

Synopsis of Estyn's report on Religious Education at key stage and key stage 3 June 2018

The report was requested by the Minister in the annual remit letter to Estyn for 2017-18.

The report judges standards, provision and leadership in religious education at key stage 2 and key stage 3

A number of schools across Wales were visited as part of this survey (*N.B. Schools that provide denominational education were not included in the sample of schools visited.*)

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia, and members of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs). The report's findings also help to inform the development and implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales.

Religious education at key stage 2 and key stage 3

Background

1

The 'National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales' aimed to improve standards of religious education nationally by providing a coherent framework for Wales. All local authorities and SACREs amended their local agreed syllabuses to take account of the framework.

2

The framework states that religious education should encourage pupils to explore a range of questions in a reflective, analytical, balanced way. It also focuses on understanding humanity's quest for meaning, the positive aspects of multi-faith/multicultural understanding, and pupils' own understanding and responses to life and religion.

3

There is no requirement for schools to make judgements on pupils' performance at the end of key stage 2 or 3 in religious education. However, the framework recognises that knowledge of the characteristics of the level descriptions will help teachers to recognise learners' strengths, as well as areas for improvement.

In 2013, Estyn published a report on religious education in key stage 3 and key stage 4. The key messages in this survey led to a number of recommendations including that schools should raise attainment, especially of boys at KS4, challenge more able pupils and ensure that planning allows for good progress.

The reports also recommended that the Welsh Government should: "Collect, analyse and publish attainment data for religious education and religious studies in the same way as for non-core subjects and also work with local authorities

and SACREs to improve the opportunities for professional development and support learning networks for teachers of religious education.'

4

In February 2015, the Welsh Government published Professor Donaldson's findings in 'Successful Futures, an Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales' (Donaldson, 2015).

The review recommends that a single organising structure for the curriculum should apply for the entire age range, from 3 to 16-year-olds. It proposes that this should comprise six 'Areas of Learning and Experience' (AOLEs). Religious education sits within the 'Humanities' Area of Learning and Experience.

5 Main Findings of review

Standards

- In many schools surveyed, standards of religious education are good.
- In key stage 2, most pupils make good progress in developing their religious education skills and knowledge, although a minority of more able pupils do not make appropriate progress
- In key stage 3, most pupils make good progress in lessons and achieve standards in line with their age and ability.
- However, a minority of schools often repeat work covered at key stage 2, and as a result pupils do not always make sufficient progress
- In religious education lessons, most pupils engage well with a wide range of fundamental human and religious questions.
- Many pupils offer considered reasons for their opinions and listen to the views of others respectfully.
- Pupils use their knowledge of different religions to make appropriate comparisons between their own lives and those of others. Many pupils have a secure understanding of the beliefs and practices of different religions.
- They have a sound knowledge of Christianity and Islam in particular along with a basic knowledge of at least two other religions.
- Many pupils consolidate and extend their literacy and thinking and reasoning skills well in religious education lessons.
- Too few pupils, at key stage 3 in particular, apply their information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively within religious education lessons.
- The majority of key stage 3 pupils understand how religious education supports them to become informed global citizens.

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Provision

- Many schools plan well for religious education at key stage 2.
- In schools where curriculum planning is good they ensure that they cover the full requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.
- In the majority of secondary schools, planning at key stage 3 is good. The curriculum ensures that pupils progress appropriately
- A lack of transition work means that in a minority of schools, topics and skills taught in key stage 2 are repeated in key stage 3.
- Most teachers plan lessons that are stimulating and engage pupils well. However, in key stage 2 most teachers do not plan activities to challenge more able pupils or that allow them to think about complex religious ideas.
- In key stage 3, in a few schools, teaching does not engage pupils well enough. Additionally, where teaching is weaker, tasks are too difficult for less able pupils and do not stretch more able pupils.
- Most key stage 2 teachers have appropriate religious education subject knowledge. A minority of teachers are fearful that they might 'say the wrong thing' when teaching religions other than Christianity.
- Often, a combination of specialist and competent non-specialist teachers teach religious education lessons at key stage 3.
- Nearly all primary schools have strong links with Christian organisations that enrich pupils' learning experiences. However, only a few schools have developed useful links with organisations relating to other faiths.
- Only a minority have developed strong and purposeful relationships that enhance learning through visits or visitors contributing to lessons.
- In both key stages, most teachers provide pupils with suitable oral feedback in their work.
- Staff in only a very few primary schools liaise with other schools to moderate their judgements.

7

Leadership

- Leadership of religious education from headteachers and subject leaders is good overall.
- In many primary and nearly all secondary schools, subject leaders regularly monitor that teachers are covering the agreed syllabus.
- Leaders do not know pupils' standards well enough
- In most schools, teachers have very limited access to professional learning for religious education. Where there are regular meetings for secondary school subject leaders to share resources, teachers find that these help them to improve.
- Most headteachers are aware of the local SACRE but are unsure of its role
- There is very little transition work between secondary schools and their partner primary schools. As a result, pupils often repeat work.
- In most schools, leaders have a secure understanding of their role and responsibilities under the Prevent duty, relating to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. In a few schools, leaders do not fully understand these responsibilities.

- Many schools need advice on how to address sensitive issues and how to deal with parental concerns on visiting places of worship.
- In most schools, leaders have considered changes to the teaching of religious education in light of the new curriculum proposals.

Schools should:

R1 Ensure that more able **pupils achieve in line with their ability** in religious education

R2 Strengthen **monitoring and self-evaluation** arrangements in key stage 2 to focus on improving pupils' standards and skills in religious education

R3 Strengthen **transition** arrangements so that learning experiences in key stage 3 build on those in key stage 2 and avoid repetition of work

R4 Evaluate their curriculum for religious education to prepare for the development and implementation of the new **Humanities Area of Learning and Experience**

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

R5 **Work with SACREs** to provide:

- a. suitable **professional learning opportunities** for teachers of religious education
- b. **support for schools to evaluate their curriculum** and plan for religious education as an integral part of the development of the **humanities area of learning and experience**
- c. **advice for schools** on how to address **sensitive issues** with pupils and how to deal with parental concerns on **visiting places of worship**

R6 **Ensure that all leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015**

R7 Provide schools with **guidance on approved places of worship** to visit

The Welsh Government should:

R8 **Work with local authorities, regional consortia and SACREs** to ensure that there is **clarity over the place of religious education within the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience**