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## S.A.C.R.E. – STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION 24.10.12

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**Present:**

**Councillor Gareth Thomas - Vice-chairman**

**Gwynedd Council Members:** Councillors Tom Ellis, Jean Forsyth, John Brynmor Hughes.

**Christians and Other Faiths:** Mr Wyn Myles Meredith (Methodist Church), Mrs Ruth Davies (Welsh Baptists Union), Mr Cynrig Hughes (Congregationalists), Rev Robert Townsend (Church in Wales).

**Teachers:** Mr Noel Dyer, (UCAC), Mrs Miriam Amlyn (NAS/UWT).

**Officers:** Mr Ken Robinson (Assistant Education Officer and SACRE Clerk), Miss Bethan James (Humanities Adviser), Mrs Glynda O'Brien (Committee Officer)

**Apologies:** Cllr. Huw Edwards, Selwyn Griffiths, Louise Hughes, Mrs Alwen Watkins (ASCL), Rev Deian Evans (Presbyterian Church of Wales).

### 1. PRAYER

The meeting was commenced with a prayer by Mr Noel Dyer.

### 2. BEST WISHES

The Vice-chair, Cllr Gareth Thomas, noted that Cllrs Huw Edwards and Selwyn Griffiths were currently going through a period of illness and best wishes were given to them for a full and speedy recovery.

### 3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

### 4. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the meeting of this committee held on 27 June 2012 as a true record.

### 5. SCHOOLS' SELF-EVALUATIONS

#### **Submitted:**

#### **(A) Draft exemplar self evaluation for Religious Education**

The Humanities Adviser reminded members that the ESTYN Inspection system did not now refer directly to Religious Education and collective worship. SACRE Gwynedd had adopted a procedure in order to achieve its statutory responsibility of monitoring school

standards by asking primary and secondary schools to present a summary of the school's self-evaluation for their attention during the year when ESTYN would inspect the school.

It was noted that one of the greatest challenges for schools was to be evaluative and quantitative in the self evaluations.

Reference was made to the exemplar draft of self-evaluation and Members were guided through the three key questions as follows:

**(a) Key Question 1: How good are outcomes in Religious Education?**

Within the above question, attention was drawn to how the question was phrased and the type of wording that Head teachers could use to complete the self-evaluation such as **most** which meant 70% of pupils with **the majority** meaning 60%. Schools were encouraged and expected to come to a decision on standards by stating excellent, good, sufficient or unsatisfactory. In terms of excellent, it was emphasised that it was expected for standards to achieve the very high requirements and was a means to lead the sector and receive national scrutiny.

**(b) Key Question 2: How good is provision in Religious Education?**

In terms of this question, schools were requested to give attention to what was undertaken in the classroom and teachers were encouraged to indicate that good practice took place regularly.

**(c) Key Question 3: How good is provision for Collective Worship?**

It was noted that for approximately three years now the focus of the above question looked at the standards of collective worship. It was also noted how important it was for Members to understand the difference between Religious Education lessons and Collective Worship. The purpose and aim of an Religious Education lesson was not to present religion to children, and the lesson should be objective. It was explained that collective worship was different where religion could be presented to children in an assembly and gave the right for parents to exempt their children from collective worship assemblies if they so desired. On the whole in Gwynedd, the majority of parents were content that their children received Religious Education lessons.

Members were given an opportunity to give observations and the Humanities Adviser was congratulated on the contents of the exemplar form and it would be useful to Members. In addition, it was noted that it would be worthwhile for schools to receive an exemplar form of what was expected to attain a standard of excellence, bearing in mind that 99% noted a good standard.

**Resolved: To accept, note and thank the officer for the exemplar self-evaluation form.**

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

The Assistant Education Officer and SACRE Clerk guided Members through the following self-evaluations and noted that seven schools had responded to his request to submit self-evaluations following recent inspections.

**(i) Ysgol Aberdyfi**

It was noted that the above school was in the south of the County, in a fairly Anglicized area and they had experienced staffing difficulties over the last two years, and as a consequence of the re-organisation of the County's primary schools there was uncertainty regarding the school's future. A very comprehensive self-evaluation was received stating that standards, provision and collective worship was good with the school active in the wider community. It was noted that there were 20 children on the school roll, and the Head teacher had stated honestly that attention was needed to 2/3 elements next year. It was further noted that the school placed emphasis on the fact that the children drafted their own criteria.

**(ii) Ysgol Santes Helen**

It was noted that the above school was a Catholic School in Caernarfon and although 20% of the children were from backgrounds where English was an additional language many attained the highest levels at the end of Key Stage 2. In terms of key question 2, it was noted that children with Additional Learning Needs were set differentiated work. It was noted that collective worship received deserved attention in school assemblies based on the liturgical year, saints days and particular periods namely Lent and Advent.

**(iii) Ysgol Maesincla**

It was noted that the above school was amongst the largest in size in Gwynedd. The school had experienced a very difficult situation due to the long-term absence of the Head, however, it was hastened to add that the Deputy had undertaken the duties very effectively. During the last inspection, when interviewing pupils, it was noted that the way in which Jesus was the focus of the worship was an excellent aspect, and its effectiveness was seen through listening to pupils – especially young pupils - talking about Jesus. A variety of resources and learning methods were used such as thinking skills. In terms of collective worship, the latest Inspection noted that “worship is exciting, forms the essence of school life and touches the pupils’ hearts”.

**(iv) Ysgol Llanystumdwy**

It was noted that the above was a Church in Wales school and the self-evaluation noted a number of good features and Christian values were prominent in the school's life. Considerable emphasis was placed on cross-curricular elements when teaching Religious Education and the school curriculum and Christian character of the school was strengthened through close collaboration with the local rector. Regarding collective worship, it was noted that silences were put to excellent use in the services and this promoted pupils' spiritual development.

**(v) Ysgol Llandwrog**

It was noted that the above school was a small Church school with a very strong community element. The school was referred to as an extended family where priority was given to Christian ethos daily. Regarding key question 2, it was noted that the school worked closely with the local Rector to highlight the Christian year calendar in school work. Collective worship was held for the whole school three times a week and the use of candles, readings from the Bible, and prayers gave an Anglican ethos to the worship.

**(vi) Ysgol Morfa Nefyn**

The above was an Infants School and was quite progressive in several ways. Reference was made to the study of Judaism via the Egypt theme by Year 2 and 3. It was noted that the pupils were familiar with Bible stories and enjoyed dramatizing these. Attention was

drawn to the fact that the self-evaluation stated excellent in the context of collective worship and the Assistant Education Officer and SACRE Clerk could certify this as the education authority used this school often as an example of good practices.

**(vii) Ysgol Eifionydd**

The Humanities Adviser noted that the nature of self-evaluations in Secondary Schools were different as they had a data of teachers' assessments included for Key Stage 3 and external examinations for Key Stage 4. Members were reminded that every pupil studied Religious Education in a secondary school in Key Stages 3, 4, 5 (if it was a school with a 6<sup>th</sup> form). However, it was noted that pupils had a choice when they were 14 years old to study an examination course in religious studies. In the past, SACRE had looked at teachers' assessments in KS3, however, during the last two years teachers were asked to submit a portfolio of class assessments to external WJEC moderators. This process had ended and there was now a national understanding for the level of attainment for Key Stage 3. Within the Ysgol Eifionydd self-evaluation reference was made to the performance of boys and girls and it was seen that they achieved the threshold of level 5 but they had set the direction to increase it to level 6. The school was congratulated on the GCSE results, and it was seen that that performance of boys was good.

It was noted that the school was aware of the statutory requirements to have daily collective worship sometime during the day in different situations.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions on the contents of the above and the following observations were made:

(a) In response to a query regarding the expectations of faith schools, the Humanities Adviser explained that in the context of the schools at Maesincla, Llanystumdwy and Llandwrog that they received support from the education authority and the Church in Wales. She was aware that the Head of Ysgol Santes Helen followed an exemplar programme of work by the Catholic Church.

(b) Reverend Robert Townsend added that from the viewpoint of Church schools, they had prepared a self-evaluation form themselves for Church schools and they received a separate school inspection by the Church in Wales to the one by ESTYN, and in accordance with the requirements of Section 50 of the Education Act 2005 and they looked at different aspects of school life as a Church school such as worship, the school's character and how religious education contributes to the Christian character of the school.

In the past, SACRE had received the Church in Wales inspections and it would be useful as well in future to receive the self-evaluations provided by schools to the Church in Wales.

(c) To conclude, the Humanities Adviser noted that there was considerable work to be done again in the context of the self-evaluations of primary schools to encourage teachers to develop Religious Education skills, namely dealing with fundamental questions, examining beliefs, teachings and religious practices and expressing personal responses.

**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 the efforts made by them in achieving the grades.**

**6. DRAFT GWYNEDD SACRE ANNUAL REPORT 2011-12**

The Draft Gwynedd SACRE Annual Report for the 2011-12 academic year, was presented for the members' approval, prior to the publication of the final report.

The Humanities Advisor reported that the report was a summary of SACRE activities during the previous year from September 2011 to August 2012, and that it was before members to give them an opportunity to express an opinion on the draft report prior to submitting the final report to the Assembly's Education Department and other institutions.

It was explained that the function of SACRE was to advise the Education Authority on matters involving the provision of Religious Education and Collective Worship and the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education.

Members were guided through the report and reference was made to the methods used to give constant attention to monitoring the standards of Religious Education, by reviewing the self-evaluations of schools in the context of the three key questions together with monitoring examination results.

Reference was made to the provision for collective worship and it was noted that every school conformed with the statutory requirements, and as part of the self-evaluation procedure teachers were asked for their views on the standard of collective worship. They sought to identify common messages in schools regarding the provision and outcomes and/or messages that were specific to a school.

It was explained that the religious education results in the annual report were for last year and these results were discussed with SACRE in October 2011. Specific reference was made to the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced Level Standards of Religious Education in 2011, and it was noted that it was more difficult these days to give views on external results and have a fair picture of the pattern as pupils undertook various courses at different times of their lives between year 10 and year 13. The Humanities Adviser was of the view that it would be unfair to present the religious education results in a public document until a fair comparison was received of pupils' performance in other subjects.

The work of the advisory service in the field of Religious Education was summarised and the courses offered under the in-service training programme for the authority's primary and secondary teachers were outlined. The report noted the link with DCELLS.

During the ensuing discussion the following comments were made:

- (a) it would be useful to show the trend regarding the results of boys and girls over two or three years in the future.
- (b) that it should be explained why there was an increase in the percentage who completed a full GCSE course in 2011.
- (c) In response, the Humanities Adviser explained regarding Key Stage 3 (11-14 old pupils) that teachers assessments were presented to the Assembly and they were listed as families. Because religious education was managed locally it was noted that the results were not collected nationally.

**RESOLVED to accept with thanks the Draft Gwynedd SACRE Annual Report for 2011-12.**

## **7. ADVISORY SERVICE REPORT**

**Submitted:****(i) A report by the Chief Moderator of Teacher Assessments.**

The Humanities Adviser explained that the Secondary Departments had submitted a sample of pupils' work to prove to external Moderators that the Departments had an understanding of Level 4, 5, 6 and 7. A comprehensive report had been received from the Chief Moderator and Members' attention was drawn to the requirements. It was seen that some schools had submitted a sample of work that had been approved, the Chief Moderator suggested that others should look further at specific issues and a few schools had not submitted evidence due to valid reasons such as long term illness.

Options were discussed to assist schools who required additional assistance and it was decided that SACRE would request the Humanities Adviser to visit the relevant schools.

**Resolved: To request that the Humanities Adviser visits schools to offer additional support to teachers on issues that require specific attention.**

**(ii)** During the meeting, the GCSE results were submitted to Members. It was noted that:

- the results were good with 10 schools submitting pupils to sit the GCSE examination.
- 41.9% of the pupils achieved grades A\* / A.
- the gap between boys and girls was reducing.
- 80.5% of the candidates achieved level 2 qualification (A\* - C)
- The percentage of girls and boys who achieved Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications had increased gradually since 2011.

It was noted that it was a challenge to ensure that more Departments offered the course to pupils, however, in the current climate where staff were limited and the number of pupils were reducing it was envisaged that this was a difficult task.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted:

- (a) That it was important that SACRE tried to give support to staff in Departments bearing in mind that Religious Education was vitally important and it should not be cut first because it was not a core subject.
- (b) In response, the Humanities Adviser explained that the subject had to be viable and as the school population in some schools had reduced there might be some situations with only three pupils opting for GCSE in Religious Education and therefore it would be necessary to make arrangements with a neighbouring school to offer the subject to them.
- (c) The Humanities Adviser explained the tables to Members and noted that on the whole the percentages were quite positive and those schools designated C(m) were aware of what had to be achieved. It was added that the process had not been easy for Departments and this was the first cycle for Departments to come to terms with the requirement to administer at a national level. However, it had been an useful process and had been beneficial for the Religious Education community

in terms of the requirements of the subject to develop pupils to think philosophically rather than descriptively.

- (ch) A Member noted that the tables presented did not give an opportunity to compare standards with other schools, and there was no comparison with the Gwynedd average score and other schools.

**Resolved: To accept and note the contents of results.**

## **8. WALES ASSOCIATION of SACREs.**

The draft minutes of the Wales Association of SACREs held on 26 June 2012 at Llandudno Junction were submitted to Members.

- (a) The Humanities Adviser reported that the minutes were for information and explained that following a comment by a Member that the minutes had been submitted in English only, that the final minutes would be submitted bilingually to the next Association meeting on 23 November at Merthyr Tydfil.
- (b) It was noted that ESTYN, following a recent discussion with the Wales Association of SACREs, had agreed to provide thematic reports on specific subjects in the curriculum and the next one would be Religious Education focussing on Key Stages 3 and 4. ESTYN would prepare a questionnaire as well as visiting schools across Wales.
- (c) An appeal was made for any Member to attend meetings of the Wales Association of SACREs to represent elected members, as Mr Wyn Meredith represented the religious sector.

**RESOLVED: (a) To accept and note, for information, the contents of the minutes of the Wales Association of SACREs meeting held on 26 June 2012 at Llandudno Junction.**

**(b) To note that the next meeting of the Wales Association of SACREs would take place on 23 November 2012 at Merthyr Tydfil.**

**The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.00 pm.**

**CHAIRMAN**