
S.A.C.R.E. – STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION 10/06/15

Present:

Gwynedd Council Members: Councillors Tom Ellis, Jean Forsyth, Selwyn Griffiths and Gweno Glyn.

Christians and Other Faiths: Dr W Gwyn Lewis (Presbyterian Church of Wales).

Co-opted Member: Mr Rheinallt Thomas

Teachers: Mr Noel Dyer, (UCAC)

Officers: Mrs Mai Bere (Assistant Education Officer and SACRE Clerk) and Mrs Glynda O'Brien (Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer).

GwE: Miss Bethan James (Challenge Adviser)

Apologies: Cllr. Annwen Daniels, Llywarch Bowen Jones, Mrs Ruth Davies (Union of Welsh Baptists), Mr Cynrig Hughes (Congregationalists), Rev. Robert Townsend (Church in Wales), Mrs Eirian Bradley-Roberts (Catholic Church), Mrs Miriam Amlyn (NAS/UWT Teachers Union)

1. PRAYER

The meeting was commenced with a prayer by Mr Rheinallt Thomas.

2. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Resolved: To re-elect Councillor Selwyn Griffiths as Chair of this Committee for 2015/16.

3. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Resolved: To elect Councillor Gweno Glyn as Vice-chair of this Committee for 2015/16.

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

5. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (a) Mai Bere was welcomed to her first Gwynedd CYSAG meeting in the role of SACRE Clerk as a successor to Mr John Blake, who had now retired. The Members' Support Officer was requested to send a word of thanks to Mr Blake for his service and support to SACRE over the last year and to wish him well.

- (b) Reference was made to the decision of Mr Wyn Myles Meredith to retire from his service on SACRE and it was understood that he was making arrangements for another representative to serve in his place on behalf of the Methodist Church.

Mr Meredith had been a loyal member of SACRE since his retirement as a Member of Gwynedd Council in 2008 and was the only one who had represented Gwynedd SACRE on the Wales SACRE Association and had attended the meetings regularly.

The Members' Support Officer was requested to send a letter to Mr Meredith thanking him for his commitment and support to SACRE over the years and to wish him well in the future.

- (c) Reference was made to Mr Noel Dyer's decision to take early retirement from his post at Ysgol Glan y Môr and therefore he would also be retiring as a member of Gwynedd SACRE. The opportunity was taken to thank Mr Dyer for his commendable service and valuable contribution to SACRE work over the years and at the same time he was wished a happy retirement. It was trusted that he might possibly continue to contribute towards the work of SACRE in another role during his retirement.
- (ch) It was also noted that Mrs Miriam Amlyn was on maternity leave and best wishes were extended to her.

Resolved: To request that the Members' Support and Scrutiny Officer sends letters, on behalf of CYSAG, to thank and extend best wishes to those noted above.

6. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting that took place on 11 February 2015, as a true record.

6.1 Item 6 – School Self-evaluations

Stemming from the previous minutes, attention was drawn to the decision to hold a SACRE meeting at a school, however, it had not been possible to make arrangements for the meeting this time. They would seek to have the next meeting in November at a school.

7. REPORT BY GWE CHALLENGE ADVISER

(a) Collective Worship

The Challenge Adviser reported that they had made an effort to try and identify a way to undertake the monitoring of collective worship. The committee was reminded that a questionnaire had been circulated approximately a year ago in order to identify ways of undertaking individual responsibilities for monitoring the standards of Religious Education or collective worship and those responses steered this work. The intention now was to put monitoring arrangements in place. Reference was made to ESTYN's guidance to inspectors on this when inspecting and monitoring collective worship. The guidance referred to the legal requirements namely that collective worship should occur daily at any time during the day, and that parents were entitled to withdraw their children from worship. Whilst accepting that SACRE Members did not like inspecting collective worship, a suggestion was made that they should visit schools to have a taste of collective worship. Further reference was made to the guidance from the Wales SACREs Association stating

why collective worship was beneficial for children and it promoted the pupils' spiritual development and contributed to their personal development and the feeling of schools as a community and to connect schools with the local community. Also, school reports were scrutinised and it was asked if they fulfilled statutory requirements.

A form was presented to Members during the meeting to assist them to record their observations when attending collective worship sessions and they were guided through the contents of the form.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- (a) That it was necessary to be careful in terms of keeping to what was statutory regarding Religious Education as in some schools now there were other demands on teachers during registration period such as presenting literacy, reading and it was more difficult to hold a class service because of this.
- (b) That some governors were designated as champions to give an overview on Religious Education and/or other subjects and would it be possible to use these governors to the maximum for monitoring in order that work was not duplicated.

In response, it was noted that SACRE had a statutory role to monitor by sampling and observing what schools note in the self-evaluations correspond to what occurs in the school.

- (c) The form was welcomed and it was added that it would be useful and of assistance to schools and governors as well.
- (d) In response to a query regarding obstacles to collective worship where there were many different religions, it was not envisaged that this would be a problem as parents were fairly happy for their children to participate in school services/activities and they as parents took responsibility for faith.
- (e) That Anglesey SACRE Members already visited schools to monitor collective worship and the arrangements had been successful with the response of the schools being very positive.

Resolved: To accept the monitoring form and approve to test it out when visiting schools emphasising that the process was to support schools and not to inspect them.

(b) Developing Literacy and Numeracy in Religious Education in Key Stage 3

A presentation was received in a slide format from resources provided by Mary Parry, Education Associate Advisor with Carmarthenshire to develop literacy and numeracy in Religious Education in Key Stage 3 based on footballers of the same faith. Examples of specific tasks on activities were writing a letter regarding beliefs that included literacy and numeracy skills including units regarding prayer, food and drink, Ramadan etc.

The above had been presented recently to a meeting of the Wales SACREs Association and they were of the opinion that it was an extremely useful resource.

The following points were highlighted by SACRE members:

- (a) That it was a good resource to attract the interest of boys.
- (b) That schools would see it as a valuable resource.
- (c) The pack was also welcomed as a good resource to develop literacy in a meaningful context and in addition it was an opportunity to use translingual skills that would be valuable in the context of bilingual education in Wales.

Resolved: To accept and approve the pack and it was agreed that SACRE Members and the GwE Challenge Adviser would circulate these to the County's 14 secondary schools.

(c) Update on the Donaldson Consultation on the Curriculum for Wales

The GwE Challenge Adviser reported that the Welsh Government had requested Professor Donaldson to conduct a consultation with various organisations to formulate a new curriculum for Wales. The committee was reminded that during the 1980s the CYTŪN syllabus had been drawn up for the schools of Gwynedd and Anglesey, however, since 2007 Gwynedd SACRE had agreed to use the national framework for the curriculum and Religious Education across Wales was very similar. If the Welsh Government accepted the recommendations of Prof. Donaldson this could mean radical changes. The GwE Challenge Adviser, on behalf of SACRE, had drafted a response to the recommendations as follows:

- (1) In what ways do you agree or disagree that the existing national curriculum is now suitable to fulfil the needs of children and young people in Wales?

The Members of Gwynedd SACRE recognise that some aspects of the existing national curriculum do not satisfy the needs of children and young people of Wales in a digital age. However, the fundamental principles of education are unchangeable, namely the development of literate, intelligent, curious and sensitive children and young people who show respect to their fellow man and the environment in a changing world. Religious education already contributes to this as learners cultivate more understanding of the significance of religion and its importance to people.

- (2) What is your opinion of the four general aims described in the Report? Generally, do you believe that these are the appropriate basis for the curriculum for children and young people in Wales in the future? If they are not, why is this?

Gwynedd SACRE support the four general aims described in the report. Religious education already "stimulates learners to think for themselves in order to develop an understanding of life, the world and search for meaning that inspires them to bring about transformation personally, socially and globally" (National Exemplar Framework to present Religious Education to learners 3-19 years in Wales, 2008).

- (3) New framework: Six learning and experience fields. In what way do you agree or disagree with this method of working?

Gwynedd SACRE welcomes the specific and worthy attention given to Religious Education in the report and is aware of the valuable contribution of religious education to the six areas of learning and experience. However, some questions remain:

- *How can it be ensured that religious education does not 'get lost' within Humanities and the other learning and experience fields?*
- *To what extent can we be confident that schools understand the fundamentals of religious education in the twenty first century?*

- *How can schools present the requirements of the Cytûn Syllabus within Humanities and the learning and experience fields and continue to allow parents to withdraw their children from religious education lessons if they wish to do so?*

(4) Assessment that supports educational progression? In what way do you agree or disagree with this method of working?

Gwynedd CYSAG is of the opinion that the purpose of assessment is to assist learners to progress. Good practice to 'assess for learning' has assisted learners in Gwynedd to make good progress in religious education. Nurturing learners and teachers' understanding of the 'progression steps' help when planning valuable learning experiences for pupils.

Currently, Gwynedd SACRE monitors religious education standards in the secondary sector by scrutinising KS3 teachers' assessments and the results of KS4 and KS5 external examinations. It is likely that a new assessment system will mean new challenges.

- *How will Gwynedd SACRE fulfil its statutory responsibilities to monitor the standards of religious education?*
- *Who will draft the 'progression steps? Will the 'Religious Education' threads be obvious? Will Gwynedd SACRE be able to contribute to the process of drafting the 'progression steps'?*
- *Who will train the teachers to use the 'progression steps' in order to assist the learners to make progression in religious education?*
- *Who will be responsible for 'sampling' religious education standards? How often? Will Gwynedd SACRE be able to contribute to the sampling process? Will Gwynedd SACRE get access to the findings of the sampling process?*

(5) What is your first response to the principles of pedagogy described in Professor Donaldson's Report?

Gwynedd SACRE welcomes the attention given to the pedagogy principles in the report. Many of the principles already underpin the guidance given to teachers who teach religious education in Gwynedd schools. However, we encourage teachers to reflect on their practices in order to ensure that their learning strategies have a positive impact on learners' progress.

(6) Schools and teachers play a part in shaping the curriculum. In what way do you agree or disagree that this is desirable?

Gwynedd SACRE Members know from experience of the key contribution made by teachers and members to the process of developing and approving the Cytûn syllabus and any supplementary guidance. It is felt that teachers are already free to develop inquiries that are relevant to their pupils within a 'framework' and an open-ended 'range' and 'subject skills'. We are anxious that teachers provide religious education experiences that stimulate and are relevant to their pupils. However, the view is that children and young people should learn about their local and national religious communities that do and have contributed to life in Wales. Some questions remain:

- *In a time of financial cuts, will schools have religious education experts who can lead the process of developing the curriculum?*
- *How can it be ensured that pupils do not repeat subjects or religious education themes?*
- *Will teachers in rural secondary schools have the energy and time to develop a new curriculum and respond to the requirements of new external examinations?*

- (7) What is the best way to continue with this process of participation and how would your school / location like to take part?

Gwynedd SACRE is anxious to continue to contribute to the process of developing a new national curriculum by responding to questionnaires and workshops. Religious education of the highest standard is already a priority for elected Members, religious representatives and the teachers who regularly attend SACRE Meetings.

Gwynedd SACRE is represented on the National Consultation Panel for Religious Education (NCPRE) and the Wales SACREs Association and Gwynedd contributes to the work of the Wales Religious Education Organisation and we hope that the Welsh Government recognise experience, knowledge and the guidance of these bodies.

During the ensuing discussion the teachers' representative highlighted that the UCAC Union welcomed the majority of the contents of the Donaldson Report, however, concern was expressed regarding the implementation of the curriculum in the current financial climate that meant a great deal of fairly expensive changes.

Resolved: To accept, note and approve the responses submitted on behalf of Gwynedd SACRE to Professor Donaldson's report.

8. SCHOOLS' SELF-EVALUATIONS

(a) The SACRE Clerk guided Members through the sheets submitted with a summary of the findings in the schools in question and drew attention that five primary schools and two secondary schools had been inspected by ESTYN during the Spring 2015 term, as well as Ysgol y Traeth where a report had not been published thus far. It was anticipated that another four schools would be inspected during this term namely the schools at Llanaelhaearn, Llanrug, Llanelltyd and Hiracl.

(b) From the point of view of SACRE, although ESTYN had noted that Ysgol Gynradd Dolgellau was unsatisfactory, attention was drawn that this referred to the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils.

(c) In terms of the annual report, attention was drawn to the conclusions raised in terms of provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

(ch) It was noted that reports as a whole did not often refer to merely religious education. The Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle report noted that the provision for KS4 was unsatisfactory in terms of the timetable and therefore it was suggested as SACRE members that it would be useful to invite the school to share their feedback. In response it was suggested further that a written report would be acceptable rather than drawing a teacher out of the school.

(d) Members were guided through the self-evaluations of the schools at Coed mawr, Bro Plennydd, Tanygrisiau, yr Eifl, Ffridd y Llyn and Felinheli by referring to the three key questions namely:

1. How good are outcomes in Religious Education?
2. How good is provision in Religious Education?
3. How good is provision for collective worship?

It was agreed that the self-evaluations equated to what was noted in the ESTYN inspections.

The GwE Challenge Adviser noted that it was important to refer to religious education in the self-evaluations in order that SACRE could have a taste of what they do, together with the use of appropriate vocabulary.

Resolved: To accept and note the contents of the inspections and self-evaluations and in accordance with procedure to request that the Assistant Education Officer sends a letter to the above schools congratulating them on their success and to note SACRE's appreciation of their efforts to achieve the grades.

9. WALES ASSOCIATION of SACREs

(a) Minutes of the previous meeting

Draft minutes of a meeting of the Wales Association of SACREs that took place on 6 March 2015 in Pembrokeshire, were submitted.

It was reported that no specific issues arose from the minutes as SACRE Members had already received presentations given to the Wales SACRE Association, under item 7 above.

Resolved: (a) To accept and note the contents of the minutes.

(b) To note that the next meeting of the Association would take place on 25 June 2015 in Flintshire.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.45 pm.

CHAIRMAN