What would be Sikh reaction to a request by a teacher to draw pictures of the Sikh gurus or to impersonate them in drama?

There would be no problem with someone being asked to draw or paint a picture. Indeed, some gurdwaras have competitions for children to see who can, for example, draw the best picture of Guru Nanak or Guru Gobind Singh.

However, Sikhs would be offended if children were asked to directly act out the part of a Guru in drama. Instead, they would prefer it if a reporting style was used – giving an account of an incident, or reading out the words spoken by a Guru, for example.

Further explanatory notes

- (1) Readers might be more familiar with the spelling *Punjab*. This is derived from the two Farsi words, *panj* meaning 'five' and *ab* meaning 'waters': historically, the larger Panjab was watered by five major rivers. For the sake of accuracy, the spelling *Panjab* is increasingly preferred. For the same reason, the language is spelt *Panjabi*, not *Punjabi*. Confusion has probably been caused because the word or prefix *pan* is pronounced as if it were *pun*. The word *panj* (five), for example, would rhyme with the English word *sponge*. (Note: the English word 'punch' derives from this root – it was originally a drink made by mixing five ingredients.)
- (2) The word *Harmandir* derives from *Har* meaning 'God' and *mandir* meaning 'house'. Thus, *Harmandir* means 'place where God is worshipped'. *Sahib* is a term of respect. Sikhs use the term after the names of people, places or things that they honour. Thus, for example, the Sikh holy book is the Guru Granth *Sahib* and the stool upon which it is placed is referred to as the manji *Sahib*.

- (3) Though *Khalsa* is often translated as 'brotherhood', the term carries no gender-specific connotation: both male and females are baptised into the Khalsa.
- (4) Sikhs refer to these five men as the *Panj Pyares* ('Five Beloved Ones'). See note (1) above for further usage of the term *panj*.
- (5) The title consists of three words: *Guru* meaning 'spiritual teacher', *Granth* meaning 'scripture' and *Sahib*, a term of respect (see note (2) above).
- (6) The memory of this episode lives on. When Queen Elizabeth II visited the Panjab region of India in 1997, whether or not an apology should be offered for the massacre became an acute political issue.
- (7) Source of these statistics?
- (8) *Amrit* – sometimes translated into English as 'nectar' - is made up of water and sugar. It is sprinkled over the initiates during the ceremony of initiation (*amrit pahul*). The ceremony is sometimes described as 'taking amrit'. The word *amrit* itself derives from two Sanskrit words – *amar* (immortal, everlasting) and *rit* (nectar).
- (9) Within many religious traditions, there are differing views about who is the 'true' believer. Some Christians draw a distinction between 'committed' and 'nominal' Christians, for example. In trying to grasp Sikh views, a helpful though imprecise parallel might be the distinction between 'religious' and 'non-religious' Jews.
- (10) The term 'brotherhood', traditionally used of the Khalsa Panth, carries no gender implication. Both men and women can take *Amrit* and become members of the Khalsa.
- (11) Sikhs sometimes point to the etymology of the word *kirpan*: *kirpa* means 'God's blessing' and *an* means 'standing up for truth and justice'.
- (12) The term *kachhera* is preferred to the word sometimes used in books, *kaccha*. The latter word, meaning something like the English word 'nickers', is thought by Sikhs to be less appropriate for one of the Five Ks.
- (13) The Sikh *gurdwara* in Neville Road, Forest Gate, is *Ramgarhia*.
- (14) The dating system used for Sikh festivals is currently changing. In that Sikhs will be adopting a lunar calendar, Sikh festivals may be fixed in the future.
- (15) For a retelling of the story of Guru Har Gobind and his cloak, see Curriculum Bank *Religious Education Key Stage 1* (Scholastic 1997), pages 145-146
- (16) An *amrit-dhari* Sikh male would not be willing to become a fireman under current regulations as he may not be able to wear a helmet over his turban and a tight-fitting oxygen mask over his bearded face.

Glossary of Sikh terms used in the text

The brief definitions of most of the following Sikh terms, found in the text of this briefing paper, have been taken from *Religious education: glossary of terms* published by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) in 1994. Terms marked with an asterisk (*) have been added by members of the working group which produced this document.

<i>Akal Takht</i>	<i>Throne of the Eternal: throne of the Timeless One.</i> Building facing the Golden Temple in Amritsar, where Sikhs gather for political purposes
<i>Akhand Path</i>	Continuous reading of the <i>Guru Granth Sahib</i> from beginning to end
<i>Amrit</i>	<i>Nectar.</i> Sanctified liquid made of sugar and water, used in initiation ceremonies
<i>Amrit-dhari*</i>	A Sikh who has undergone baptism and who thereby undertakes to live a dedicated Sikh life, including the wearing of the <i>Five Ks</i>
<i>Baisakhi</i>	A major Sikh festival celebrating the formation of the <i>Khalsa</i> in 1699 CE
Bandi Chhor <i>Vaisakhi</i>	A Sikh Festival associated with the sixth Guru, Har Gobind being released from prison
<i>Chunni*</i>	A scarf, often pulled up over the head, worn by women
Dastar	Formal term for a turban in Panjabi
<i>Diwali</i>	A festival of lights, Sikhs associating it with a story about the sixth Guru, Har Gobind arriving in Amritsar
<i>Dupatta</i>	A scarf, often pulled up over the head, worn by women
<i>Ik Onkar</i>	<i>There is only One God.</i> The first phrase of the <i>Mool Mantar</i> . It is also used as a symbol to decorate Sikh objects
<i>Kaur</i>	<i>Princess.</i> Name given to all Sikh females by Guru Gobind Singh
<i>Five Ks</i>	<i>Panj kakke.</i> The symbols of Sikhism worn by Sikhs
<i>Gurdwara</i>	Sikh place of worship. Literally the 'doorway to the Guru'
<i>Gurpurb</i>	A Guru's anniversary (birth or death). Also used for other anniversaries
<i>Guru</i>	Teacher. In Sikhism, the title of <i>Guru</i> is reserved for the ten human Gurus and the <i>Guru Granth Sahib</i>
<i>Guru Granth Sahib</i>	Primal collection of Sikh scriptures, compiled by Guru Arjan and given its final form by Guru Gobind Singh
<i>Harmandir Sahib*</i>	<i>House of God.</i> The title given by Sikhs to the Golden Temple of Amritsar.
<i>Jat*</i>	The land-owning caste in the Panjab to which many Sikhs have traditionally belonged

<i>Kachera</i>	Traditional underwear/shorts. One of the Five Ks
<i>Kangha</i>	Comb worn in the hair. One of the Five Ks
<i>Kara</i>	Steel band worn on the right wrist. One of the Five Ks
<i>Kara parshad</i>	Sanctified food distributed at Sikh ceremonies
<i>Kesh</i>	Uncut hair. One of the Five Ks
<i>Khanda</i>	Double-edged sword used in the initiation ceremony. Also used as the emblem on the Sikh flag
<i>Khalsa</i>	The Sikh community
<i>Kirpan</i>	Sword. One of the Five Ks. 'Dagger' should be avoided
<i>Langar</i> <i>Guru ka Langar</i>	<i>Guru's kitchen.</i> The gurdwara dining hall and the food served in it
<i>Mool Mantar</i>	<i>Basic teaching; essential teaching.</i> The basic statement of belief at the beginning of the <i>Guru Granth Sahib</i>
<i>Nishan Sahib</i>	Sikh flag flown at gurdwaras
<i>Pagri*</i>	Turban
<i>Panjab</i>	<i>Land of five rivers.</i> The area of India in which Sikhism originated
<i>Panjabi*</i>	In that Sikhism began in the <i>Panjab</i> , the traditional language of Sikhs
<i>Panth</i>	The Sikh community
<i>Patka</i>	A large piece of material worn by a Sikh over his hair

<i>Rahit Maryada</i>	Sikh Code of Discipline
<i>Ramgarhia*</i>	A traditional caste particularly associated with carpentry
<i>Romaal*</i>	A piece of material which might be worn by a young Sikh boy over his <i>top knot</i>
<i>Sahaj-dhari*</i>	A Sikh who has not undergone baptism and who therefore, for example, does not wear all of the Five Ks
<i>Sahib*</i>	Lord. A <i>Panjabi</i> term which, when used as a suffix to a name or title, expressed honour eg <i>Guru Granth Sahib</i> , <i>Harmander Sahib</i> , <i>Nishan Sahib</i>
<i>Sat Guru</i>	<i>True Guru/Teacher</i> . One of the titles used by Sikhs of God
<i>Sewa</i>	Service directed at the Sikh community and <i>gurdwara</i> , but also of humanity in general
<i>Sikh</i>	<i>Learner; disciple</i> . A person who believes in the ten Gurus and the <i>Guru Granth Sahib</i> , and who has no other religion
<i>Singh</i>	<i>Lion</i> . Name adopted by Sikh males
<i>Waheguru</i>	<i>Wonderful Guru/Teacher</i> . One of the titles used by Sikhs of God

Further reading and information

- *The Guru Granth Sahib*, Piara Singh Sambhi, 48 pages, Heinemann Educational 1994
One of the 'Discovering Sacred Texts' series, aimed at lower secondary school age pupils
- *Living Religions: Sikhism*, Chris Richards, 57 pages, Nelson 1996
One of the 'Living Religions' series, aimed at primary school non-specialist teachers of RE. A companion poster pack is also available
- *Religion through Festivals: Sikhism*, Davinder Kaur Babraa, 48 pages, Longman 1989
One of the 'Religions through Festivals' series of books aimed at lower secondary school age pupils
- *Sikhism: A new approach*, Pamela Draycott, 96 pages, Hodder & Stoughton 1996
A text book written for those studying Sikhism at Key Stage 4. A very useful survey – but do note that the Sikh terms *Waheguru* has been misprinted as *Raheguru*
- *Sikhism*, Hew McLeod, 334 pages, Penguin 1997
A very readable book written by one of the foremost scholars of Sikhism. Note, however, that some of the things which this New Zealand scholar has written have not been well received by members of the Sikh community
- *Meeting Sikhs*, edited by Joy Barrow, 134 pages, Christians Aware publications
A very informative book, with colour photographs, available from: Christians Aware, 124 New Walk, Leicester LE1 7JA (0116 2540770)

Further guidance

- **Sikh Education Welfare and Advancement (SEWA)**
An international discussion forum of like minded Sikhs
298 Norwood Road, Norwood Green, Southall, Middlesex UB2 4JH
(Tel & fax 0181 737 0866)
- **The Sikh Missionary Society UK**
10 Featherstone Road, Southall, Middlesex UB2 5AA
(Tel 0181 574 1902 Fax 0181 574 1912)

Appendix 1

The Wearing of the Kirpan by Sikh Pupils: Guidelines for Redbridge Schools

The following preamble and guidelines were agreed by members of the local Sikh community.

Preamble

The *kirpan* is one of the Five Ks or religious symbols kept by all *amritdhari Sikhs* (those who have been baptised through a religious ceremony unique to Sikhs). A baptised Sikh promises not to remove these symbols from his/her body at any time following the Amrit ceremony.

There is, at present, no specific policy regarding the Sikh *kirpan*. However, LAM 2/82 gave guidance to schools regarding the wearing of 'religious dress' and 'jewellery' as follows.

'Cultural issues based on religion, such as modesty, the wearing of clothing with religious significance and dietary needs will affect some children in school ... the Sikh Kara (steel bangle worn on the right wrist) and the Muslim Tawiz (a string with a small bag or box) ... If schools consider it dangerous for them to be worn in physical education lessons, headteachers should seek the co-operation of parents in allowing their removal in lessons. However, if agreement cannot be reached, as headteachers have overall responsibility for safety in their schools, their may be no alternative to the children concerned being withdrawn.'

In practice, it is usually possible to reach agreement so that the *kara* (for example) does not have to be removed, but may be held securely by tape or an elastic wrist band during PE lessons etc. Should a pupil have to be withdrawn from any activity, it is suggested that this should not in any way be portrayed as a "punishment or major issue", and the child concerned be given something positive to do instead.

The question of the *kirpan* should be treated with the utmost care, as the wearing of the Five Ks is of the utmost importance and sensitivity for baptised Sikhs. The word *kirpan* comes from the words *kirpa* and *aan*. *Kirpa* means an act of kindness, a favour; and *aan* means honour and self-respect. Thus for Sikhs, the *kirpan* symbolises freedom of spirit. To call it a dagger or knife is insulting to this article of faith as the functions of these two items are very different from the *kirpan*.

The wearing of the *kirpan* is not against the law as it is understood how important it is to the Sikh religion. Section A of the Offensive Weapons Act 1996 creates the offence of having an article with a blade or point (or offensive weapon) on school premises etc. Under Section 4, subsection (4), a person has a defence if the article is worn for religious reasons or as part of any national costume.

Two other defences are contained on similar grounds within the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 (Section 1) and the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Section 137).

It is essential for a baptised Sikh to keep his/her vows, and this commitment, which is not entered into lightly or easily, should be respected by the school community.

The *kirpan* may be worn unobtrusively under outer clothing, and thus should not normally be the cause of any concern. The sword itself (NB it should not be referred to as a 'dagger' or 'knife') is usually about 25 cm (9-10 inches) long, and is held in its scabbard by a strap and thus cannot fall out or be easily taken out. After obtaining the agreement of parents it would often be possible for the retaining strap to be sewn tight which would effectively prevent the *kirpan* from being removed from its scabbard.

Any Sikh who wears the *kirpan* will know its importance and treat it very seriously and carefully, never as a toy or object to fool around with. **It is not sufficient for a baptised Sikh to wear a small (replica) version like a brooch or badge**, though others may do so.

It is hoped that staff and students will be informed of the importance of such religious objects and will wish to respect the commitment of any member of the school community who wishes to take their faith as seriously as do *amritdhari* Sikhs.

It is quite unusual (but not unfeasible) for young (primary school aged) children to become baptised Sikhs, so there is no real danger of a 'craze' developing.

The guidelines

1. Restricted to pupils who have gone through the Amrit Ceremony and can produce a certificate or some other form of documentation from their Gurudwara. It is also a condition that the school is informed at the first opportunity.
2. Be worn under clothing, secured in a form which will prevent its accidental removal from the scabbard in line with religious requirements, to the satisfaction of the Sikh Authorities.
3. If the wearer can be proved (by means of an enquiry involving the LEA, school and the designated Gurudwara) to have removed or threatened to remove his/her *kirpan*, may have the permission to wear the *kirpan* withdrawn and shall be reported to the appropriate authorities with a view to having suitable disciplinary action instigated against them.
4. Parents/guardians of and the pupil wearing a *kirpan* shall waive any claims for negligence which may be made against the school in respect of any loss or injury to the pupil arising out of simply wearing of the *kirpan*. This will only apply if the *kirpan* is intentionally misused by the wearer.
5. During physical education, sports and recreational activities, the *kirpan* will be hidden under clothing or carried in a secured pocket in shorts so that other people have no access to it.

These guidelines may be reviewed from time to time, in consultation with all relevant bodies, taking into account legislative changes.

Appendix 2 Examples of certificate of having taken *amrit* and waiver declaration

These examples were supplied by the Sikh Missionary Society (for address, see page 14)

Certificate of Amrit Sanchar	
<i>This is to certify that</i>	
Name:	Date of birth:
Address:	
<i>has been initiated into the order of the Khalsa in line with Sikh faith and tenets</i>	
Authorised signature:	Date:
Authorised signatory: (please print name)	Position in institution:
Official stamp:	
Institution: (please print name)	

Waiver declaration	
I agree that: (name of pupil)	
1.	I will wear the Kirpan only in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the governors and agreed by the local education authority, a copy of which I acknowledge receipt.
2.	I waive any claims against the Trustees, Governors and employees of (name of school) for any loss or injury to myself or my property arising out of my wearing the kirpan.
	Signed:
	Dated:
I, (parent of pupil) confirm that my son/daughter will abide by the above conditions.	
	Signed:
	Dated:

Appendix 3

Information about Sikh gurdwaras in or near Redbridge

The following gurdwaras are located in the boroughs of: Redbridge, Newham, Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham

- **Singh Sabha London East**
100 North Street, Barking, Essex IG11 GJD
(Tel 0181 594 3949)

722-730 High Road, Seven Kings, Ilford, Essex
(Tel 0181 598 1817)
- **Dasmesh Darbar**
99A Roseberry Avenue, Manor Park, London E12 6PT
(Tel 0181 471 2204)
- **Ramgarhia Sikh Gurdwara**
10-14 Neville Road, Forest Gate E3 2AT
(Tel 0181 471 0225)
- **Gurdwara Sikh Sangat**
71 Francis Road, Leyton E10 6PL
(Tel 0181 556 4732)
- **Guru Nanak Satsang Sabha (Karmsar)**
400 High Road, Ilford, Essex
(Tel 0181 478 8090)
- **Guru Gobind Singh Khalsa College**
Roding Lane, Chigwell, Essex IG6 6BQ
(Tel 0181 559 9160)