
**S.A.C.R.E. – STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
30-06-10**

Present:

Gwynedd Council Members: Councillors Huw Edwards, Selwyn Griffiths, Aeron Jones, Pat Larsen and Dafydd W. Roberts

Christians and Other Faiths: Mrs. Ruth Davies (Union of Welsh Baptists), Mr Gwyn Hefin Jones (Presbyterian Church of Wales), Eirian Bradley Roberts (The Catholic Church)

Teachers: Mr Paul Matthews Jones (SHA), Miss Miriam Williams (NAS/UWT)

Officers: Mr Ken Robinson (Assistant Education Officer and SACRE Clerk), Miss Bethan James (Humanities Adviser), Leusa Jones (Advisory Teacher) and Ioan Hughes (Committee Officer)

1. PRAYER

The meeting was opened with a prayer from Councillor Huw Edwards.

2. CHAIRMAN

Resolved to elect Councillor Huw Edwards as Chairman for the year 2010/11.

The member thanked the Committee for the honour and he referred in particular to the work of Councillor Pat Larsen as Chair for the last two years. He added that there was always a friendly atmosphere in the meetings and that Councillor Larsen was very willing to provide guidance and advice.

3. VICE-CHAIRMAN

Resolved to elect Councillor Dafydd W. Roberts as Vice-chairman for the year 2010/11.

The councillor thanked members for the honour.

Information was requested regarding the Gwynedd SACRE constitution and whether or not it noted that the chairman of the Committee must be a councillor.

Resolved: To submit the necessary information regarding the Gwynedd SACRE constitution to the next meeting.

4. APOLOGIES: Councillor Stephen Churchman, Mr Noel Dyer, Mr Wyn Meredith, Ms Elisabeth Roberts (NAHT) and Rev Robert Townsend (Church in Wales).

5. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL CONNECTION

No declarations of personal interest were received from any member present.

6. MINUTES

Submitted: Minutes of the SACRE meeting held on 10 February 2010

Resolved: To accept and approve the minutes as a true record.

7. USE OF LOCAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS

In accordance with a request made at the previous meeting, a questionnaire had been circulated to every secondary school in Gwynedd in order to obtain information regarding the use of religious leaders in schools.

The Assistant Education Officer (SACRE Clerk) explained that the response had been good with ten out of the fourteen schools completing and returning the questionnaire.

In terms of collaboration, the majority of schools had stated that they:

- held special lessons,
- visited chapels/churches
- invited religious leaders to the school
- invited representatives of various charities to the school

A minority of the schools held weekly Christianity Clubs, organised activities in collaboration with a local chapel or church and also made use of leaders to assist with GCSE religious studies.

The questionnaire referred to those who could have visited the schools, and in response, reference was made to:

- Ministers
- Rectors
- Youth Leaders
- Charity representatives
- Representatives from different religions such as the Gideons, The Orthodox Church and the Sedemists.
- Local Mosque representative.

The questionnaire provided an opportunity for the schools to include observations and note their plans for the future. It became apparent that there were many plans in the pipeline and an officer noted that all the schools had expressed their willingness to collaborate with different denominations and to use representatives in the interest of developing Religious Education.

The officer believed that the response and the observations were very positive.

Rev. Robert Townsend was mainly responsible for requesting the information, and as he was unable to attend the meeting, he had submitted a letter stating that he felt that the results were encouraging.

A member referred to the link that existed between the youth workers and the schools and it was agreed that this was of particular value.

News regarding the 'Efe' scheme that had been established in the Snowdonia Area was welcomed. It was a plan for all denominations and an individual had been employed to visit the schools in the area.

The Humanities Advisor called for further information regarding the work of arranging the various activities. As an example of the information that could be beneficial, she referred to the times when the activities were held and whether they were held during school hours or outside school hours. In addition, she asked whether permission from parents or members of the school governing bodies was required before holding the activities.

A member noted that every pupil was invited to activities in Pwllheli and these activities were held during school hours. It was interesting to note that the greatest support came from the boys.

Resolved: To accept the report with thanks

8. SCHOOL INSPECTIONS

Submitted:

(A) Information on the contents of school inspection reports under Section 28 of the Education Act 2005 in relation to Religious Education and pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development.

Reported: (a) By the Assistant Education Officer (SACRE Clerk) that the aim was for schools to attain Grade 1 or 2 in the inspections and it was very pleasing when schools achieved these standards. The officer referred further to the importance of the school's self-evaluations and he thanked the schools and the advisors for their collaboration.

The Humanities Adviser guided the members through the inspections of the following schools:

- Ysgol Gynradd Abergynolwyn
- Ysgol Ffridd y Llyn, Cefnddwysarn
- Ysgol Gynradd Llanelltyd
- Ysgol Gynradd Talysarn
- Ysgol Gynradd Bontnewydd
- Ysgol Machreth, Llanfachreth

She referred in particular to the schools where Religious Education had been the main focus of the inspection namely: Ysgol Abergynolwyn, Ysgol Machreth and Ysgol Bontnewydd. These three schools had attained grade 2 for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

Members were reminded that the third year of the curriculum was about to commence. In light of this, the officer noted that she was now searching in particular for a reflection of the curriculum when reading the reports.

With the new Agreed Syllabus, focus was placed on Religious Education skills and the contents, and in relation to the contents, the officer referred to three headings, namely: The World, Human Experience and Searching for Meaning. The response to these was welcomed.

An outline was provided of what had become apparent in the reports and the work linked to searching for meaning was addressed in detail. The Humanities Advisor explained that this field had been flawed in the past but that the primary schools had gone about dealing with the shortcoming during the last five years. This was acknowledged in the reports with an understanding of the meaning of prayer being highlighted in a few of them.

However, the officer was of the opinion that some of the inspectors had a better grasp of the new Agreed Syllabus than others.

The importance of incorporating skills in a school's curriculum was emphasised and the officer hoped that this was true in the Humanities field and also in Religious Education. She still believed that some inspectors were better than others at being able to use a suitable vocabulary when referring to skills. As an example, the officer listed some of the suitable words and terms to be used, such as: the children being able to explain, compose, arrange pictures, discuss, contemplate, communicate meaningfully, obtain information and to create and associate ideas with human experiences.

The officer wanted to see such skills being transferred to everyday life and to other subjects. She congratulated the schools on the efforts made to reach these targets.

A member expressed concern regarding how suitable some of the inspectors were to undertake the work and how suitable was the training provided to them. He was concerned that some schools were losing out because of this.

In response, the Humanities Advisor said that the inspection procedure would change. She said that Estyn would be setting guidelines in relation to the new inspection procedure.

She reported further on key question 3 within the current inspection framework which dealt in particular with the pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development.

Six schools had been inspected, four of them had attained grade 1 whilst the other two had been awarded grade 2. The officer emphasised that many factors would be considered before a grade was awarded. Attention was drawn to the fact that schools were praised for their efforts in developing the pupils' moral and spiritual development.

Details of the work undertaken at schools and the opportunities provided to pupils to contribute towards various activities such as planning worship sessions, were expanded upon. Particular reference was made to a school that had been praised for creating a civilised ethos, and the officer noted the way in which the pupils of that particular school respected their fellow pupils and the adults who worked with them.

In relation to one school, reference was made to the need to review the procedure of co-worship as an opportunity to sufficiently address the pupils' spiritual development and to create an appropriate ethos was being missed.

Particular reference was made to observations within the report of Ysgol Ffridd y Llyn, Cefnddwysarn. Particular attention was drawn to the way in which spiritual development was being promoted effectively at the school. The officer believed that it was possible to use the observations made in the report to prepare schools for self-evaluation under the new inspection framework.

This was reiterated by the Assistant Education Officer (SACRE Clerk) and he referred to the praise Ysgol Ffridd y Llyn had received in terms of the strong link which existed with religious leaders.

The information was welcomed by members.

Resolved to accept and note the contents of the reports.

(B) A summary of the self-evaluations of the following schools:

- (i) Ysgol Ffridd y Llyn
- (ii) Ysgol Talysarn
- (iii) Ysgol Bontnewydd
- (iv) Ysgol Garndolbenmaen
- (v) Ysgol y Gelli
- (vi) Ysgol Eifion Wyn

The Humanities Adviser reminded members of the procedure for schools to undertake self-evaluations namely, if a school was not inspected in the subject of Religious Education that school would be requested, within a year of the inspection, to submit a self-evaluation of the subject and of the element regarding the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

Having received six self-evaluations, it was noted that all of them had either awarded themselves grade 1 or grade 2 for key question 1, which involved the development of the Religious Studies subject, and key question 3, which involved the moral, social, cultural and spiritual development of the pupils.

It was noted that the pattern and the contents of the self-evaluations varied and it was added that Cynnal was currently reviewing the self-evaluation guidelines that were being prepared for schools. The Humanities Advisor explained that the inspection framework was changing and Religious Education would not be dealt with as a subject. It was further noted that the reports provided by Estyn would not necessarily refer to moral and spiritual development; neither would they refer to Religious Education standards unless the schools were exceptions. This could involve poor standard requiring the attention of the local authority or an extremely high standard deserving better than the highest grade.

The implication of this was seen in reports provided in accordance with new guidelines in pilot schools. The impact of the change on the duties of the Gwynedd SACRE which was responsible for monitoring standards of Religious Education had already been addressed. From then on, consideration would have to be given to where the necessary evidence for the monitoring work could be obtained.

According to the information received by Estyn, local authorities should support schools, assist them with their self-evaluations, to identify strengths and weaknesses and to support schools should there be a need to deal with an unsatisfactory issue. It was noted that the matter was being discussed at every SACRE across the country.

The Humanities Adviser was thanked for her report and the schools congratulated for their high standard of work.

RESOLVED to accept and note the contents of the self-evaluations.

9. REPORT OF THE HUMANITIES ADVISER

Mrs Leusa Jones was welcomed to the meeting and the Humanities Advisor explained that she had been working as an Advisory Teacher in the secondary sector during the last two terms and that she would continue with the secondment during the next year. It was added that Mrs Jones was the Head of Religious Education at Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle and reference was made to the value of her contribution in working with the Gwynedd and Anglesey secondary departments.

Reference was made to the appointment of Mr Paul Matthews Jones as Headteacher of Ysgol Dyffryn Conwy. He had represented Gwynedd headteachers on Gwynedd SACRE, however, his contribution would now come to an end. He was wished well in his new post and he was also thanked for his conscientious work, his support and his willing assistance.

It was noted that this year was the first year in which the Religious Education department had submitted the portfolios of key stage 3 teachers' assessments to external moderators.

The Exams Joint-committee was responsible for co-ordinating the project to check the standards for 11-14 year old pupils, namely key stage 3. It was noted that this was a pilot year and that two schools from Gwynedd were part of the work. The Humanities Advisor added that the pilot year enabled an opportunity to learn and to gain experience. There would be an invite for other departments to submit portfolios in 2010/11 and by 2012, each Department must submit portfolios to show their understanding of levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 in accordance with the Agreed Syllabus in Gwynedd.

It was emphasised that DCELLS provided an opportunity every year for teachers to voice their opinion with regards to any need for additional learning resources. It was noted that this could be very obvious from the perspective of Welsh education resources and the Humanities Advisor wanted everyone to take full advantage of this opportunity.

It was reported that DCELLS was currently coordinating a group to provide Religious Education guidelines in the Foundation Phase. A request was made for teachers to develop guidelines that could benefit other schools. There was one primary school headteacher from Gwynedd who was a member of the panel.

A pack on slavery had now been sent to all secondary schools and it was noted that it looked at the Welsh link with slavery. The Humanities Advisor added that the pack created an opportunity for Religious Education, Geography, History and Personal and Social Education departments to collaborate to develop slavery as a theme across the four fields.

It was reported that the Humanities Advisor had received an invite to be a member of the Dyfi Biosphere Education Group. She would be representing schools in South Gwynedd who were part of the special Afon Dyfi area that had been awarded the UNESCO status, the only UNESCO status in Wales for a biosphere. It was explained further that the biosphere was a location where people would attempt to have the correct balance between people, the environment and the local economy.

Two schools, namely Ysgol Pennal and Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas had already begun working with some of the partners and they had benefited from working with Dyfi Woodlands. As a contribution to the Group's work, which had developed a Religious Education unit, the Humanities Advisor would be linked to work focusing on the theme of woodland in religion and in the local communities.

The Chairman thanked the officer for the report. In addition, he thanked Mr Paul Matthews Jones for his work as a member of the Gwynedd SACRE and he welcomed Mrs Leusa Jones to the meeting.

RESOLVED to accept the report with thanks

10. WALES ASSOCIATION of SACREs.

Submitted – for information, a written copy of the minutes of the Wales Association of SACREs held in Swansea on 18 March, 2010.

RESOLVED to accept and note the information.

11. REVIEW OF WALES SACREs

The report of the Assistant Education Officer (SACRE Clerk) was submitted explaining that a survey would be sent out to all Welsh SACREs in order for the Wales Association of SACREs to produce a report mapping the relationship between SACREs and their local communities. The purpose of the report would be to collate and share information, experiences and practices.

A request had been made for the SACREs to complete the questionnaire by 20 July. The officer explained that there was an opportunity for members to consider how the work could be dealt with.

RESOLVED that the Chairman and the Vice-chairman along with the officers should join to address the work.

12. RESILIENCE PROJECT

Submitted – the report of the Humanities Advisor noting that the 'REsilience' project had begun in England with the intention of discussing how teachers were able to respond to situations when religious extremism raised its head in classrooms.

It was noted that there was concern in England and Wales regarding the extremist groups working under a religious banner and undermining the commendable work that existed between denominations, between religious groups and even between religions.

Wales had been invited to participate in the REsilience project which mainly worked to develop the skills of secondary sector teachers to deal with burning issues or controversial matters in Religious Education. In addition to educational skills, this would be linked to ensuring that suitable materials were available for use with the pupils in the classroom.

Every secondary school in Gwynedd and Anglesey had been invited to participate in the project, however, it was noted that none of them had chosen to participate in the pilot school. However, the Humanities Advisor hoped very much that the area's schools would chose to join the project in the future. She emphasised that good material was available and that it had been translated into Welsh.

In response, a member said that the element of different religions was not apparent in the areas in question and that there was no threat of hatred. He therefore suggested that there was no reason to be disheartened.

RESOLVED to accept and note the contents of the reports.

13. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FESTIVAL – MARCH 2011

Submitted – the report of the Humanities Advisor noting that 2011 was the year of Celebrating Religious Education and that the Wales Association of SACREs was very eager to arrange celebrations on a national level. This could take place during spring 2011 at the meeting of the Wales SACREs. In addition to this, a request had been made to hold various activities locally and to contribute ideas for the celebrations on the Celebrating Religious Education website.

In light of this the members were called upon to submit ideas for celebrations in the area. It was noted that no funding pledge had been made to support any activities. Reference was made to pamphlets that had already been provided and a member noted that they could be distributed to ministers, youth leaders and schools.

It was accepted that it would be suitable to include the information in the weekly electronic bulletin that was sent to all primary and secondary school headteachers.

An observation was made that the Celebrating Religious Education website was in English only and a pledge was made that enquiries would be made with regards to this.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to accept the report.**
- (ii) that the Celebrating Religious Education pamphlets are to be included in the weekly electronic bulletin to all primary and secondary headteachers in the area.**