

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held in the Council Chamber, Ty Nant, Nant Hall Road, Prestatyn on Monday, 4th February 2008 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Representing Denbighshire County Council

Councillors G.C. Evans, G.A. Jones, D. Owens and G.J. Pickering

Representing the Denbighshire Teachers' Joint Negotiating Committee

I. Barros-Curtis, M. Bradshaw, L. Linaker and M.B. Lloyd

Representing Religious Denominations

H. Ellis, S. Harris, M. Hatch, Rev. B.H. Jones (Chair), M. Ludenbach and A. Tucker

Co-opted Members

T. Ap Sion (substitute for the Rev. Prof. L.J. Francis)

Observer: Clive Halliday, Chair of Denbighshire's Standards Committee

ALSO PRESENT

Inspector/Adviser RE (G. Craigen) and Administration Officer (K.E. Jones)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE WERE RECEIVED FROM

T. Bryer, B. Wyn Evans together with Councillors H.H. Evans, N. Hugh-Jones and M.M. Jones

Apologies had also been received from the Interim Corporate Director Lifelong Learning and the Interim Head of School Improvement.

SILENT REFLECTION

The meeting began with a few minutes silent reflection.

WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting. A warm welcome was also extended to Captain Angela Tucker who was a new SACRE member attending her first meeting and Mr. Clive Halliday, Chair of Denbighshire's Standards Committee who was observing today's meeting.

774 URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters for consideration by the committee.

775 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th November 2007 (previously circulated) as received by the County Council on 22nd January 2008 were submitted.

Matters Arising -

Page 2 – Item No. 4 – Minutes: Matters Arising: Issues to raise with the Minister for Education – The Inspector/Adviser RE submitted a report (circulated at the meeting) on the outcomes of the visit with the Minister held on 26th November 2007. The Inspector/Adviser RE summarised the report for members outlining the four questions put to the Minister and her response thereto. He was pleased to report that it had been a very positive meeting and the delegation had been encouraged by the Minister's personable approach and willingness to hear their views. The Minister had proved very supportive towards RE in a number of matters, particularly regarding the need to raise the profile of Post 16 RE. The delegation had suggested a high profile conference to raise awareness and the Minister had volunteered to give a key note speech at that event. At the end of the meeting the Minister stated that she valued the contribution of WASACRE and the role of SACREs and their great value to Local Education Authorities. Members were pleased to note the positive meeting and looked forward to future developments arising therefrom. The Chair thanked the Inspector/Adviser RE and the delegation for their hard work and support.

Page 2 – Item No. 2 Minutes: Matters Arising: Spiritual Development in the Curriculum – Copies of the final version of the document offering advice on Spiritual Development across the curriculum were made available for members to collect at the meeting. The Inspector/Adviser RE reiterated that the document would shortly be sent to every teacher in the authority and it was felt that schools and teachers would value that input. Members were pleased that all teachers would be given the opportunity to benefit from that guidance. Councillor G.J. Pickering emphasised the importance of feedback on the document from teachers which would prove useful for SACREs. In response to a query regarding distribution of the document the Inspector/Adviser RE confirmed that he would ensure all teachers, including those at St. Brigid's School who were not on the Council's payroll, would receive a copy.

Page 5 – Item No. 8: WASACRE – In accordance with SACRE's request at the last meeting, copies of the handbook issued to new SACRE members had been made available at the meeting for all members to collect.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 12th November 2007 be received.

776 REVISED AGREED SYLLABUS

The Inspector/Adviser RE reminded members that SACRE had a statutory responsibility to advise the Local Education Authority on the adoption and revision of its Agreed Syllabus. Accordingly he sought SACRE's confirmation of the decision and recommendation to the Local Education Authority and Agreed Syllabus Conference to adopt the National Exemplar Framework as the Agreed Syllabus for Denbighshire, with appropriate amendments, and to provide supplementary guidance to schools. A meeting of the Agreed Syllabus Conference would be held immediately following today's SACRE meeting.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) *the decision and recommendation to the Local Education Authority and Agreed Syllabus Conference to adopt the National Exemplar Framework as the Agreed Syllabus for Denbighshire, with appropriate amendments, and to provide supplementary guidance to schools be confirmed, and*
- (b) *the Local Education Authority be requested to print and distribute copies of the Agreed Syllabus and Supplementary Guidance to schools.*

777 EXAMINATION RESULTS 2007

The Inspector/Adviser RE submitted tables (previously circulated) detailing examination results for schools in the GCE and GCSE examinations in Religious Studies for 2007 as compared with 2006 for members' review.

The Inspector/Adviser RE proceeded to take members through the results in detail and verbally reported upon comparisons between the 2007 and 2006 examination results. He particularly referred to the following points:-

- GCSE Results All – Religious Studies 2007 – there were 34 less candidates than the previous year; overall there had been an improvement on the previous year with 70.4% achieving A* - C but this figure was 0.7% below the national average
- GCSE Results Boys – Religious Studies 2007 – there were 17 more candidates than the previous year with an improvement of 1.4% with 66.7% achieving A* - C which was 2.1% above the national average; this figure was the only one of the results this year above the national average
- GCSE Results Girls – Religious Studies 2007 – there were 51 less candidates with 73.5% achieving A* - C which was an improvement on the previous year being 1.5% below the national average compared to 3.7% below the year before
- Religious Education All (Short Course) – overall there were 22 more candidates; 43% achieved A* - C which was a drop of 3.2% compared to the previous year which was 15.8% below the national average showing a decrease on the previous year's performance
- Religious Education Boys (Short Course) – there were 13 more candidates than last year with 31.1% achieving A* - C which was the same result as the previous year which was 20.1% below the national average
- Religious Education Girls (Short Course) – there were 9 more candidates with 51.1% achieving A* - C which was 4.9% below the previous year and 14.5% below the national average which was a decrease of 11.6% on the previous year
- GCE Advanced Level All – Religious Studies 2007 – there were 16 more candidates with 69% achieving A – C which was a 14.2% increase on the previous year but still 6.9% below the national average level although an improvement on the 10.7 % below the national level the previous year
- GCE Advanced Level Boys – Religious Studies 2007 – there were 5 more candidates with 60% achieving A - C which was the same as the previous year but still 11% below the national average which was worse than the 9.1% below the national level the previous year
- GCE Advanced Level Girls – Religious Studies 2007 – there were 11 more candidates with 72.1% achieving A – C which was an increase of 19% on the previous year but 5.2% below the national average but an improvement on the previous year which was 13.5% below the national average level.

The Inspector/Adviser RE referred to the mixed outcomes. Although five of the examination tables had shown an improvement only one of those was above the national average level. Two examination tables showed a decrease on previous performance and two remained the same as the previous year. Members were advised that there were no results for the COEA/Entry Level for 2007. The Inspector/Adviser RE reminded members that they had examined the trends the previous year and letters had been sent to those schools showing a decrease in performance over time. He advised that Rhyl High School was the only school this year showing a decrease in performance over three consecutive years advising that the GCSE results for the short course in RE were 23.8% for 2007; 46.8% for 2006, and 60.6% for 2005. Accordingly the Inspector/Adviser RE would be visiting the school the following term to address the poor performance. Prior to 2005 results at Rhyl High School had been good and there was a need to investigate the attainment levels. The Inspector/Adviser RE agreed to report back to members thereon.

During the ensuing discussion Councillor G.J. Pickering noted that most of the secondary schools required some assistance and stressed the need for actions at an early stage in order for performance levels to increase in the next examination results. The Inspector/Adviser RE reported upon work being undertaken in individual schools with the School Improvement Team and it was

hoped that strategies being discussed at an all schools level would have a positive impact. Mrs. M.B. Lloyd highlighted that much depended upon the cohorts of pupils following the courses which changed each year. She felt that schools should be thanked for the good work undertaken and encouraged to improve. The Chair agreed that SACRE needed to encourage the schools by offering the services of the Inspector/Adviser RE to bring about improvements. Councillor D. Owens expressed his disappointment regarding the poor performance results and felt that greater emphasis should be placed on this aspect of the curriculum through the Modernising Education Agenda and he stressed the importance of having a good standard of Religious Education within schools. Mrs. M.B. Lloyd advised that more emphasis had now been placed on RE in the curriculum and the new Agreed Syllabus would provide greater emphasis and guidance on this issue.

The Inspector/Adviser RE spoke generally about the difficulties and dilemmas facing schools and reported upon ongoing work with schools, including session work with those schools where results were below the national averages, to secure improvements. He also referred to a proposal to run an Examination Strategy Course for pupils and discussions with WJEC were ongoing in that regard to target examination performance for particular candidates. It was agreed that feedback on the feasibility of such a course be sought from schools. In response to a suggestion from Councillor D. Owens, the Inspector/Adviser RE agreed to meet with the newly appointed Head of School Improvement when he took up his position in order to address areas of poor performance in RE and secure improvements.

The Inspector/Adviser RE suggested that, for those schools where results had improved on the previous year and were above the national averages, letters of congratulations should be sent. Similarly, for those schools who had under performed letters should be sent asking what actions those schools were taking and offering assistance to bring about improvements.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) *the statistical data and summary be received;*
- (b) *the Inspector/Advser RE arrange a meeting the following term with those schools where results were below the national average;*
- (c) *feedback be sought from schools regarding the feasibility of the proposal for a Pupil Examination Strategy Day;*
- (ch) *letters of congratulation be sent to the schools where results had improved on the previous year and were above the national averages;*
- (d) *letters be sent to those schools where results had been below the national average in order to ask what actions were being taken and to offer the services of the Inspector/Adviser RE in helping to bring about improvements, and*
- (dd) *the Local Education Authority be requested to distribute the above letters.*

778 ANALYSIS OF INSPECTION REPORTS ON SCHOOLS

The Inspector/Adviser RE submitted a report (previously circulated) analysing the results of the recent inspections of two schools between June and October 2007 in the provision of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development (SMSC), and Religious Education where it was part of the inspection. Inspections had been carried out at Ysgol Llantysilio and Ysgol Cefn Meiriadog and a brief history of each school had been incorporated into the report.

The Inspector/Adviser RE provided members with a brief resume of the findings relating to each school, explaining and clarifying specific issues in response to members' questions thereon. It was pleasing to note the 31 positive comments for SMSC between the two schools with only 5 negative comments. The schools would be addressing those negative points. With regard to the comment that no extra curricular activities were currently offered to pupils on the school site (Ysgol Llantysilio) members were advised that the distance travelled by the pupils to the school had an impact. Mrs. M.B. Lloyd added that, since the school had been clustered, there may be more of an opportunity to

address that point. Councillor D. Owens referred to the negative comment regarding insufficient detailed planning for the promotion of pupils' active bilingual skills at Ysgol Cefn Meiriadog advising that the issue was actively being addressed. With regard to Religious Education the two schools had received 24 positive comments between them and there had been no shortcomings identified within the schools. No negative comments had been received in any of the Key Stages which had been Graded 2 (good features and no important shortcomings). Members were advised that there may be new grade descriptions during the new cycle of inspections.

Members congratulated the two schools on their positive inspection reports and were encouraged to note that no shortcomings had been identified.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) *the report be received and noted;*
- (b) *the Inspector/Adviser RE write to the schools inspected congratulating them on the good features and offering the services of the Inspector/Adviser RE or other officers of the LEA in terms of addressing any shortcomings or key issues, and*
- (c) *the Local Education Authority be requested to distribute the above letters.*

779 WALES ASSOCIATION OF SACRES

The minutes of the WASACRE meeting held in Ebbw Vale on 4th December 2007 (previously circulated) were submitted.

The Inspector/Adviser RE reported upon a presentation by Tudor Thomas 'Stretch and Challenge – The Key Concepts of the New RS A level for Introduction in 2008' outlining the new arrangements for A level specifications. A copy of the presentation slides would be appended to the final version of the minutes. The Inspector/Adviser RE had delivered the second presentation to WASACRE on Post 16 RE and highlighted the proposal for a Post 16 RE Conference building on previous work to support an innovative way that RE might be approached and delivered in the curriculum with benefits and values. The proposal included a Conference in September/October 2008 at St. David's College in Cardiff (by invitation of the Governing Body) and consideration of a video conference link in North Wales. The Conference was also to include a key note speech by the Minister; report from young people via Funky Dragon; presentation by Dyfed Powys Police on their programme for Police Officers on religious issues; Cardiff University lecturer to speak on the essential value of Religious Studies for people considering medicine as a career, and the launch of a Guidance Pack to support RE at the Conference. WASACRE had agreed to provide some funding for the Conference with other means of support being sought. It was hoped that SACREs would encourage schools to send delegates to this Conference.

Mrs. M.B. Lloyd also advised of discussions at the WASACRE Executive regarding the provision of Post 16 RE at FE (Further Education) Colleges whom did not fall within the remit of the law in providing RE and highlighted the need for their involvement. The Inspector/Adviser RE confirmed that it had been agreed to invite FE Colleges to the Conference.

Councillor G.J. Pickering had also attended the WASACRE meeting and extended his thanks to Councillor M.M. Jones for her help and assistance on the day. He had found the meeting a very enjoyable and interesting experience. Councillor Pickering had noted the lack of representation from North Wales and had been pleased that his suggestion regarding establishing a video conference link to the proposed Post 16 Conference in Cardiff had been accepted. Reference had also been made to the various interesting displays in the foyer which members had been encouraged to see and Councillor Pickering had noted that the materials had been provided predominantly from the primary schools. He hoped that any North Wales hosts would consider a greater input from the secondary school sector. Finally Councillor Pickering stressed the importance of the Post 16 Conference on the future provision of Post 16 RE and highly recommended that secondary schools and FE Colleges attend the event.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of WASACRE held on 4th December 2007 together with the verbal report from members attending be received and noted.

Prior to the close of the meeting the Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions to debate.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 a.m.
