



CAERPHILLY STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) - 14TH NOVEMBER 2013

**SUBJECT: ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SECONDARY
SCHOOLS**

REPORT BY: INTERIM DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Estyn Thematic Review in Religious Education in Secondary Schools.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The purpose of the Estyn thematic review is to inform the Welsh Assembly Government about standards in RE in secondary schools. The report covers outcomes including standards in religious education at key stage 3 and key stage 4, attainments in GCSE religious studies, and participation and engagement in learning. It also covers the factors that affect standards, including curriculum planning, teaching, assessment, and leadership, improving quality and external influences.
- 2.2 Estyn visited a sample of about 20 schools between November and December 2012 and this included a visit to one Caerphilly school - St Martin's Comprehensive school. The visits involved lesson observations, scrutiny of work and relevant documentation and interviews with senior managers, the subject lead and a focus group of learners.
- 2.3 Additional schools were also asked to complete a brief questionnaire about provision for RE. Relevant data and evidence from recent inspections will also feed into the work.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The report links to SACRE's duty to monitor and develop the provision of Religious Education and Collective Worship in schools and the CCBC Strategic Equality Plan 2012.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 **Estyn Thematic Report: *Religious Education in Secondary Schools***

4.2 **Main Findings Of The Report**

- 4.3 GCSE courses in religious studies have gained in popularity over recent years. More pupils gain a qualification in religious education than in any other non-core subject in Wales. The number of pupils taking the full GCSE course in religious studies has risen significantly over

the last five years, with just over a quarter of the pupils in Year 11 entered in 2012. The number of pupils taking the short GCSE course in religious studies has also risen steadily over the last five years, with just over half of the pupils in Year 11 entered in 2012. For both courses, more girls than boys are entered, though the difference is greater with the full course.

- 4.4 Attainment in the full GCSE course in religious studies has risen steadily over the last five years. The percentage of pupils attaining grades A* to C in religious studies is well above the average for other subjects. While attainment in Wales is broadly similar to that for the UK as a whole, a higher proportion of pupils attain grade A* in Wales.
- 4.5 Attainment in the short GCSE course in religious studies has fallen over the last five years, although it recovered slightly in 2012. In spite of this fall, the percentage of pupils attaining grades A* to C in Wales has remained consistently better than for the UK as a whole, and a higher proportion of pupils attain grade A* in Wales.
- 4.6 A significantly higher percentage of girls attain grades A* to C than boys in both the full course and short GCSE courses in religious studies. The gap between this percentage for girls and boys is wider in Wales for both courses than it is across the UK as a whole.
- 4.7 Teacher assessment of pupils' performance in religious education at the end of key stage 3 is not included in the Welsh Government core data sets that cover other National Curriculum subjects and not published nationally in any other way that would enable an analysis of standards at key stage 3 or progress between key stages.
- 4.8 In the schools visited for this survey, lesson observations and pupils' work show that standards are good in a majority of schools at key stage 3. Standards are not excellent in any of the schools visited, but they are unsatisfactory in a few schools where pupils do not make enough progress. More able and talented pupils constitute the group that is the most likely to underachieve and this is usually because the tasks set by teachers do not challenge them to demonstrate the level of skill and understanding required for level 7 or above.
- 4.9 Most pupils following the full GCSE course in religious studies at key stage 4 make good progress and a slightly lower proportion of pupils studying the short course also make good progress. Where pupils are not following an examination course at key stage 4, standards in lessons are rarely better than adequate. In these lessons, a minority of pupils misbehave. This suggests that they do not value the lessons and this may be because they do not lead to a qualification.
- 4.10 Almost all pupils in the lessons observed showed respect for the opinions and beliefs of others. Many pupils value what they learn in religious education and understand how it contributes to their personal and social development. In particular, pupils enjoy engaging with fundamental questions, such as 'is there life after death?', 'what is evil?' and 'what is truth?'. Pupils enjoy learning about different religious responses to questions like these and why people live their lives in different ways as a result of their beliefs. They enjoy considering their own views, and discussing them with peers. They are prepared to talk about a variety of issues relating to religion and ethics and take part in lessons enthusiastically.
- 4.11 Teaching was good or better in just over two-thirds of the lessons observed for this survey. Teaching was excellent in nearly one-fifth of lessons and unsatisfactory in a very few lessons. These findings suggest that teaching in religious education is better than average for teaching across all subjects in secondary schools inspected since 2010.
- 4.12 In many schools, at both key stages, religious education teachers:
 - have good subject knowledge;
 - teach enthusiastically;

use a range of teaching strategies to support learning, particularly through discussion in pairs and groups;

use artefacts and audio-visual resources creatively;

prepare pupils thoroughly for GCSE examinations;

promote pupils' thinking skills effectively; and

promote literacy appropriately, particularly oracy and writing skills.

- 4.13 Many secondary schools use non-specialist teachers to teach religious education and the short GCSE course in religious studies, although they are rarely used to teach the full GCSE course. Non-specialist teachers do not have a negative impact on standards in the majority of schools.
- 4.14 In the majority of schools, teachers provide pupils with useful feedback, both oral and written, that enables them to understand their progress and how to improve their work.
- 4.15 Teachers generally have a very good understanding of GCSE requirements, but few have an accurate understanding of the levels of pupil performance at key stage 3 set out in the national exemplar framework.
- 4.16 The local agreed syllabuses across Wales are very similar, being based on the national exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19-year olds in Wales. Almost all schools meet the requirements of their local agreed syllabus. However, a very few schools do not meet the requirements at key stage 4 either because they do not give enough time to cover the syllabus or because, occasionally, lessons are used predominantly to help pupils gain a non-subject qualification such as an Essential Skills Wales qualification.
- 4.17 In the majority of schools, effective subject leaders set high expectations within the department, monitor other religious education teachers closely, provide appropriate support and challenge, and delegate aspects of leadership and management amongst colleagues to encourage a collegiate approach. Self-evaluation is good or better in only a minority of religious education departments. The paucity of national data on religious education and religious studies makes it difficult for schools to compare standards with other schools, but only a minority of departments analyse internal examination data thoroughly in order to plan for improvement.
- 4.18 The lack of opportunities for professional development and learning networks means that good practice is not shared enough and challenges, such as raising boys' attainment, the accuracy of assessing levels of performance at key stage 3, planning for the development of skills and improving self-evaluation, are not addressed effectively.
- 4.19 The recommendations were that Schools should:
- R1 develop strategies to raise the attainment of boys at key stage 4;
- R2 improve standards at key stage 4 for pupils who are not entered for a qualification and consider giving all pupils the opportunity to gain an appropriate qualification;
- R3 improve the accuracy of teacher assessment of pupils' levels at key stage 3;
- R4 ensure that tasks are challenging enough to enable more able pupils to reach higher levels at key stage 3;
- R5 ensure that the curriculum, staffing and timetabling arrangements enable all pupils to make good progress through key stages 3 and 4; and
- R6 strengthen self-evaluation and use data in religious education departments to identify where and what to improve.

4.20 The recommendations were that The Welsh Government should:

R7 collect, analyse and publish attainment data for religious education and religious studies in the same way as for non-core subjects; and

R8 work with local authorities and SACREs to improve the opportunities for professional development and support learning networks for teachers of religious education.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Religion and Belief is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and locally is covered by section 6 (xi) of the CCBC Strategic Equality Plan 2012.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications attached to this report.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no personnel implications attached to this report.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Members of the SACRE are requested to discuss the content and recommendations found in the report and consider the implications for schools and Caerphilly SACRE.

9. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

9.1 As part of SACRE's statutory duty to monitor and develop religious education and collective worship.

10. CONSULTATION

10.1 All comments have been reflected in this report.

Author: Vicky Thomas (RE Consultant to SACRE)
Consultees: Keri Cole, Manager, Learning, Education and Inclusion