

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

Minutes of a meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Wynnstay Road, Ruthin on Monday, 8th June 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Representing Denbighshire County Council

Councillors G.C. Evans, C. Hughes, G.A. Jones, M.M. Jones and J.G. Yorke

Representing the Denbighshire Teachers' Joint Negotiating Committee

C. Harmsworth and L. Linaker

Representing Religious Denominations

Rev. B.H. Jones (Chair), H. Ellis, R. Elms, B. Wyn Evans, S. Harris, M. Hatch, M. Ludenbach and E. Wright.

Co-opted Members

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ALSO PRESENT

Inspector/Adviser RE (GC), Head of School Improvement and Administration Officer (KEJ)

APOLOGIES

Councillor J.A. Davies, R. Hayward and M.B. Lloyd

SILENT REFLECTION

The meeting began with a few minutes silent reflection.

61 URGENT MATTERS

In accordance with Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair declared that he intended to include for discussion the following matters which required urgent attention :-

- (i) Religious Education – Guidance for 14-19 year olds**
- (ii) Personnel Matter – Inspector/Adviser RE**

62 PRESENTATIONS BY HEADTEACHERS FROM SCHOOLS IN RESPECT OF EXAMINATION RESULTS

(This item was brought forward on the agenda with the consent of the Chair)

At the last SACRE meeting held on 2nd February 2009 members considered the examination results in Religious Studies for 2008. Whilst there were some pleasing results, members noted that some schools had reported results consistently below the national averages for more than three years. Consequently it had been resolved that the headteachers of those particular schools be invited to SACRE's next meeting to give a fuller picture of their examination results and to discuss strategies for raising the performance in the future. [Copies of the summary of results for 2008 as discussed at the last meeting together with the letter sent to all secondary schools following the meeting had been circulated previously with the agenda.]

The Chair reiterated the purpose of issuing the invitation to schools in order to give SACRE a fuller picture of their examinations results (such as value added data and other factors that may influence results) and to discuss strategies for raising the performance in the future. SACRE also wished to offer their support to schools and share good practice and ideas.

(i) Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School, Rhyl

The Chair welcomed Mrs. M. Ludenbach, Head of RE who was representing the school in the absence of Mrs. C. Britton, Headteacher who unfortunately had a prior engagement.

Mrs. Ludenbach delivered a powerpoint presentation to members on RE at the school advising of the significant progress made since summer 2006 when the school had failed inspection and was subsequently put into special measures. She provided SACRE with some background information regarding the status of the school at that time together with subsequent staffing arrangements including her appointment as a supply teacher in October 2006 to Head of Department in September 2008 and Mrs. C. Britton becoming acting Headteacher in June 2007 and subsequently Headteacher. The school were out of special measures in June 2008.

Mrs. Ludenbach drew members' attention to specific milestones during the period 2006 to date and predictions for 2009 including the following:-

- Summer 2007 results showed a positive of 9.8% (from -10 to +9.8), an improvement of almost 20%
- 2008 results showed a positive performance difference of 9.8% (moved up to 23%) which was a further performance improvement of almost 24%; the national comparison, whilst still a minus, was the best result for the past five years
- 2006 – 2008: Full GCSE Course results over the two years more than doubled from 22.4% to 55.8% / Short Course results in 2007 had decreased but 2008 showed a 13% improvement
- 2009 predicted 42% (a minus prediction) due to the change in cohort of pupils with all key subjects having a lower prediction for 2009
- Year 11 predictions for 2009 were currently on target and Year 10 prediction was 49% with further progress expected in Year 11

Members were also apprised of factors to be taken into consideration when scrutinising the results with the school having the highest percentage of transients, ethnic minority and students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) within the county. In addition, social deprivation with 32.7% of students entitled to free school meals. New staff had no experience of teaching RE GCSE which was compulsory at the school.

SACRE was provided with details of a number of initiatives the new RE team were working on together with GCSE strategies for further development. In line with diocesan directives all students were now taking the full GCSE Course in Catholic Christianity. In terms of future results, Yellis data was available for the first time to reflect the performance of class 2009. Finally Mrs. Ludenbach advised that in Year 7 – 2009 there was a greater likelihood of a more balanced intake; the RE department was a developing department within a school that was moving forward under strong leadership, and it was anticipated that results would reflect those factors in 2010.

During the ensuing discussion members took the opportunity to raise various questions with Mrs. Ludenbach particularly referring to: the loss of the sixth form at the school and implications on faith based provision, the number and use of Learning Support Assistants at the school, and availability of resources for dealing with the high number of pupils with SEN. Members had been heartened to hear of the improvements in performance over the last two years despite the difficulties faced by the school and congratulated the school on their achievements in that regard. SACRE also noted the high proportion of pupils with SEN and felt that additional resources should be offered to support the school in that regard.

The Chair thanked Mrs. Ludenbach for her comprehensive account of RE provision at the school, offering SACRE's support and best wishes to the school for the future.

(ii) Denbigh High School

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Alison Duncan, Headteacher and Karl Lewis, Head of RE at Denbigh High School.

Mrs. Duncan thanked members for her invitation to the meeting and quoted a number of positive comments made by the Inspector/Adviser RE when he visited the school earlier in the year in order to highlight the good practice already established in terms of RE provision and school ethos. She then referred to statistical information (circulated at the meeting) detailing the mean residuals by subject at the school; value added analysis data for Religious Studies; the school's performance in comparison with other Denbighshire schools and the Welsh average; and examination results achievements for 2008 for GCSE and AS Level.

During consideration of the statistics provided, Mrs. Duncan and Mr. Lewis particularly drew members' attention to the following:-

- RE pupils performed significantly better compared to pupils in other subjects at Key Stage 3 and GCSE and extremely well at A Level
- in terms of Value Added, RE pupils at Key Stage 3 & 4 and A Level had achieved higher than expected
- although performance in RE at Key Stage 4 had dipped in 2007 it was just 1% below the Wales average in 2008
- GCSE grades showed boys outperforming girls so there was a need to address this discrepancy but it was positive that so many boys were achieving well
- across the whole school 56% of grades were at C or higher and RE pupils were performing well in terms of value added performance
- the RE GCSE trend showed a significant improvement in 2008
- a large number of pupils were progressing to A Level and the quality of results were good
- there were 19 candidates for A Level examination in Year 13 and 23 candidates in Year 12
- last year RE had been the single most strongest subject in candidate entry across the whole school.

Mrs. Duncan stated that Denbigh High was an underperforming school but in that context there was a high level of performance in Religious Studies. Factors to be taken into consideration when scrutinising examination results included: the fact that a particularly high proportion of pupils at the school were boys and in such schools results tended to be depressed; the school had been under resourced and more of the budget would be directed to departments at Key Stage 3 & 4; there was only one secondary RE specialist at the school, and the issue of serial absenteeism. With regard to absenteeism members were disappointed to note that many absences were condoned by parents and Mrs. Duncan stated that it was a cultural issue. Whilst controlled monitoring of absences and intervention procedures were in place she felt that absenteeism needed to be made a high profile issue.

In terms of the statistical information provided, Mr. Lewis explained the dip in performance for 2007 and referred to the wealth of strategies put in place (circulated at the meeting) for further raising attainment including matters relating to resources; time allocation; external training; candidate suitability; support to colleagues and pupils and the continuation of good practice already utilised to ensure value added remained positive.

The Chair thanked Mrs. Duncan and Mr. Lewis for their full and informative presentation and congratulated the school on their achievements. He offered SACRE's support to the school and wished them well for the future.

(iii) Prestatyn High School

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Mr. Phil Pierce, Headteacher and Dawn Jones, Head of RE at Prestatyn High School.

With the aid of a power point presentation, Mr. Pierce provided some background information about the school which was the third largest in the country and as such had a very clear teaching structure with all subjects having equal parity within the system. He was pleased to advise of the school's long association and involvement with the faith community in Prestatyn.

In terms of factors influencing examination results Mr. Pierce indicated that:-

- Yellis data (cognitive ability) showed that the pupils attainment was below the national average
- free school meal entitlement had risen as a measure of deprivation with the school having a higher than average level of pupils with social deprivation
- inward migration to the town had changed the school and created challenges
- there were a significantly higher number of entrants for the GCSE Full Course in comparison with other schools within the county with Religious Studies being treated as a mainstream subject and regarded highly by the school
- only fourteen candidates had been entered for the Short Course because wherever possible pupils were entered for the Full Course

Mr. Pierce advised that the mean residual data by subject showed good performance for Religious Studies.

With regard to strategies for raising performance in the future Mr. Pierce reported upon:-

- the school development plan and strategic priorities linked to raising standards
- the launch of an interactive section on the school website for homework
- pupils' progress and assessment checks in all subjects
- use of the buddy system within the school
- onsite inclusion unit for vulnerable learners
- Opening Minds approach, a project based/skills focused initiative
- the recently opened Learning Centre
- the use of churches as a resource

RE specific strategies included: exciting and creative lessons; in house revision materials; use of setting; relevant courses; culture of success; early entry; leadership, monitoring and evaluation, and quality resources.

During the presentation pictures of pupils' work and activities were shown and Mr. Pierce extended an open invitation to SACRE members to visit the school. Members took the opportunity to raise questions regarding the patterns of deprivation; the level of support for pupils with SEN and the use of the website as a resource for pupils. Mr. Pierce indicated that comparisons of schools performance should be made in the context of the environment those schools worked. He reported upon the availability of ICT resources for pupils at the school and the use of the pop-in youth centre in Meliden. Paper resources were also made available to try and ensure that particular pupils were not disadvantaged and be sensitive to the needs of pupils from deprived backgrounds. Finally Mr. Pierce confirmed that the level of support staff was an issue for the school.

The Chair thanked Mr. Pierce and Ms. Jones for the enlightening presentation and assured them of SACRE's continued support.

Although presentations from five schools had been timetabled on the agenda, members were advised that unfortunately two of the schools had been unable to attend today's meeting. The Inspector/Adviser RE read out a letter received from Mr. Meurig Rees, Headteacher at Ysgol Glan Clwyd thanking SACRE for the invitation but advising that the date had coincided with a regional meeting at the school so he would be sending a summary response instead. The Inspector/Adviser RE had met with the Deputy Headteacher together with the senior management team and Head of School Improvement to discuss future strategies for the school which were currently being addressed. The Deputy Headteacher had indicated that he would be willing to attend SACRE on an alternative date if members wished. However, the Inspector/Adviser RE suggested that members may wish to see this year's results prior to extending a further invitation. The Inspector/Adviser RE also advised that an apology for non attendance had been received from Mr. Mark Edwards, Headteacher of Rhyl High School. Members were aware that the school had been put into special measures and he advised that Estyn were visiting the school this week and it was felt that it would not be appropriate for the Headteacher or senior management team to be away from the school at this time. Members were

pleased to note that both schools had responded positively to SACRE's invitation and acknowledged and accepted the reasons why they had been unable to attend today's meeting.

Finally members discussed the positive experience of inviting schools to SACRE providing a fuller picture and an insight into the success of RE within schools and the way in which RE provision was organised. It also gave SACRE the opportunity to consider the many factors contributing to examination results and difficulties faced by particular schools. The Chair felt confident that it was a practice SACRE would continue. The Head of School Improvement agreed that the meeting had proved a worthwhile experience for both schools and SACRE giving the opportunity for experiences and good practice to be shared.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) *the presentations from Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School; Denbigh High School and Prestatyn High School be received;*
- (b) *a letter be sent to the schools thanking them for their time and to encourage the Heads of Department in their efforts to work towards higher results, and*
- (c) *the Local Education Authority be requested to distribute the above letters to the schools involved.*

63 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held on Monday, 2nd February 2009 (previously circulated) were submitted.

Matters Arising –

Page 2 – Item No. 2 Minutes: Matters Arising: Reporting on Assessment in RE – the Inspector/Adviser RE advised of his appointment as Chief Moderator at KS3 for Religious Education adding that it was encouraging that RE was being treated the same as all other curriculum subjects. The Chair was pleased to hear of the parity between subjects and congratulated the Inspector/Adviser RE on his appointment.

Page 8 – Item No. 6 – St. Mary's Centre at St. Deiniol's Library (Resolution (d)) – the Inspector/Adviser RE sought members' views as to whether RE News was still a value for money publication in view of the funding provided by the authority. A positive comment on the content was made but some disappointment expressed that the publication was not what it used to be. In view of the mixed response the Inspector/Adviser RE suggested that schools be asked for their views and their feedback be reported to members at a future meeting.

Page 8 – Item No. 7 – Wales Association of SACREs – the Inspector/Adviser RE referred to the WASACRE meeting on 24th June in Denbighshire and accepted particular members confirmation of their attendance at that event.

Councillor M.M. Jones reiterated SACRE's previous comments that the appropriate translation of SACRE to CYSAG be made in the Welsh version of the minutes.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) *the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 2nd February, 2009 be received and approved as a correct record, and*
- (b) *schools be asked for their views on the publication RE News and their feedback be reported to a future meeting of SACRE for consideration.*

64 ANALYSIS OF ESTYN INSPECTION REPORTS

The Inspector/Adviser RE submitted a report (previously circulated) analysing the results of the recent inspections of five schools undertaken between May 2008 and February 2009 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 Borthyn VC School, Ruthin; Ysgol Bro Famau; Ysgol Brynhyfryd, Ruthin; Rhyl High School and Ysgol Mair, Rhyl 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. Three key issues had been raised in the SMSC section of the report which would be addressed by the relevant schools. It was pleasing to note the 88 positive comments across the five schools which far outweighed the 17 negative comments relating to four schools. In terms of Collective Worship, the Inspector/Adviser RE indicated that he had visited Rhyl High School on a number of occasions and reported that the whole school acts of collective worship were excellent. The issue raised within the report referred to acts of worship by form tutors which some secondary schools struggled with. The Inspector/Adviser RE confirmed that he had already discussed this issue with relevant schools. The Religious Education part of the report only referred to three schools: Borthyn, Bro Famau and Rhyl High with 55 positive comments across the three schools. There were no important shortcomings identified for Borthyn and Bro Famau. With regard to the shortcomings identified for Rhyl High members were reminded that the school had been put into special measures and as a result, the local authority and School Improvement Officers were working closely with the school to address issues within the school. On a positive note, Religious Education was one of the better subjects at the school, only surpassed by Art.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) *the report be received and noted;*
- (b) *a letter be sent to the schools inspected congratulating them on the good features identified and offering the services of the Inspector/Adviser RE and School Improvement Officers in relation to any areas for development or key issues needing addressing, and*
- (c) *the Local Education Authority be requested to distribute the above letters.*

65 WALES ASSOCIATION OF SACRES

65(a) Minutes of WASACRE – 13th March 2009

The Inspector/Adviser RE submitted the draft minutes of the meeting of the Wales Association of SACREs (WASACRE) held at Brynmenyn House, Bridgend on 13th March 2009 (previously circulated) for members' information.

The Chair reported upon the meeting attended by himself and Mrs. M.B. Lloyd which had proved a beneficial and worthwhile experience, details of which had been included within the draft minutes.

RESOLVED that minutes of WASACRE held on 13th March 2009 be accepted.

65(b) WASACRE meeting – 24th June 2009

The Inspector/Adviser RE reminded members that the summer meeting of WASACRE was to be held in Denbighshire this year, on the 24th June at the Wild Pheasant Hotel, Llangollen. He added that the hosting SACRE was invited to attend en bloc and encouraged members to make an effort to attend.

In response to a question from Councillor M.M. Jones the Inspector/Adviser RE confirmed that an invitation to attend the event would be extended to the Chair of the County Council.

RESOLVED that the arrangements for the WASACRE meeting hosted by Denbighshire on 24th June, be noted.

66 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION GUIDANCE FOR 14 TO 19 YEAR OLDS

(This item was considered as a matter of urgency, notice having been given by the Chairman at the commencement of the meeting)

The Inspector/Adviser RE drew members' attention to the Religious Education Guidance for 14 to 19 year olds produced by DCELLS (Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills), copies of which had been made available at the meeting for members to collect. He commended the document to SACRE and felt it would be a useful for members to be made aware of DCELLS advice to schools.

67 PERSONNEL MATTER – INSPECTOR/ADVISED RE

(This item was considered as a matter of urgency, notice having been given by the Chairman at the commencement of the meeting)

The Inspector/Adviser RE informed members that he had agreed a one year secondment opportunity to take up the post of Executive Director of the St. Giles Centre for RE and Faith Development based at Wrexham but working closely with the St. Mary's Centre at Hawarden. The start date had yet to be agreed as it was dependant upon a secondment replacement for his current post. However it was possible that he would have taken up the post prior to SACRE's next scheduled meeting in October. On behalf of SACRE the Chair wished the Inspector/Adviser RE well on his new venture and took the opportunity to thank him for the tremendous work he had undertaken with schools across the three authorities and SACREs and his valuable contribution over many years.

Prior to the close of the meeting the Chair reminded members that SACRE's next meeting would be held on 12th October and that the Vice-Chair, Councillor M.M. Jones would be taking up the post of Chair. He also reminded the teacher representatives that in accordance with SACRE's terms of reference, nominations for a new Vice-Chair would be sought from the teacher representatives.

Finally the Chair thanked the Council's Translator and Clerk to SACRE for their contribution to the meeting and a special thanks was extended to the Inspector/Adviser RE in appreciation of all his hard work.

The meeting concluded at 1.00p.m.
