

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

Minutes of a meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Wynnstay Road, Ruthin on Friday, 11 October 2013 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

Representing Denbighshire County Council

Councillors Dewi Owens, Joe Welch and Ann Davies

Representing Religious Denominations

Mr. Dominic Oakes, Ms Mary Ludenbach and Ms S Harris

Representing Teacher Associations

Katie Thomas (substitute for Ali Ballantyne)

Co-opted Members

Mr G Craigen

ALSO PRESENT

Systems Leader for GwE (PL) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

POINT OF NOTICE

Apologies for absence had been received from the incoming Chair, Reverend Martin Evans-Jones who had been unable to attend the rescheduled meeting. In his absence, and the absence of a Vice Chair, Councillor Dewi Owens took the Chair for the meeting.

SILENT REFLECTION

The meeting began with a few minutes silent reflection.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors Margaret McCarroll, Bill Tasker and Arwel Roberts together with Ali Ballantyne, Reverend Martin Evans-Jones, Cate Harmsworth, Reverend Brian H Jones and Tania Ap Siôn

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR TO CHAIR

In accordance with Denbighshire SACRE's constitution the current Vice Chair, Reverend Martin Evans-Jones was appointed Chair for 2013 – 2015.

***RESOLVED** that Reverend Martin Evans-Jones be appointed Chair of Denbighshire SACRE for 2013 – 2015.*

3 ELECTION OF NEW VICE CHAIR - FROM THE LEA REPRESENTATIVES

In accordance with Denbighshire SACRE's constitution nominations had been invited for the appointment of Vice Chair for 2013 – 2015 from the LEA Representatives. In the absence of a number of LEA Representatives it was agreed to defer the appointment to the Advisory Council's next meeting.

***RESOLVED** that the appointment of Vice Chair of Denbighshire SACRE for 2013 – 15 be deferred to the next meeting of the Advisory Council.*

4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of personal or prejudicial interest had been raised.

5 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised for consideration.

6 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held on 10 June 2013 (previously circulated) were submitted.

Matters Arising –

Page 6 – Item No. 4 Minutes of the last meeting – RE Quality Mark – At the request of the Systems Leader for GwE (SL) members agreed to postpone the presentation on the RE Quality Mark to the Advisory Council's next meeting in February 2014.

Page 7 – Item No. 5 SMSC Provision in the Further Education Sector – The SL confirmed that a letter had been sent to the Rhyl Sixth College as requested by the Advisory Council and early indications were positive. He confirmed that he would continue to progress the matter and seek co-opted membership. In response to a question from the Chair the SL confirmed that a prayer room had been set aside but had not been utilised and tended to be used as a storage area. The Chair suggested that the College Director, Celia Jones be approached directly regarding on-going concerns about the use of the room.

Page 9 – Item No. 6 Analysis of Inspection Reports – The SL confirmed that letters had been sent to the schools inspected congratulating them on the good features identified.

***RESOLVED** that the minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 10 June 2013 be received and approved as a correct record.*

7 SACRE DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

The Systems Leader for GwE (SL) presented the draft Annual Report for Denbighshire SACRE 2012/13 (previously circulated) for approval which provided details of SACRE's activities during the previous academic year including advice given to the local education authority together with other local and national matters.

The SL sought members' approval of the report, subject to any amendments, as an accurate account for distribution to those recipients listed within the report. The following amendments had been identified –

- pages 17&18 – references to 'Flintshire' be amended to 'Denbighshire'
- page 21 – change 'Inspector/Adviser' to 'Senior Learning Advisor'

Members were happy to receive the report as a true record of SACRE's work.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *subject to the above amendments the Annual Report of Denbighshire SACRE for 2012 – 2013 be approved as an accurate account of SACRE's work, and*
- (b) *the Local Education Authority be requested to arrange translation, printing and distribution of the report to all schools and colleges in Denbighshire and other recipients as required by law and as identified in the report.*

8 ANALYSIS OF INSPECTION REPORTS

The Systems Leader for GwE (SL) submitted a report (previously circulated) analysing the results of the recent Estyn inspections in terms of RE provision and collective worship in three schools between March and May 2013. Inspections had been carried out at Bodnant Community School, Prestatyn; Ysgol Esgob Morgan, St. Asaph and Rhos Street C.P. School, Ruthin.

The SL provided members with a brief resume of the findings relating to each school and members were pleased to note the positive comments across the schools with no negative comments having been received. Mr. Gavin Craigen was surprised that reference to partnership working had not been commented upon across all three schools as he imagined it to be a positive feature and good practice within those schools. The SL confirmed it was not a feature consistently commented upon.

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *the report be received and noted;*
- (b) *a letter be sent to the schools inspected informing them that their Inspection Report had been considered, congratulating them on the good features identified, and*
- (c) *the Local Authority be requested to distribute the above letters*

9 ESTYN REPORT ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The Systems Leader for GwE (SL) presented Estyn's report on the standards of teaching and learning in Religious Education within the secondary school sector published in June 2013 (previously circulated). He also reported upon his attendance at the National WASACRE Conference the previous day during which key messages from the Estyn Thematic Review for RE were discussed together with the national priorities of Literacy and Numeracy through RE. The keynote speakers at the Conference were –

- Mark Champion, Estyn – The Estyn Thematic Review of RE
- Richard Roberts, CfBT – Literacy & Numeracy Framework

A sample of 20 secondary schools had been inspected in Wales as part of the study (Ofsted had visited 70 schools in England) and the report included standards in Key Stages 3 & 4, attainment in GCSE religious studies and participation and engagement in learning. It also covered factors affecting standards including curriculum planning, teaching, assessment, leadership, improving quality and external influences. Members' attention was drawn to the following main findings –

- results in Wales had been very positive with more pupils gaining a qualification in RE than in any other non-core subject
- numbers taking both the full and short GCSE course in Religious Studies had risen over the last five years with just over a quarter of pupils entered in the full course and just over half of pupils entered in the short course
- attainment had risen steadily in the full course and was well above the average for other subjects and although attainment had fallen in the short course performance remained consistently better than the UK
- the gap in attainment between girls and boys was wider in Wales for both courses than across the UK
- standards were good in the majority of schools at Key Stage 3 but there were a few schools where standards were unsatisfactory and there was a recommendation to ensure tasks were challenging enough to enable more able pupils to reach higher levels – since publication of the report training had been provided for Denbighshire teachers in order to improve the accuracy of teacher assessment of pupils' levels at Key Stage 3
- non-specialist teachers were used to teach RE and the short course although they were rarely used to teach the full course – non-specialist teachers had not had a negative impact on standards in most schools
- self-evaluation was good or better in only a minority of RE departments and it was a recommendation to strengthen self-evaluation and use data to identify where and what to improve
- lack of opportunities for professional development and learning networks had been identified meaning good practice was not shared enough and challenges were not addressed effectively.

The SL also elaborated upon the recommendations arising from the report. In terms of the Welsh Government (WG) recommendation R7 that attainment data for RE and RS be dealt with in the same way as non-core subjects, the WG had responded that it would not be appropriate to progress that recommendation in light

of the on-going curriculum review for Key Stage 3. The final recommendation R8 was that WG work with local authorities and SACREs to improve the opportunities for professional development and support learning networks for teachers of religious education. Networks had disappeared in Denbighshire following the removal of the learning adviser posts and in order to progress that recommendation it was proposed that a letter be sent to Denbighshire's Head of Education, Karen Evans enquiring about opportunities and support for RE teachers and offering SACRE's support in that regard. WASACRE was also very much about providing support for teachers under that recommendation.

Members discussed the recommendations for schools detailed within the report and how best to address the attainment gap between boys and girls. It was noted that this was also an issue in other subject areas and the Chair referred to local strategies which had been introduced to address gender discrepancies within Denbighshire with positive results. The SL advised that WASACRE had considered its responsibilities in supporting teachers and was looking to address the issue through training provision. It was agreed to contact the Head of Education, Karen Evans to enquire as to any local strategies which could be implemented with a view to raising attainment for boys in terms of RE.

SACRE also considered the finding that non-specialist teachers did not have a negative impact on standards in most schools and the need to raise awareness of this issue. It was acknowledged that teaching skills did not change across subjects and different subjects could be taught well by non-specialists. The SL reported upon his own experience of RE teaching and the importance of a robust scheme of work and lesson plans in order to share good practice and raise standards. However some concerns were also raised that some teachers did not have the knowledge and enthusiasm to teach non-specialist subjects and there was a need for specialist teachers. It was also highlighted that attainment in the full GCSE course had risen over the last five years where specialist teachers were used but that attainment in the short GCSE course had fallen where non-specialist teachers were used. The reason for the fall in attainment in the short course had been explained by some schools using the short course to ensure that the majority of pupils received a qualification in RE and stream the more able candidates to the full course. This raised the question as to whether those pupils entering the short course would have achieved a better result if they had been taught by specialist teachers. Members also noted that the short GCSE course was worth half a full GCSE and schools tended to opt for that course because it could be carried out in the time set aside to cover the legal requirement for RE – hence the recommendation (R2) to consider giving all pupils the opportunity to gain an appropriate qualification at Key Stage 4.

When discussing standards of achievement members highlighted that the benefits and value of RE could not always be measured in academic achievement. It was also suggested that SACRE's previous practice of receiving presentations on the provision of RE and collective worship within schools be revived.

At the end of debate Mr. Gavin Craigen highlighted two aspects of Mark Champion's presentation at the National WASACRE Conference –

- the fact that almost all pupils respected the opinions and beliefs of others and valued what they were learning in RE which was a positive message which should be promoted and shared with others, and
- standards of teaching in schools was excellent with very few lessons deemed unsatisfactory and teaching in RE was significantly better than in other subjects.

Mr Craigen supported the proposal to write to the Head of Education regarding learning networks but felt the issue should be explored in the wider community and consortia arrangements currently in place. He also felt the report should be brought to the attention of schools to consider the recommendations. After further discussion it was –

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *the report be received and noted, and*
- (b) *a letter be sent on behalf of SACRE to Denbighshire’s Head of Education Karen Evans making enquiries into the following –*
 - *any local strategies which could be implemented with a view to raising attainment for boys in terms of RE*
 - *opportunities and support for RE teachers in terms of professional development and support learning networks (including consortia arrangements) and offering SACRE’s support in that regard, and*
 - *how best to bring the report to the attention of schools to consider the recommendations pertinent to them.*

10 WASACRE

(a) Minutes of WASACRE – 19 June 2013

The minutes of the meeting of the Wales Association of SACREs (WASACRE) held on 19 June 2013 in Caernarfon (previously circulated) were submitted for members’ information. The Systems Leader for GwE (SL) reported on a presentation he had made at the meeting on the RE Quality Mark (REQM) in a specifically Welsh context which had recently been piloted in some schools. Those schools had shared their experiences at WASACRE and the SL confirmed he would also invite them to the next SACRE meeting when the REQM was on the agenda. WASACRE had agreed to provide funding for translation of the documents. In response to questions the SL advised of the ongoing work to amend the English criteria for the REQM to a Welsh context. The cost of applying for the REQM assessment would be £450.00 per school but schools would be encouraged to look through the materials even if they did not apply for the quality mark.

RESOLVED that minutes of WASACRE held on 19 March 2013 be received and the verbal report provided by the Systems Leader for GwE on the RE Quality Mark be noted.

(b) WASACRE meeting – 27 March 2014

The Systems Leader for GwE (SL) advised that the next WASACRE meeting would be held on 27 March 2014 in Caerphilly and sought confirmation of representatives to attend. He also drew members' attention to nominations received for the Executive Committee (previously circulated) advising that there were two nominations for one position.

Members discussed attendance at the next meeting and considered the candidates for the Executive Committee and it was –

RESOLVED that –

- (a) *Councillor Ann Davies and Philip Lord attend the next WASACRE meeting on 27 March 2014, and*
- (b) *Councillor Michael Gray, Caerphilly receive Denbighshire SACRE's vote for the election to the WASACRE Executive Committee.*

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Denbighshire SACRE would be held at 10.00 a.m. on Friday 14 February 2014 and had been scheduled to take place in the Council Chamber, Nant Hall Road, Prestatyn.

The meeting concluded at 3.20 p.m.