

## **STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)**

Minutes of a meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held in by video conference on Thursday, 22 February 2024 at 10.00 am.

### **PRESENT**

**Representing Denbighshire County Council** - Councillors Ellie Chard, Cheryl Williams, Ann Davies, Gill German, Delyth Jones and Emrys Wynne

### **Representing Religious Denominations**

Jennie Downes, Collette Owen and Dominic Oaks

**Observer** – Councillor Jon Harland

### **ALSO PRESENT**

RE Adviser (PL), Principal Education Manager (JB) and Committee Administrators (SJ and NPH [Zoom Host])

Also in attendance for agenda item 6 were two teaching staff from Prestatyn High School.

### **SILENT REFLECTION**

The meeting began with a few minutes' silent reflection.

#### **1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Leah Crimes, Susan Williams and Sarah Griffiths.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Jon Harland to his first attendance at SACRE.

Councillor Cheryl Williams informed the committee this would be her last meeting as a Member of SACRE. She was shortly due to become Mayor and would not be able to fully commit to attending meetings.

Mr Dominic Oaks informed the Committee he would have to leave the meeting early.

#### **2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no personal or prejudicial declarations raised.

#### **3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

None.

The RE advisor apologised for the late information on the right to withdrawal that was circulated after the publication of the agenda.

#### **4 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) meeting held on 17 October 2023 (previously circulated) were submitted.

Matters of accuracy – Collette Owen Representing Religious Denominations and Non-Religious Philosophical Convictions confirmed she had tendered her apologies but they had been missed of the apologies given.

Matters arising – Jennie Downes made reference to the minutes in agenda items 5 and 6 where it mentioned the agreed syllabus and the draft annual report. She informed the Committee as part of her work for the WASACRE they were reviewing where those documents were being made available and stored. The RE Advisor confirmed a copy of the draft annual report was included as part of the published agenda, but it might be beneficial to have a copy stored on Denbighshire County Council website for easy access. It was available for schools to access on the internal network, but it would be appropriate that it was made available for all.

***NOTED***, that subject to the above, the minutes of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education meeting held on the 17 October 2023 be received and approved as a correct record.

#### **5 REMOVING THE RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL FROM RVE**

The RE Advisor provided an update on the advice provided to schools with regards to the removal of the right to withdrawal from RVE.

He reminded Members a discussion had taken place in the summer meeting of the Committee and subsequently a meeting between the Education Manager and numerous Members to discuss the impact the removal of the right to withdrawal would have on the subject. It was suggested that some formal advice be provided to local schools. It would aid support and guidance with conversations with parents. He shared with Members the draft guidance that had been prepared via Powerpoint.

Members were guided through the guidance. The aim of the document was to inform teachers of the regulations around the right of withdrawal and to understand the rationale behind the right of withdrawal being removed.

The first section of the draft paper provided information on the legislation and the right to withdraw. The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act required maintained schools must provide Religion, Values and Ethics:

- as a mandatory element for pupils aged 3-14;
- as a mandatory element for pupils aged 14-16;
- to pupils who request it post the age of compulsory education

It was also stressed to Members non-maintained settings must provide Religion, Values and Ethics for children for whom funded non-maintained nursery education was provided.

There was still a right to withdrawal from collective worship. So within the school collective worship assembly pupils could be removed from that element. Religious Education was currently applicable for pupils within school years 7, 10 and 11 and the right to withdraw from RE was currently available only during those years of education. A distinction had been included in the document to help make it clear for schools the difference between the rights for different school years.

A section had been included on the rationale Welsh Government used when they were explaining why they were removing the right to withdrawal. The curriculum was broad and balance had a great deal of breath and depth for the learner. The document provided details to the parent or reader on a bit guidance on what the lenses and topics were covered.

The second half of the document provided the readers 'Do's and Don'ts' which was felt would be a quick and easy way to support the reader. Members were guided through the list which included objective, plural and critical. It was stressed the document was there to make it clear for parents but also easy to understand.

The RE Advisor hoped Members were in agreement of the content of the document and opened the discussion.

The Chair thanked the RE Advisor for sharing the document and confirmed it had been circulated to the committee prior to the meeting.

Members stressed how important it was to be mindful of people's views and beliefs and support those pupils and families.

The RE Advisor confirmed that if a school was withdrawn from RE, they would remain on the school site and re-join the class following the RE lesson had completed. Individual conversations between families and schools was vital to ensure the wishes of parents was adhered too.

Councillor Emrys Wynne asked if visitors to schools were provided with direction and guidance when addressing children in schools. The RE Advisor was under the impression it was individual to the school. Those schools that received visits from such denominations such as Gideons would have some training on what was appropriate when addressing the children. There would always be teaching staff present when any visitors were present in the school. It may be the school communicate with parents prior to any visitors coming to address the children so they are aware, but that would be at the discretion of the school. Safeguarding in schools was always a key element to ensure pupil safety.

Councillor Gill German thanked the RE Advisor for the clear document and was very pleased with the contents of the paper. She stressed the importance of making the difference between school collective worship and Religion, Values and Ethics education. The latter being a curriculum subject to learn about the world with no opinion of staff given.

Members heard WASACRE were looking at creating case studies around answers to individual's questions which may be covered in the paper, it was suggested it may be beneficial to circulate a copy to WASACRE to aid that work.

Officers were unaware of any increase to pupils being withdrawn from RVE.

The RE Advisor stressed collective worship was the responsibility within SACRE and SACS to advice on within schools. If a school wished to make a determination and make a change the nature of their collective worship they would have to come to the Local Authority for discussion and debate.

***NOTED** that the Members of the SACRE Committee note the verbal report.*

## **6 CURRICULUM FOR WALES, EMERGING PRACTICE - PRESENTATION FROM PRESTATYN HIGH SCHOOL**

The Chair welcomed Kirsty and Maria who were in attendance to present to the Committee the work that Prestatyn High School were undertaking in relation to the Curriculum for Wales.

Members were provided with a PowerPoint Presentation, detailing the work and changes that had taken place in Prestatyn High School. Members were provided with details of how the school had previously educated year 7 and 8 pupils in a way which was heavy on looking at just Christianity and Islam. It was felt they although previously the context of each area was looked into, the context of that in North Wales was not discussed with the pupils.

A shift had been introduced that involved looking at 4 topics across the two years of education. Those 4 topics were: Saints and sinners, disasters, unsolved mysteries and campaign for change. It was felt the 4 topics covered would make learners ambitious, capable and ethical citizens.

Members were made aware that in Prestatyn High School it was compulsory cohort at GCSE, every pupil would be entered to sit the Religious Studies GCSE examination. It was noted that the school had seen very low number of withdrawals from the Religious Studies lessons. It was felt the shift in the way of teaching and what was covered in the class lessons had resulted in a positive outcome.

Learners and parents were made aware of the timetable of work and topics both via school correspondence on the school website.

Members heard a number of external providers, supported the school by attending and providing sessions for pupils including the charity named MILK – Make Life Kind. The new curriculum promoted pupils to think for themselves, independence, form personal views and be open and able to speak.

At the end of any session, 'I can' statements were conducted by the pupils and they demonstrated the progression the pupils were making throughout the lessons. It had been noted by the teaching staff the improvement in pupil's expectations and progression. Work to improve extended writing was taking place, with a task to create a presentation on someone the pupil believed was a Saint. Pupils were provided with resources and a route to success which would allow pupils to extend

their understanding and answers. It allowed pupils to evaluate the impact Saints had had on society. The topic would be completed just before an assessment to allow learners to bring together everything they had learnt throughout the topic and demonstrate their understanding and knowledge.

The representatives stressed the school still had ambitions of how to improve what was offered to pupils and include every learner. It was felt the changes had made a great improvement but as a school and area of learning there was always room to improve. Guidance and resources had been made available to all teaching staff to support learner's development in a consistent way. Staff were also looking at ways to incorporate other subject areas including history and English to further develop the learners understanding and depth of knowledge. For example, in history when learners are developing understanding around Robin Hood, expanding that to include the aspect of Saints and Sinners.

In the school there was a social responsibility curriculum, which was offered to key stage 3. It consisted of one lesson per fortnight with the aim to encourage pupils to become more socially responsible and make more informed ethnically correct decisions within school and the community. The school had established an anti-discriminatory group which had recently received a Police Commissioners award.

Members were presented with and guided through some of the learner's journeys and stressed that was adaptable and could easily be changed to what was going on in society or in the school.

The subject allowed not just the pupils but the teaching staff to be more aware of the differences each pupil may experience in their everyday lives.

All pupils were asked to complete a self-reflection sheet to detail their understanding and any areas they want to discuss in future lessons. The topics were very pupil led looking at the needs and wants pupils suggest.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee commended the two teaching staff of the detailed and informative presentation. She was very impressed with the changes offered to pupils as part of the changes to the way pupils are educated. Some of the comments and ways of working, provoked her to look and distinguish connections between subject areas such as geography and history especially when thinking about topics such as Robin Hood.

Councillor Gill German echoed the thoughts of the Chair and thanked the teaching staff for their time and detailed presentation. It highlighted the positive changes that had been made in Prestatyn High School and the impact that was having on the lives of the pupils as a whole. She stressed to the Committee the social responsibility curriculum had been driven by the pupils and was guided by the thoughts and needs of the pupils.

Members heard the Education Minister had attended the school to see the social responsibility aspect of the curriculum and he was very impressed with the work the school had completed and continued to commit too.

All Members thanked the teachers for the presentation and work they were involved in at the school.

In response to Members questions, the teachers confirmed that there was a unit that touched on social online safety, but it was felt the area was a big area that would need more of a focus. There was a lot of information available for pupils and families on the MILK website. It was important to include families and wider families when there were any concerns.

**NOTED** that Members receive the verbal presentation on the emerging practises of the curriculum for Wales in Prestatyn High School.

## 7 QUALIFICATIONS

The RE Advisor shared some information detailing what would be available from 2025 with regards to GCSE's and Year 10 and 11 opportunities. Members heard Qualifications Wales had been conducting a consultation on what the new suite could and potential would look like. Expectations had been created on what they could look like, that had been presented to the awarding bodies to design the GCSE content for Qualification Wales to rectify.

Numerous consultations had been reviewed including the wider curriculum, GCSE curriculum to what potentially could be on offer.

The RE Advisor shared on screen the Qualification Wales website to demonstrate where the information could be found. Information on the broad offer that was available for 14-16 year olds calling it the foundation offer. Within that section was a number of documents.

A question was asked of, if there should be a religious education/ religious studies qualification. The responses received was 60% yes to an individual foundation level qualification for religious education. Although the consultation received was positive they would not be providing a religion, values and ethics qualification. Instead they have a qualification made of a number of units entitled skills for life. There were 3 units that schools could access – 1-faiths, beliefs and local community, 2- ethical choices and 3-values for life. Schools could opt in to select those areas.

The RE Advisor guided Members to the Made for Wales GCSE section of the website which provided guidance and information. A summary of the consultation was also available online. A section on the outcomes was also included and members heard within that area there was a section that covered Religious Education. It was stressed in completing a GCSE, pupils would have to study Christianity, one other religion and humanism. Denbighshire's response to humanism, Members felt that it did not reflect the broad and balanced non-religious philosophical convictions it was a brand of atheism.

Previously the other religion had been from Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. For A-Levels Sikhism was not offered as an alternative religion.

Members heard a decision had been made that 40% non-examination assessment would be included as part of the qualification with the remaining 60% examination. Learners were permitted to complete some of the assessment units before the end of the course.

There was a move to online digital examinations, Members heard there was a five-year window from the beginning of the delivery through to what that would entail.

Schools were also made aware of the Agored qualification that was offered – called exploring world views. A number of schools had moved over to this qualification. It was non example and more based on coursework and had been designed to meet religion, values and ethics curriculum.

Also there was the NCFE Level 2 certificate – Equality and diversity. It was different to some of the other qualifications as you don't have to include any religion to gain the qualification alternatively you can include many beliefs and religion and gain the qualification. This had replaced in a number of schools the GCSE for Religious Studies removing the religious content as part of the course.

**NOTED** that Members note the verbal update on Qualifications.

## **8 WASACRE**

- **Minutes of WASACRE – 25 October 2023**

The minutes of the Wales Association of SACREs (WASACRE) held virtually on 25 October 2023 (previously circulated) were submitted.

Jennie Downes representing the Religious Denominations and Non-Religious Philosophical Convictions provided members with some key points to note from the last WASACRE meeting.

She stressed the next meeting was scheduled to take place on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

A question had been raised around corporal punishment and whether it was included as an example of a philosophical conviction. Internal discussions with Welsh Government was still taking place around that decision.

WASACRE were still awaiting a response from Welsh Government on the definition of religion.

A number of annual reports were reviewed by WASACRE. Discussions around what was included in the annual reports and made available for viewing would take place. Work around updating the WASACRE website to provide a wider forum to share what was happening in individual SACS and SACREs.

The National Professional Learning resources, provided resources to support practitioners delivering RVE. It was created and published on Hwb as part of a collaboration between WASACRE and the Welsh Government.

Members were encouraged to book onto the WASACRE conference to be held on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024. It was free to go to and lunch was provided. It was hoped the Minister for Education and Welsh Language would be speaking. A number of different areas and presentations would be given on the day. A number of presentations would be made available following the conference.

The conference was to be held in Wrexham University and would be an in person conference with some aspects possibly made available following the conference.

***NOTED** that minutes of WASACRE held on 25 October 2023 be received.*

**9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of Denbighshire SACRE would be held on 26 June 2024.

**The meeting concluded at 11.40 a.m.**