

Response to the Estyn Thematic Review of Religious Education at KS2 and KS3

Libby Jones, Chair of NAPfRE

On behalf of NAPfRE I would like to thank Estyn for this report, for responding to the request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2017-2018, and for the recommendations it offers to schools, SACREs and Welsh government, within the report.

Members agreed that there are few surprises with regard to the recommendations within the report. Members consider them to be fair and that they support the case for improved professional learning opportunities for RE, increased support for RE in schools from SACREs, and a strengthened position for RE in the new curriculum.

Members feel that the report shows a fairly positive image of RE in the 47 schools from which direct evidence was gathered. However, some members question whether this 'positive' image reflects a true picture across all schools in Wales. Anecdotal evidence shared by SACREs and RE professionals at NAPfRE meetings would suggest otherwise.

Members were encouraged to note that full requirements of the locally agreed syllabus are covered in schools where curriculum planning is good, and that this was the case in many schools at KS2 and in the majority of schools at KS3. However, this does suggest a short fall in schools that do not plan well for RE out of the 47 schools from which the evidence was gathered. Members question what implications this has for RE on a wider scale across Wales.

Members were pleased to note that in the 47 schools, standards in RE were generally good and that most pupils engage well with a wide range of fundamental human and religious questions. It was felt that lack of challenge for more able learners in KS2 and planning for KS2-3 progression in RE are common issues for subjects across the curriculum.

Members were interested to learn that leadership of religious education is good overall and that in most of the 47 schools, leaders have considered changes to the teaching of religious education in light of the new curriculum proposals. However, members are very concerned that in some schools across Wales changes are already being made to the teaching of RE, driven by Head teachers and/or Humanities leaders who have no specialism in RE, and whom have clearly misinterpreted the proposals. Many teachers have shared their fears with members of NAPfRE about the future of RE within the new curriculum at their school, as a result of these premature and misjudged changes.

With regard to the recommendations offered in the report, members feel that some of these present funding implications for schools and LA's. For example, for professional learning in RE and PREVENT initiatives etc. The recommendation regarding 'approved places of worship' also raised concern for members. Most SACREs have a list of local places of worship, but to 'approve' them would be

impossible. Approved by whom? Based on what criteria? How regularly? It is surely the role of the individual school so seek out risk assessment etc. Members feel that this phrase needs clarifying.

Members are pleased that the report offered examples of good practice, but some members question the quality of good practice shared, and members guarded against including more citizenship based examples. Members agreed that this report was provided with the new curriculum in mind and perhaps wasn't hugely reflective of the great practice that is happening in RE specifically across Wales.

Members noticed that numerous references were made in the report to collective worship and question why these were included. Religious education is separate and different to collective worship and members would guard against the two aspects of education being referred to together in order to avoid confusion.

Finally members noted that at least one school involved in this process, had not been recognised in the final report, which raised the issue that there may be others. Members feel that all schools involved in whatever capacity or at whatever stage of the process should be given full recognition in retrospect.

Libby Jones
Chair of NAPfRE
RE Advisor for Wrexham County Borough Council

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