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**MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)**  
**held**  
**at Rooms 6&7, Innovation House, Wales 1 Business Park, Magor, NP26 3DG on Friday,**  
**9th February, 2018 at 1.30 pm**

**PRESENT:** Mrs. N. Baicher (Sikh Faith) - Chair

County Councillors: L.Brown, A. Webb, A. Easson, J.Watkins,  
R. Cottrell, S. Cave, N. Chatral, A. Jones, S. Oram, S. Perry Phillips,  
M. Millington, K. Fitter and T. Thomas

Faith Representatives

Roman Catholic Church	R. Cottrell
Bahá'í Faith	S. Cave
Buddhist Faith	N. Chatral

Teachers Associations

A. Jones  
S. Oram  
S. Perry Phillips  
M. Millington

Co-Opted Member

K. Fitter  
T. Thomas

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Gill Vaisey	RE Consultant
Kellie Beirne	Deputy Chief Executive
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer

**APOLOGIES:**

County Councillors: M.Lane, P.Pavia, Dr. A. Daly, Revd. P. Baines, K. Christofi and C. Cooper

**1. Apologies for absence**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Kellie Beirne, Deputy Chief Executive. She set out her proposals for a constructive and democratic meeting seeking members' co-operation to assist her in managing the meeting effectively. Accordingly, it was agreed that:

- only one person speaks at a time;
- if two or more members speak at the same time, comments will be directed through the chair; and

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- where possible, meetings should be restricted to a maximum of two hours duration.

#### **2. Declarations of interest**

Item 7 – Self Evaluation Report: County Councillor A. Easson declared a personal non prejudicial interest as a Governor of Ysgol Y Ffin.

#### **3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13th October 2017**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a true record subject to the following amendments:

Item 4: Confirmation of minutes delete ‘remove “and noted” and replace with ‘remove “received and”

#### **4. Presentation from Andrew Jones: Using guest speakers to support the delivery of the new Religious Studies GCSE.**

Andrew Jones kindly provided a presentation on using guest speakers to support the delivery of the new RE GCSE course. He circulated the course booklet for the module “Issues of Life and Death” and explained the contribution of guest speakers from Christian and Muslim faiths. The module topic was “Abortion” and he informed SACRE how the opposing views were also represented by the school chaplain for Pro-Choice and the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child for Pro-Life on separate dates.

Prior to visiting the school, the speakers were contacted and asked to provide their material to provide the opportunity to check that it was appropriate for pupils from Y9 to Y11. This approach led to the deletion of some images, assured that the speakers adhered to the required brief and pitched the session appropriately. Letters were sent home providing an opportunity for parents to discuss the session in advance with an option for pupils to opt out. It was reported that no pupil was withdrawn. The sessions were successful, the pupils were responsive and had the opportunity to ask and answer questions to address the contrasting views.

Following the presentation, observations were invited:

Other faith representatives present stated that they would welcome an invitation to be involved in the future.

SACRE Members recognised that sensitive topics are a significant challenge for teachers to approach and provide a balanced view. It was agreed that guest speakers provide an effective stimulant and worthwhile discussion.

#### **5. SACRE News Bulletin**

a) Kath Fitter reported on the visit to Goytre Fawr Primary School by Fatima Jilani and her teenage daughter, Umaamah, to answer questions about the Muslim faith particularly in response to various news items e.g. Manchester Arena atrocity.

The discussion was very positive. Only one family had asked if their daughter could leave if she felt uncomfortable but this had not been necessary. The children had behaved in a mature and sensible manner whilst considering this sensitive topic. The guests and children had both

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responded honestly and openly and it was felt that a safe environment had been created to ask and answer questions which included the following:

- Have people treated you differently since the event;
- Are the people who carry out attacks bad Muslims or not even Muslims at all;
- What would you do if you found your friend was a terrorist; and
- Had Umaamah experienced bullying;

Positive feedback had been received from parents who valued the opportunity for the children to ask questions and believed that the children benefitted from the opportunity.

SACRE Members were informed that Mrs. Jilani had resigned her position on SACRE but was still very willing to go to schools. Mrs. Jilani was thanked for her time, work and commitment during her membership.

b) Suggested items for inclusion in the next SACRE News Bulletin included the following:

- Holocaust Memorial Day
- Inter Faith Network
- Calendar of Festivals
- Report from Chris Abbas report (Afon Taf High School)
- Article from the Religious Education Council
- Bahá'í Faith: 200 years anniversary celebration. The Chair reported that she had attended the celebration event in the Senedd. The speaker was extraordinary and the information pack was made available for members to view.
- Farmington Scholarship for Teachers
- Plurality in Religious Education Conference.
- SACRE Members were reminded that there is an Open Day at Blaina Mosque on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018.
- SACRE Member Mrs S Cave provided the following report for inclusion:

*On Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February, I was invited with two other Bahá'í members from Tewkesbury and Leominster (both members of their SACREs) to have a Bahá'í activity day at Heart of the Forest Community Special School, Speech House, Forest of Dean. It was their bi-annual World Faith week. It was most inspiring working with the students and their teachers and assistants. We took two assemblies and three art workshops – with the theme based on Unity.*

*During the week the school has also had visits from other faith representatives and they are ending the week with the 6<sup>th</sup> form Gospel Choir from Wyedean School."*

County Councillor J. Watkins had also visited Archbishop Rowan Williams Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School to provide a successful assembly on Buddhism as part of World Faith week with opportunities for the pupils to ask questions. The Chair will liaise with the RE Consultant regarding the possibility of a presentation about World Faith Week at a future meeting.

- It was noted that Monmouth Comprehensive School lends artefacts, information and resources to cluster primary schools.
- Mr. R. Cottrell reported that he had attended the Archdiocesan Conference in Cardiff on the topic of the Donaldson curriculum and the way forward for Religious Education in Catholic Schools. St Mary's RC Primary School follows the "Come and See" scheme

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and the Jesuits made a presentation and provided a pupil profile with a view that it is adopted for use in all Roman Catholic Schools. This values based profile is being incorporated and piloted in St. Mary's RC Primary School. This has involved rewriting the RE Policy to embed values across all aspects of the curriculum concentrating on "What kind of person do you want us to help you to be". SACRE Members are welcome to visit the school. The information will be circulated.

It was also mentioned that there is another values based package (not church/faith based) that provides universal positive human values (available online).

- Concern was expressed about the huge content of the new RE GCSE course observing that there was too much content to allow meaningful consideration. One member suggested that there are too many topics adding that, in her view, humanism is a belief not a religion and that time is needed to cover main religions. It was explained that humanism is a small section of the life and death module only.

Actions taken to deliver the curriculum include starting the full course in June for Y9 classes, discrete RE is being delivered by form tutors, Y8 and Y9 pupils are given GCSE style exam questions and topics delivered in KS3 are at GCSE level. Concern was expressed at the pressure that GCSE teachers are under and the support of SACRE Members was confirmed. The RE Consultant was asked to convey our concerns.

#### **6. Curriculum development update**

It was recalled that the What Matters in RE document was referred to at the last meeting and although not available for public sight at that time is now included in the SACRE papers. It is intended to be a tool for Pioneer Schools and is not intended for use as a curriculum. At a presentation made to Pioneer School teachers in Swansea, it was evident that there was support for ensuring that the RE element in the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience was properly reflected.

Concern was expressed at the level of continuous curriculum change.

A SACRE Member expressed concerns about the use of non specialist RE teachers and whilst the aim of Donaldson is to make RE less fragile by including it in the curriculum, it was suggested that the inclusion of non religious views, ethics, philosophy etc takes up too much time and that there is a need to have more depth in less subjects.

SACRE Members supported the view that it is important to recognise that ownership and responsibility for the spiritual development of pupils is for the whole school and not solely the responsibility of Religious Education. It was suggested that there should be a RE expert on the Pioneer group. The Clerk was asked to circulate a list of Pioneer Schools to members.

SACRE has been asked by Welsh Government to respond to the 'Humanities AoLE Submission to Curriculum and Assessment Group: 4 December 2017' document.

A teacher representative considered that it is fundamental to ensure that the 'Humanities What Matters' statements include references to resilience in relation to radicalisation and extremism.

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In response to a suggestion that a member intended to submit their own SACRE response, it was explained by the RE consultant that SACRE is an advisory body to the LA and as such her understanding is that individual members of SACRE have no independent authority to act in the name of SACRE. She suggested that individuals are of course welcome to make personal responses to consultation papers but must do so in that capacity and not as representative of the SACRE. Another member confirmed he supported this view as accurate.

The RE consultant stated that all response to the consultation of the WG document are welcome and SACRE Members were requested to send any further observations to the RE Consultant to include in a response from SACRE.

#### **7. WASACRE**

A SACRE Member expressed concern about the proposal to update WO Circular 10/94 and was informed that the updates will be to reflect current legislation.

It was reported that Humanists UK would like ideally, to be on SACRE Group A (faith group) and has asked Welsh Government to make a statement to guide SACREs how best to interpret legislation. Welsh Government has indicated that it is a matter for the courts to decide, and a decision regarding the situation with the Vale of Glamorgan is awaited.

It was questioned how Monmouthshire is represented on WASACRE. It was confirmed that there are four places for each SACRE and Monmouthshire SACRE has in place four appointed representatives. It was observed that there are no Councillors amongst the representatives (although County Councillor T. Thomas attends as Chair of REMW - Religious Education Movement Wales). It was agreed that County Councillor L. Brown will attend the next WASACRE meeting as a substitute for Mrs. S. Cave who is one of the Monmouthshire appointed representatives but who is unable to attend the next meeting.

#### **8. Self-Evaluation Report**

County Councillor A. Easson declared a personal non prejudicial interest as a Governor of Ysgol Gymraeg Y Ffin.

SACRE received the recent favourable inspection/self evaluation report for Ysgol Gymraeg Y Ffin that demonstrated good standards and provision in Religious Education. The school has indicated that in order to strive for 'Excellent' judgements in teaching and learning, they plan to observe excellent practice with other schools. The RE consultant will write to congratulate all staff and will make arrangements to discuss which other schools might be visited.

#### **9. Estyn**

The RE Consultant and the Chair, with the input of some of the teachers, completed the Estyn survey addressed to Chairs of SACREs as it fell outside meeting dates. One member informed the committee that she had also completed the questionnaire for SACRE.

Responses from Chairs of SACRE were being sought to support the Estyn Thematic Review of RE. The findings of Estyn's thematic review of RE across Wales will be brought to the next meeting

The opinion of teachers was sought about lack of funding for teachers to attend courses, training needs and the use of non-specialists to teach RE. They reported that:

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- WJEC is piloting Saturday sessions to allow teachers to attend training as schools are reluctant to pay cover. It was agreed that new specification training shouldn't be charged for.
- Use of non-specialist teachers had a significant impact and it was noted that RE specialists are rarely appointed. Specifically, there was impact on engagement and the ability to motivate pupils to opt to continue the subject as a full course.
- Specialist teachers contribute to pupils achieving higher standards.
- Non-specialist teachers have less experience in handling the "big" questions.
- There was also additional strain placed on the specialist teachers providing resources for non-specialist.

#### **10. Right of Withdrawal from Religious Education**

The booklet "Right of Withdrawal from Religious Education" was circulated to members and has been distributed to schools.

The RE consultant was thanked for her work. It was confirmed that relevant sections were composed by a representative of each faith group and denominations.

The numbers of pupils being withdrawn by parents wholly and partially, and the reasons why, are being collated to attempt to identify instances of withdrawing from RE that might be prejudicial to provide evidence for the Minister. There has been a good response from Monmouthshire schools so far.

#### **11. To note dates and venue of future meetings**

- It was reported that a SACRE in another LA wrote to Qualifications Wales expressing concern about the pressure on teachers and pupils due to the nature of the new GCSE Specification. This was being followed up by a second SACRE and Monmouthshire secondary school representatives had been asked for their views in support of the letter.
- It was explained that it would be beneficial to organise a training event for faith representatives and teachers but noted that the EAS is no longer providing courses or venues. Alternatives are being looked into.
- Tribute was paid to Richard Williams who has resigned as Clerk to SACRE. Richard's contribution to meetings was outstanding; his commitment to the role and standard of minutes was excellent. The RE Consultant will send him a card in recognition and thanks.
- Friday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018 at 1.30pm at Innovation House, Magor NP26 3GA.

**The meeting ended at 3.40 pm**