

Cwestiynau i CYSAGau/ Questions for chairpersons

Pa gysylltiad rheolaidd sydd gan eich sefydliad ag ysgolion cynradd ac uwchradd yn eich ardal?

What regular contact does your SACRE have with primary and secondary schools in your area?

There are both primary and secondary teacher representatives sitting on Merthyr Tydfil SACRE. SACRE listens to their views at every meeting. SACRE also invites presentations from other teachers at SACRE. Teacher workload and the costs involved in releasing teachers from schools sometimes prevents teachers attending meetings.

SACRE communicates regularly with teachers (e.g. via email) offering information on current developments in Religious Education, new and noteworthy resources and special events. SACRE also shares information with schools from organizations such as Welsh Government, the WJEC, RE organizations, and faith groups. SACRE regularly provides schools with up to date information on possible visits and visitors to support their RE provision. SACRE has recently decided to improve communication with schools by introducing a regular SACRE News Bulletin. This will also provide a form of two way communication between SACRE and schools.

There is contact with schools via the Education Officer who requests self-evaluation reports from schools. Merthyr Tydfil SACRE considers and analyses school inspection reports. If there are any issues regarding Religious Education, such as non fulfillment of statutory requirements, then the LA takes a pro-active approach to working with schools in producing an action plan to address any shortcomings. Support is offered where necessary. During the academic year 2016-2017 no follow up was necessary.

Whilst Merthyr Tydfil SACRE endeavors to contact teachers, sufficient funding would ensure that SACREs could have more regular, effective, face to face contact with teachers via CPD training in Religious Education, which is vital to supporting teachers and the delivery of good RE.

Pa gymorth ac arweiniad ydych chi'n eu rhoi i staff ysgolion?

What support and guidance do you provide for school staff?

SACRE communicates regularly with teachers (e.g. via email) offering information on current developments in Religious Education, new and noteworthy resources, special events, and articles from teachers as a way of sharing good practice. SACRE also shares information with schools from organizations such as Welsh Government, the WJEC, RE organizations, and faith groups. SACRE regularly provides schools with up to date information on possible visits and visitors to support their RE provision. SACRE has recently introduced a News Bulletin to go to schools to provide more support and guidance.

Merthyr Tydfil SACRE provides schools with up to date information on visits and visitors. SACRE offers advice to schools on important special events such as Holocaust Memorial Day.

SACRE offers support to schools in raising standards by sending letters to schools congratulating them on the outcomes of good Estyn inspections and/or offering support where recommendations are made. This would especially be the case if recommendations are made in Estyn inspection reports with regards to non fulfillment of statutory requirements in Religious Education. Whilst SACREs rely heavily on Estyn inspection reports to report when statutory requirements are being met, little can be gleaned from inspection reports about the quality of Religious Education being delivered in schools.

A ydych yn teimlo y gall athrawon fanteisio ar hyfforddiant a chymorth digonol i'w galluogi i addysgu addysg grefyddol yn effeithiol?

Do you feel that teachers have sufficient access to training and support to enable them to teach RE effectively?

The local authority, via Central Couth Consortium, offers CPD to schools. CSC provide professional learning hubs where lead practitioners provide high quality professional learning for schools in the area. They develop school to school support for improvement and share resources and research. Lead practitioners within Wales and from CSC are now feeding back to SACRE via WASACRE presentations.

The local authority informed SACRE that with the current Welsh Government's emphasis on Literacy and Numeracy no subject specific training is on offer. Access to CPD specific to Religious Education has been affected in recent years by lack of funding and the increased demands on teachers remaining in the classroom to ensure the content of courses are covered. Whilst Merthyr Tydfil celebrates the commitment and success of its teachers, more funding specifically for CPD in religious education would ensure that standards are raised further. SACRE is aware that schools are finding it very difficult to release teachers for training during the working day. As a result of this teachers sometimes need to use their own time to network and this has an effect upon their workload and work life balance. There is a danger that teachers might feel that they are practicing in isolation if they are not attending regular RE related training events and there is less opportunity to share good practice.

In the future, with the development of the new curriculum and a skills based approach, where RE might be taught by non-specialists, SACRE would appreciate the opportunity to offer essential training opportunities for teachers in order to provide a better understanding of RE and to enable the delivery of excellent Religious Education. Merthyr Tydfil SACRE is very concerned that if RE is diluted in the new curriculum then teacher training for Religious Education might not be high on the agenda. It must be given credence and seen as worthwhile.

A ydych yn teimlo bod unrhyw broblemau o ran athrawon nad ydynt yn arbenigwyr yn addysgu addysg grefyddol mewn ysgolion uwchradd? Sut mae hyn yn effeithio ar safonau disgyblion?

Do you feel that there are any issues with non-specialist teaching RE in secondary schools? How does this impact on pupil standards?

SACRE members are concerned that this question has had to be asked in relation to Religious Education at all. They have queried whether this would ever be asked of core subjects such as Mathematics or English. SACRE members believe that RE should be taught by specialists.

Some non-specialist teachers have the ability and desire to teach good RE and can be very committed. However, non-specialist teachers are rarely as passionate as subject specialists. Their subject knowledge will obviously lack the depth of a specialist and they might not be aware of skills specific to good Religious Education. No child should lack love of the subject, or underachieve in RE, as a result of non-specialist teaching or underfunding of RE departments. Lack of training on the part of teachers can impact upon children and young people.

Non-specialist teachers within a department at KS3 and KS4 will significantly increase the workload of the specialist head of department thus causing undue stress upon that member of staff. In these cases, heads of department are often required, not only to provide overly detailed schemes of work, but also individual lesson plans and resources. There is a need then to

consider the recent Welsh Government teacher workload survey which reported that teacher workload is already too heavy in considering the staffing of Religious Education departments in schools.

If, as a last resort, non-specialist staff are used to teach RE then they should receive sufficient training and the non-specialists should not be replaced every year by those staff with hours free on their timetables. It is very important to have consistency in staff to ensure uptake in Religious Studies at GCSE. Whilst Merthyr Tydfil celebrates the success of GCSE and GCE results which are above the All Wales comparisons, it is also recognized that some pupils will be disadvantaged if they are taught by non-specialists who lack subject knowledge at this level. Teachers of GCSE are concerned that the new course is demanding and content heavy. Despite the work of lead practitioners in supporting them they are finding it difficult to access and create resources. Specialist teachers will find it difficult to deliver the content in the time available to them. It will be so much more challenging for non-specialists to be able to deliver the course with equal depth and thoroughness. Thus, students will be yet again be disadvantaged. Some teachers are having time allocation for Religious Education and Religious Studies reduced and this would also put too much pressure on specialist and non-specialist teachers alike.

A ydych yn monitro safonau a darpariaeth mewn addysg grefyddol mewn ysgolion lleol? Os ydych, ym mha ffyrdd a pha mor aml? Beth yw eich canfyddiadau?

Do you monitor standards and provision for RE in local schools? If yes, in what ways and how often? What are your findings?

Merthyr Tydfil SACRE considers and analyses both primary and secondary school inspection reports and are satisfied that schools that have been recently inspected are meeting the statutory requirements for Religious Education. If issues are raised with regards to Religious Education, such as non fulfillment of statutory requirements, then the LA takes a pro-active approach working with schools in producing the action plan to address any shortcomings. Support is provided where necessary. SACRE, in consultation with the LA and its schools, use school self-evaluation as a means of fulfilling its statutory responsibility to monitor provision and standards in Religious Education. A letter is written to every school whose inspection report had been received this academic year, congratulating them on good aspects noted by Estyn and asking for information via the self-evaluation proforma.

SACRE analyses examination results over a three year period and identifies trends in performance benchmarked against All Wales data. Schools are informed of the outcomes of this analysis and any issues raised by SACRE. In addition the LA and its SACRE gather and analyse data via the Consortium regarding key stage 3 teacher assessment in Religious Education. This information is presented to SACRE and sent to all secondary schools in the LA. There is evidence that there is good RE taking place in schools in Merthyr Tydfil.

In 2016-17 SACRE wrote to all schools in the local authority reminding them that coverage of the programmes of study of the locally agreed syllabus remains a statutory requirement whilst the curriculum is under review.

The current GCSE Short Course no longer counts towards the 9 capped point score and therefore holds no value to the school. As a result of this, and because they are finding it progressively more difficult to fit everything into the school timetable, there might be the temptation to reduce hours from the statutory Religious Education which is the entitlement of every pupil. Teachers both in Merthyr Tydfil and throughout Wales are very concerned that if they lose the short course delivery of statutory RE will be made more difficult as pupils might deem it pointless.

SACRE wrote to secondary schools drawing specific attention to delivery of RE at KS4 and informing them that coverage of the Global Citizenship unit alone would not be sufficient to

cover all aspects of the agreed syllabus KS4 programme of study. It asked all schools to confirm that they understood the requirements of the agreed syllabus and that they are meeting these statutory requirements in their schools.

The findings of Merthyr Tydfil SACRE in these monitoring strategies are shared with Welsh Government in the SACRE annual report.

A ydych wedi ystyried effaith Dyfodol Llwyddiannus ar addysgu addysg grefyddol mewn ysgolion? A ydych yn rhagweld unrhyw broblemau os caiff addysg grefyddol ei haddysgu'n rhan o gwricwlwm ehangach y Dyniaethau yn CA3?

Have you considered the impact of Successful Futures on teaching RE in schools? Do you envisage any issues if RE is taught as part of a wider Humanities curriculum at KS3?

In the current political and social climate good Religious Education has never been more important for our pupils in order to ensure that they receive a balanced and informed view of religion and how it may be expressed.

SACRE has included the curriculum review as a standing item on the agenda and members have had the opportunity to discuss the developments of the curriculum review at every meeting since the review began. Members have had opportunity to express their views in lengthy and in-depth discussions.

SACRE members have expressed concerns about whether good Religious Education can be maintained if it is taught as part of the wider Humanities Curriculum. Members do not want to see Religious Education diluted and fear that it might disappear or become unidentifiable if it is not safeguarded as a specific subject.

In order to maintain high standards of teaching and learning in the subject, we must ensure that within the new curriculum RE has parity with History and Geography and that it is delivered by subject specialists. If teachers are deployed to teach all areas / subjects encompassed within the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience, there is a real danger that the quality of Religious Education that pupils experience will be diminished. Teacher bias is inevitable as they will play to their strengths thus resulting in vastly different experiences for pupils where one teacher teaches several subjects within Humanities. A recent WASACRE presentation highlighted the fact that this is the experience of at least one school who had adopted a 'Humanities Approach' over a number of years and found that it was not effective in maintaining standards in each of the subject specialisms.

A further potential negative impact of a Humanities approach may be the uptake of RS GCSE. If pupils are not taught by specialists and receive subject specific quality RE provision, there may be limited opportunity to engage pupils and inspire them to take RS at GCSE.

If current legislation remains, there needs to be careful consideration of the implications of the right of parents to be able to withdraw their child(ren) from RE. The planning, teaching and learning associated with RE placed within a Humanities Area of Learning and Experience, would need to be clearly identifiable in order for teachers to be able to manage any request for partial or whole withdrawal from RE made by parents. If pupils are withdrawn from the RE element of Humanities, this calls into question whether this partly defeats the object of creating a Humanities approach. Pupils will potentially have different experiences of this AoLE.

Current legislation states that RE is not a statutory requirement for Nursery pupils, yet the new curriculum is designed for 3 – 16 year olds. The anomaly needs to be addressed in order to bring RE in line with the other subjects with the Humanities AoLE and ensure that children in Nursery classes have the same opportunities as those from Reception upwards.

At ei gilydd, pa mor dda ydych chi'n teimlo y mae addysg grefyddol yn cael ei haddysgu mewn ysgolion ar hyn o bryd? A ydych yn teimlo bod unrhyw agwedd benodol ar addysg grefyddol yn cael ei haddysgu'n dda neu ei haddysgu'n wael? Pa dystiolaeth ydych chi'n seilio'r farn hon arni?

Overall how well do you feel that RE is currently being taught in schools? Do you feel that any particular aspect of RE is more often taught well or taught poorly? What evidence do you base this judgement on?

KS3 and KS4 data shows that there is clear evidence that good RE is taking place in schools in Merthyr Tydfil. Teachers of Religious Education are passionate and dedicated. However, SACRE have discussed the impact of increasing demands upon school timetables, the Welsh Baccalaureate, global citizenship, literacy, etc. SACRE is concerned about whether standards in RE can be maintained.

The budgets for Religious Education departments are often much less than those of the core subjects. Therefore, resources and staff training for Religious Education could be greatly improved. If standards and outcomes are good in schools in Merthyr Tydfil then the impact of proper funding upon teaching and learning, and ultimately upon our children and young people, would be exceptional. Evidence is based upon conversations with teacher representatives on SACRE, the data provided and upon discussion with individual teachers, both from Merthyr Tydfil and further afield via the input of the RE consultant to SACRE.

There are essential aspects of Religious Education that cannot be measured, such as the spiritual development of children and young people. There is a need to recognize that these aspects hold value in and of themselves. In a target setting culture schools are increasingly under pressure to compete, both against their own past performance and against other schools. Therefore, often these valuable aspects of the curriculum are lost. If this is so it ultimately hinders the holistic development of children. In the current political and global climate good Religious Education should be of paramount importance to schools and not something that is dropped from an overly burdened curriculum. Religious Education needs to have a special status in schools when the new curriculum is implemented. Pupils are always be eager to engage with the big questions about life that are raised in RE. Therefore, they need the space, time and resources fully trained to do this properly.

SACRE has struggled to monitor standards of standards of teaching and learning in RE in its primary schools as Estyn's inspection framework ceased to include subject specific inspection and subsequent judgments. SACRE has had to rely on other means of monitoring schools and this has proved challenging and limiting. SACRE does endeavor to scrutinize self-evaluation reports to aid this situation.

Feedback from primary school teacher representatives on SACRE suggests that many teachers other than the RE Co-ordinator, often omit RE due to the pressures of other curriculum demands, time restraints and lack of enthusiasm for and / or confidence in RE. This situation is exacerbated by commercially produced 'schemes of work' and / or 'Individual Learning Projects' that take a cross-curricular topic approach and do not include Religious Education. Where schools have purchased such resources, a conscious effort needs to be made to add the RE into the curriculum. Where this does not take place then schools are in danger of not fulfilling their statutory requirements. Additionally, children (and the society they belong to) are not offered the opportunity to benefit from all that good Religious Education brings. The status of RE in a school, and therefore the quality and quantity of provision, often depends on the attitude of the Headteacher, senior management staff and RE Subject Leader for RE.

Primary teachers receive little, if any CPD in RE and rely on their mostly very limited initial teacher training input and the support and enthusiasm of their RE Co-ordinator..

A ydych yn teimlo bod safonau addysg grefyddol mewn ysgolion wedi gwella neu ddirywio'n gyffredinol dros y 5 mlynedd diwethaf? Ym mha ffyrdd a pham?

Do you feel that standards of RE in schools have generally improved or declined over the last 5 years? In what ways and why?

SACRE feels that the standards of RE in schools have improved as a result of the GCSE Short Course in Religious Studies. However, teachers are now afraid that standards will decline in this area with the increased demands of the core modules of the new GCSE. Additionally, standards might have improved following the 22 SACREs in Wales agreeing to adopt the National Exemplar Framework into their Agreed Syllabus. But in recent years, with the impact of increased demands of an overburdened curriculum, teachers are talking about a threat to the progress being made in RE. Indeed, such is the concern in the profession that many teachers are now joining a 'Save RE' Facebook group. Teachers are working together in networks, often now using social media and Hubs as a forum. Might this be a reflection of the fact that teachers are not getting the training they require to deliver RE effectively. In the past year the Religious Education Consultant to SACRE has been asked by some teachers from schools in Wales whether they still have to follow the Agreed Syllabus for RE and whether schools should be cutting their time allocation. This indicates the worries that teachers have. Additionally, the lack of training, resources and the use of non-specialists to deliver RE greatly impacts on the workload and work life balance of specialist teachers of RE. Teachers often seek their own opportunities to develop and to fulfill their needs of their students and deliver good RE. Teachers are asking. The confusion about whether schools still have to fulfill the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus, in light of the fact that a new curriculum is being developed, partly arises from the lack of sufficient teacher training outside of their own school environment.

Beth ydych chi'n teimlo yw'r prif broblemau y mae ysgolion yn eu hwynebu?

What do you feel are the main issues facing schools?

The increased burden of headteachers having to fit everything into the school timetable with a curriculum overload.

Overloaded curriculum requirements for class teachers in the primary school.

Literacy and Numeracy taking a priority at the expense of other foundation subjects including RE.

Lack of funding for resources and CPD.

Lack of quality, specialist CPD courses.

A competitive target setting culture that does not value that which cannot be measured, e.g. spiritual development or the impact of the arts or culture upon the lives of young people.

Teacher workload and the retention of the best quality educators.

A oes unrhyw wybodaeth arall yr hoffech ei rhannu â mi?

Is there any other information that you would like to share with me?

WASACRE has highlighted a growing trend of cases where schools are not meeting the statutory requirements for Religious Education throughout Wales. Merthyr Tydfil SACRE has raised this issue with schools in the authority by sending letters reminding them of the legal

requirements for RE. Estyn has a monitoring role within schools. It should be the role of Estyn to flag up where schools are not meeting these requirements. However, without evident sanctions on schools who do not comply with statutory requirements, there is little incentive for schools to rectify the situation.

Merthyr Tydfil SACRE is keen to offer as much support to schools in ensuring good RE takes place in its schools and would value statements concerning the quality of Religious Education within school inspection reports.

**Diolch yn fawr i chi am ein helpu â'n hymchwil.
Thank you very much for helping us with our research.**

Anfonwch yr ymateb hwn at liz.counsell@estyn.gov.uk erbyn 27 Hydref.

Please email this response to liz.counsell@estyn.gov.uk by October 27th

Os hoffech i mi ddilyn yr holiadur hwn â sgwrs fer dros y ffôn, rhowch eich enw a'ch manylion cyswllt. If you would like me to follow up this questionnaire with a short telephone conversation, please add your name and contact details.

Enw/ Name _____ **Swydd/ Position** _____

E-bost/ Email _____ **Ffôn/ Phone** _____