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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
held
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Wednesday, 23rd June, 2021 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: COUNTY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:

County Councillor P. Pavia (Chair)
County Councillor T. Thomas
County Councillor M. Powell
County Councillor L. Brown

FAITH REPRESENTATIVES:

Revd. J. Greaves
Mr. N. Pryor
Mrs. S. Gooding
Mrs S. Cave

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Paula Webber	RE Adviser (EAS)

APOLOGIES:

Neil Jenkins, Sharon Randall-Smith, Kate Wilding and Suzanne Hamer

1. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. To consider a response to the consultation on the RVE Framework.

It was agreed that the attendees would form a Working Party to provide comments on the consultation document with a view to formulating a formal response by the closing date of 16th July 2021.

Question 1 – How well does the guidance explain the scope of RVE and its context within the Humanities Area?

Comments included:

- Could be improved, the earlier version was more user-friendly and less legalistic. Disagreed that the legal element should be confined to a footnote.
- Must be clear on legal requirements particularly that religious traditions are mainly Christian and the other principle religions. Using the phrase “Range of religions” is incorrect as it only covers Christianity and principle religions in Wales.

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- Need to make clear to SACREs/SACs that inspection of faith schools is still undertaken by faith schools themselves and is not the role of SACREs.
- Any additional RVE required is determined by the Bishop.
- Support was given for p.6 para 4 “understanding the concept of religion will enable learners to build a well-grounded understanding of religion and the significance of the different ways it is defined” but an addition suggested “within Christianity and the principle religions found in Wales”.
- More emphasis needed to reflect that the main tradition in Wales is Christianity and how it can be looked at from different perspectives.
- Would like WASACRE to give guidance to SACREs and schools on other principle faiths. All the faiths on SACREs must be represented to promote a better understanding of different faiths around the world. Faith representatives can add expertise for professional learning.
- No one religion is more important than another. Right for children to have insight into many religions.
- Definition of principle religions is best left to the discretion of schools – there is flexibility in the curriculum to allow this. With teaching of non- religious, philosophical beliefs, there is concern religion is going to be squeezed out of the curriculum
- The guidance doesn't place the relationship of RVE to Humanities in general. There is insufficient reference e.g. the “what matters” statements. RVE's place within Humanities needs to be strengthened.
- Surprise that the guidance will be within the Curriculum for Wales guidance. This changes the nature of the document. It becomes statutory at this level rather than when adopted as an agreed syllabus.
- Some of the guidance doesn't fit well with the Humanities guidance. It is much more prescriptive than the rest of the humanities guidance. Moved from local to national. The relationship between RVE to Humanities has changed. It doesn't fit with the guidance for all the other subjects' examples. The document is statutory so schools will think that the examples (journeys) is the only approach. No other subjects have examples. Don't want to limit creativity and innovation. The Journeys were liked but could be misunderstood as the only approach.
- The material provided is subjective rather than objective. The assumption of spiritual development cuts across the renaming to RVE, as some may deny there is a spirit to develop. Learners would not be expected to undertake a spiritual journey but a learning experience. This is an unhelpful overlap.
- Could elaborate more on the integrated/multidisciplinary approach.
- Difference in opinion of what constitutes lenses – thought to be looking at concepts/perspectives from different angles and spirituality wasn't mentioned.
- The withdrawal of the right to withdraw from RE requires clear definition.
- Needs a statement to explain what Critical, objective and pluralistic education means.
- Overall, in answer to Q1 – Not Very well.

Question 2 – *Is the guidance, as a whole, clear and helpful for you in your role?*

Comments included:

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- Question is unclear if referring to SACRE.
- Inspection of Faith schools is left to the schools concerned. Is it a list of points covering the basics then left to the teachers/schools discretion? SACRE looks at inspections /reports from different schools to see if they are covering the basic legal requirements.to see if schools are conforming.
- Statutory guidance would be the wrong term – should be based on localism. As it is the discretion of the LA it should be non-statutory. Guidance should be to give ideas to SACREs.
- There is insufficient understanding of the role of SACRE and there would be more interest in participation if this was clearer.
- Can there be a regional approach to diverse representation as other LAs are struggling to obtain the necessary diversity.
- Monmouthshire SACRE has had a fantastic history of working with schools.
- LA's responsibility to constitute SACRE – SACRE can only influence the Co-opted members.
- It is interesting that it is a political influence. Is there an onus on elected members to ensure proper representation. The definition of religious/non-religious, philosophical belief, may need to be tightened. In the first circular published it had to be analogous to a religion which was helpful.
- Both opening definitions are weak and unhelpful. Identifying a philosophical group that has parity with religious groups being studied would be helpful also a redefinition of religion. Important distinction between those who identify as being non-religious and humanists (they represent a small proportion of those who are non religious) and there could be disproportionate influence. The example was given that not everyone who identifies as humanist would join Humanists UK. Important religions have been omitted e.g. Buddhism, Jainism
- Charity Commission has a helpful definition of RE.
- Unclear overall

Question 3 – *Does the guidance offer relevant information to support practitioners when designing their school curriculum for RVE?*

Comments included

- A “How to” Guide would be more helpful for designing the curriculum. E.g. how to unpack the What Matters statements etc
- Professional learning is pivotal. The sample materials were good. Isolated schools would find support a challenge. Teachers have said they had to search the guidance for support. Help from SACREs valued.
- As there is a list of questions in the guidance for schools to use, it will be a balance between the flexibility allowed and the samples to achieve a balance.
- In a rural authority it's more difficult than towns to find diversity of faiths. SACRE in conjunction with EAS will have to give this some thought.
- Can SACREs work together to support schools to achieve a diverse approach?
- Teacher representatives invited to comment here.

Question 4 – *Thinking about each section of the guidance, do you feel there are:*

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Comments included:

- Introduction needs to be improved. It is too legalistic, with no passion for subject inspired. A better tone is required to sell the subject. The most important is for SACREs, agreed syllabus conferences etc – (g) should be (a).
- Gaps for professional learning were identified. Faith representatives are often overlooked. SACREs can help with professional learning.
- Need a statement of what the agreed syllabus conference should cover.

Question 5 – *Does the guidance offer all practitioners sufficient support for their planning and teaching of RVE?*

Comments included:

- Not enough reference to “What Matters” statements.
- In favour of journeys. Difficult because of conflicting subject areas. In terms of planning, it should be stated that an integrated or multi-disciplinary approach is acceptable.
- There is a lack of clear definitions. e.g. on the meaning of religion.
- There is a need to add examples or some wording of how RVE should be approached; must be visible, robust and high quality.
- Teacher views welcomed here

Question 6 – *Is additional support (e.g. professional learning and resources) needed to ensure the successful implementation of this guidance?*

Comments included:

- It was agreed that we need some teacher responses to support a strong case for additional resources and robust training at all phases. In schools there are limited numbers of staff to bounce ideas with internally. SACREs need to assist here.
- The national and local approach needs clarification with an emphasis of what objective, critical and pluralistic looks like.
- Teachers might have difficulty with the removal of right of withdrawal from RVE and Relationship and Sexuality education. Guidance on this aspect needs sensitivity.
- Teachers also have the right to withdraw from teaching RVE. More information is needed here.
- If purely objective and educational – why would any parent/teacher want to make use of this right.
- There was interest if there is any discretion for Headteachers on withdrawal and what the consequences be. It was clarified that every child is entitled to RVE and the Headteacher has no right to allow removal. Headteachers need to know what is happening in their RVE classrooms.

Question 7 – *This question is aimed at local authorities and Standing Advisory Councils for religious education (SACs).*

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Comments included:

- The relationship between agreed syllabus and guidance needs to be clearer.
- Having the agreed syllabus of a minimal nature (put forward at WASACRE) covering basic legal elements, the RE framework has a lot of flexibility and the new one moves away from this.

Question 8 – *We would like to know your views on the effects that the RVE guidance would have on the Welsh language:*

Comments included:

- The problem is well documented that any curriculum changes, any resources/guidance are in English first and Welsh versions lag behind. This is due to a huge pressure on staff to translate. The increase in Welsh medium education means more learners will be affected by this. Conversely, the drive to issue both versions at the same time can disbenefit English learners by the delay too.
- Professional learning should be in both languages.

Question 9 – *Please also explain how you believe the RVE guidance could be formulated or changed:*

Comments included:

- Engaging with religious and non religious organisations in local communities. It needs to be stressed that headteachers must allow access for faith communities to do so. This aspect is not at the Headteachers' discretion.
- Schools should be making good links with local communities. Some groups might not be aware of objective, critical and pluralistic and would attempt to proselytise. It is useful to say it's a personal account and view.
- Headteachers need that discretion, not Heads of RVE.

Question 10 – *We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.*

No additional comments made

It was agreed that Paula would compile a draft response that would be circulated by 30th June. Paula will accept comments for inclusion until 28th June 2021. Comments on the final draft will be accepted by 12th July 2021 for submission to Welsh Government by the closing deadline of 16th July.

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3. To confirm the date of the next meeting as 20th October 2021

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm