

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 Wednesday, 24th February 2010 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Representing Denbighshire County Council

Councillors M.M. Jones (Chair), J.A. Davies, C.M. Evans, G.C. Evans, G.A. Jones and J.G. Yorke

Representing Religious Denominations

H. Ellis, R. Elms, S. Harris, Rev. B.H. Jones and E. Wright

Co-opted Members

M.B. Lloyd

ALSO PRESENT

Senior Learning Adviser RE (PL) and Clerk to SACRE (KEJ)

APOLOGIES

Councillor C. Hughes together with M. Bradshaw, G. Craigen, M. Hatch and M. Phillips

SILENT REFLECTION

The meeting began with a few minutes silent reflection.

WELCOME

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. She also extended a special welcome to Mr. Philip Lord, Senior Learning Adviser RE who was attending his first meeting. Mr. Lord thanked members for his warm welcome and outlined the qualifications and experience he brought to his new role having been trained as a Church Minister and teacher for RE before taking up the post of Senior Learning Adviser RE in January 2010. He confirmed that he was looking forward to working with SACRE. At the invitation of the Chair, all present took the opportunity to introduce themselves and their association with SACRE.

765 URGENT MATTERS

There were no urgent matters for consideration by the committee.

766 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held on 12th October, 2009 (previously circulated) were submitted.

The Chair noted that the English abbreviation 'SACRE' had been used in the Welsh version of the minutes instead of 'CYSAG'.

There being no matters arising it was:-

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 12th October 2009 be received and approved as a correct record.

767 EXAMINATION RESULTS 2009

The Senior Learning Adviser RE submitted tables (previously circulated) detailing examination results at GCSE and Advanced Level Religious Studies for the year 2009 as compared with 2008 together with an analysis of the differences and trends for members' review.

The Senior Learning Adviser RE proceeded to take members through the results in detail and verbally reported upon comparisons between the 2009 and 2008 examination results. He particularly referred to the following points:-

GCSE Results – Religious Studies 2009 –

- GCSE Results All – Religious Studies 2009 – there were 95 more candidates than the previous year with 81.7% achieving A* - C showing an overall improvement of 4.6% at that level which was 9.8% above the national average
- GCSE Results Boys – Religious Studies 2009 – there were 44 more candidates than the previous year with 79.2% achieving A* - C which was an improvement of 2.1% being 13% above the national average
- GCSE Results Girls – Religious Studies 2009 – there were 51 more candidates than the previous year with 83.3% achieving A* - C which was an improvement of 6.3% being 7.6% above the national average

Religious Education (Short Course) 2009 –

- Religious Education All (Short Course) 2009 – overall there were 106 more candidates than last year with 52.9% achieving A* - C which was an increase of 9.6% in 2009 but still 6.3% below the national average
- Religious Education Boys (Short Course) 2009 – there were 65 more candidates than last year with an increase in achieving A* - C up from 29.4% to 44.8% in 2009 which was still 7.7% below the national average
- Religious Education Girls (Short Course) 2009 – there were 41 more candidates than last year with an increase in achieving A* - C up from 52.5% to 59.2% which was still 6.2% below the national average

The Senior Learning Adviser RE highlighted that in the Religious Education Short Course there were 106 more candidates overall although there was an issue in that the total figure included 66 Year 9 pupils and 13 Year 10 pupils. As it was not possible to track how many Year 9 pupils would retake the course in Year 10 the data could refer twice to the same pupil. It transpired that both Prestatyn and Rhyl High Schools were entering their lower ability pupils for the short course and there was a possibility that other schools may also be following that practice. Further investigation would be required to ascertain how many (if any) schools were continuing with that action. In response to questioning and the reasoning behind such practice, the Senior Learning Adviser RE explained that RE was statutory throughout Key Stage 4 and some schools may be using the short course as the statutory provision with the less able pupils participating in the short course which had been reflected within the poor results. Councillor G.C. Evans felt that the authority's system of tracking pupils should enable data on individual pupils to be obtained. The Senior Learning Adviser RE indicated that data was provided on pupils aged 15 but there could be some confusion in Years 10 and 11. The necessary data had been requested from schools but they were under no statutory obligation to provide it. In order to put the short course results into context, the Senior Learning Adviser RE highlighted that in Prestatyn High School only 7.7% of girls had achieved A* - C compared to 22.2% the previous year with 10.3% of boys having achieved A* - C with no boys entered the previous year. As the higher ability pupils had been entered for GCSE the school's results in that regard had been outstanding. However, by entering the lower ability pupils for the short course the results had been poor and reflected badly on the overall schools' results. By removing Prestatyn High School's results from the overall total for the short course A* - C results (which were significantly below both local

education authority and national average targets) it was highlighted that Denbighshire's results would be 7.1% above the national average as opposed to 6.3% below it.

Co-opted Member M.B. Lloyd highlighted that Rhyl High School had not entered pupils for examinations in the past and should be commended for their efforts in that regard. She felt that the short course did create an interest in the subject of Religious Studies.

GCE Advanced Level – Religious Studies 2009 –

- GCE Advanced Level All – Religious Studies 2009 – there were 3 more candidates with 86.4% achieving A – C which was a 8.6% increase on the previous year and 6.7% above the national average
- GCE Advanced Level Boys – Religious Studies 2009 – there were 11 more candidates with 87% achieving A – C, a 28.7% increase on the previous year and a 10.2% increase above the national average
- GCE Advanced Level Girls – Religious Studies 2007 – there were 8 less candidates with 86% achieving A – C which was an increase of 3.6% on the previous year and 15.1% above the national average level.

During the ensuing discussion Councillor C.M. Evans praised the outstanding results of St. Brigids School and Ysgol Brynhyfryd. Councillor G.A. Jones referred to the new Rhyl Sixth Form College and queried whether their RE examination results would be included within future reports to SACRE for monitoring and evaluation. Members noted the development of the new sixth form provision in Rhyl and highlighted the need to investigate what courses were being offered in order to ensure the results were appropriately monitored. The Senior Learning Adviser RE agreed to look into the matter and report back to SACRE thereon.

Summary of Examination Results 2009 –

The Senior Learning Adviser RE guided members through the summary of examination results which highlighted the disappointing results for Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School. He reminded SACRE that they had previously discussed the poor results relating to that school and the issues surrounding them. Councillor J. Yorke queried the absence of figures at A Level for Ysgol Glan Clwyd. Reverend B.H. Jones explained that the school's RE teacher had been on maternity leave the previous year and there had been no-one available to teach to A Level standard. He also highlighted the low uptake for RE at that level. Members discussed the number of pupils wishing to continue with RE at A Level and the Senior Learning Adviser RE raised the possibility of consortium arrangements with schools working together in order to share provision. Whilst acknowledging that there may be an issue over resources and timetabling, and bearing in mind the changes to sixth form provision within the county, members wished to encourage the establishment of a consortium in order to provide greater opportunities and choice in the provision of RE. It was suggested that the Senior Learning Adviser RE convey SACRE's disappointment regarding the poor uptake of Religious Studies in particular schools and raise the possibility of consortium arrangements with secondary schools working together as a way forward. The Senior Learning Adviser RE indicated that he would be meeting with the Head of School Inclusion regarding monitoring arrangements within schools and suggested that it would provide an ideal opportunity to raise the matter.

Co-opted Member M.B. Lloyd advocated continuing with the previous practice of sending letters of congratulations to those schools where results had improved and were above the national average and to offer assistance to underperforming schools.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the statistical data and summary be received;*
- (b) the Senior Learning Adviser RE further investigate the practice of schools entering lower ability pupils for the Short Course and the matter be kept under review;*

- (c) *the Senior Learning Adviser RE ascertain which RE Courses were being offered following the development of the new sixth form provision in Rhyl in order to ensure the results would be appropriately monitored by SACRE in the future;*
- (ch) *the Senior Learning Adviser RE be asked to convey SACRE's disappointment to the local education authority regarding the poor uptake of Religious Studies in particular schools and also raise the possibility of consortium arrangements with secondary schools working together in order to provide greater opportunities and choice in the provision of RE;*
- (d) *the Senior Learning Adviser RE arrange meetings with those schools showing disappointing examination results to ascertain what strategies were being adopted in order to address issues of under performance and to offer his services in helping to bring about improvements;*
- (dd) *letters of congratulation be sent to those schools where results had improved on the previous year and were above the national averages.*

768 ANALYSIS OF INSPECTION REPORTS ON SCHOOLS

The Senior Learning Adviser RE submitted a report (previously circulated) analysing the results of the recent inspections of three schools between June and October 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 Ysgol Llanbedr, Ysgol Dewi Sant, Rhyl and Ysgol Bodfari and a brief history of each school had been incorporated into the report.

The Senior Learning 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 72 positive comments for SMSC between the three schools and a number of outstanding features had been highlighted. Twelve negative comments had been received which the schools would be addressing. In considering the negative comments, Councillor C.M. Evans queried the need for primary school pupils to be taught in matters relating to Entrepreneurship and Enterprise and Work related education in which two schools had shown a weakness. The Senior Learning Adviser RE explained the ethos behind such provision arising from the skills based curriculum. He provided an example of young children in the foundation phase dressing up as police officers and nurses, etc. as a means of learning through play about respect and authority. He felt that such skills were already taught in schools but not under that specific label. Mrs. E. Wright agreed that such skills had always been taught within schools but the particular aspects of entrepreneurship and work related education had been identified and labeled separately. However she felt the wider issues did not relate to education within primary schools and she had been disappointment to note some criticism in that regard. Councillor J. Yorke also agreed with that viewpoint and expressed concerns about the pressures on teaching staff trying to develop entrepreneurial and work related skills with such young children, much of which was considered unnecessary. The Chair encouraged members to read the full inspection reports for the schools which she had found extremely interesting and put the various elements of the inspection into context.

With regard to Religious Education the three schools had received 26 positive comments between them with only 4 negative comments.

Members welcomed the high number of positive comments across the schools and Mrs. S. Harris felt that Ysgol Bodfari should be especially commended for their achievements in light of it being such a small school. The Chair proposed that letters be sent out in the usual manner congratulating the schools on their positive features.

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 Senior Learning Adviser RE and School Improvement Officers in relation to any areas for development or key issues needing addressing, and*

(c) *the Local Authority be requested to distribute the above letters.*

769 WALES ASSOCIATION OF SACRES

The draft minutes of the WASACRE meeting held at Tonypany, Rhondda Cynon Taf on 13th November 2009 (circulated at the meeting) were submitted.

Reverend B.H. Jones commented that he enjoyed attending WASACRE meetings which he found very educational and provided the opportunity for SACREs to meet across Wales to share views and good practice. He reported upon the main presentation at the last meeting by Joanne Glenn, Head of the Community Cohesion Strategy Unit, Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) on the 'All Wales Community Cohesion Strategy'. The aim of the presentation had been to look at community cohesion from the perspective of WAG. One aspect of the presentation referred to proposals to develop a GCSE course concentrating on the Muslim faith because that was where the main problems with terrorism had been identified. Quite a heated debate on that matter had followed with the feeling that introducing a GCSE for just one faith was unfair and inappropriate. Mr. G. Craigen had commented that such a GCSE would need to meet national criteria and be open to all as the current aim was not to nurture faith of any one religious tradition. Reverend Jones advised that it was an issue which would be considered further at future meetings.

Reverend Jones also reported upon a second presentation by Mary Parry 'Persona Dolls' whereby dolls were given certain characteristics and personalities which helped children to explore issues of concern. The dolls were becoming increasingly popular in schools for Foundation Phase pupils. In response to questions, he explained that dolls encouraged children to communicate and become involved in sensitive subjects in order to share and learn.

RESOLVED *that the minutes of the meeting of WASACRE held on 13th November 2009 together with the verbal report from Reverend B.H. Jones be received and noted.*

770 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair reminded members that the next meeting of Denbighshire SACRE would be held at 10.00 a.m. on 7 June 2010 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Nant Hall Road, Prestatyn. Mrs. E. Wright referred to the difficulties for some teaching staff in covering their classes when meetings were held on the same day in the week. It was agreed that this point be considered when formulating the County Council's future meeting cycle in 2011/12.

At this juncture the Chair referred to the merits of SACRE's previous practice of inviting teachers to meetings in order to deliver presentations on RE provision within their schools and indicated that she would like to continue with that arrangement. The Chair also welcomed the views of the Senior Learning Adviser RE on future practices.

The Senior Learning Adviser RE suggested that in order to support teachers there needed to be a networking of good practice and he advocated a means of sharing resources between teachers with pieces of work for specific topics in order to avoid duplication and resource preparation/planning time. He advised that he had raised this issue at Secondary School Forums and had sent out a blank CD Rom together with a resource he had produced when Head of RE as a goodwill gesture and had asked schools to reciprocate in order to facilitate that process. Members welcomed the initiative and expressed an interest in viewing some of the resource material. It was agreed that this matter be considered further at the next meeting.

Prior to the close of the meeting the Chair thanked the Senior Learning Adviser RE for his work and members for their attendance and contributions to debate.

The meeting concluded at 11.15 a.m.
