

Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales: Implementation

Our members welcome the opportunity to inform the scrutiny by the Children, Young People and Education Committee of the implementation of the recommendations outlined by 'A curriculum for Wales – a curriculum for life'.

1. The work of the Pioneer schools network in designing and developing the new curriculum.

Our members noted that:

- pioneer schools have very little to report or share with others despite attending many meetings in Cardiff and receiving considerable funding;
- progress is slow, there's a lack of direction and pioneers schools are increasingly frustrated because of this;
- they had received a positive and enthusiastic response from **one** pioneer school;
- the pioneer schools have not yet addressed the 'Areas of Learning and Experience', but we understand that these will be the focus of the next phase of development (January 2017);
- some schools are trialling cross curricular planning and delivery, but at this stage there seems to very little reference to ensuring progression in subject knowledge and skills or the 4 purposes of education;
- some pioneer schools wrongly believe that in order to be creative with a humanities approach at KS3, that the statutory requirements, *e.g. locally agreed syllabus for Religious Education*, do not have to be adhered to, which WASACRE thinks is a real concern; and that,
- a pioneer school promoted deliberate timetabling of non-specialist teaching within humanities to encourage a skills based approach within this curriculum area but this runs contrary to research findings that show that the most effective teachers are those who have deep knowledge of the subjects they teach.

2. The interface with effective professional learning for the education workforce and initial teacher education and training

Our members noted that:

- trainee teachers within the primary sector have very little Religious Education subject knowledge and this seriously limits their ability to develop a 'local' curriculum;
- Welsh Government intends to introduce new professional standards for teachers in Summer 2017;
- the new professional standards for teachers will be introduced to ITE in September 2019;
- they had no knowledge of any effective professional learning opportunities which had helped teachers to design, develop and implement the new curriculum, although many have been supported in delivering numeracy and literacy; and that,
- some exemplar literacy and numeracy activities developed by schools and literacy and numeracy 'advisors' did not contribute to an understanding of subject areas such as Religious Education, *e.g. building a scale model of a mosque is not religious education*.

3. The governance arrangements for implementation and the role of the Independent Advisory Board, Change Board and Strategic Stakeholder Group

Our members noted that:

- There was a concern that in the first meeting the stakeholder group were told they were not going to have any impact on the curriculum itself, but welcome the change in stance to allow stakeholders to work with pioneer schools on relevant areas of the curriculum;
- progress has been very slow;

- the agenda for the Stakeholders' meeting often arrives the day before the meeting and the details of the meetings are often very sketchy. This makes it difficult for the representative to liaise with other members in order to prepare for the meetings;
- stakeholder meetings have been an opportunity to receive information and offer feedback;
- a wide variety of topics/themes are discussed in the stakeholder meetings, the presentation on digital competence was informative and allowed those not directly involved in this area to see the impact across the education sector and further;
- the meetings have not yet taken advantage of the specific expertise of each stakeholder;
- there had been unnecessarily lengthy discussions in some meetings on issues such as the wording of the 'vision';
- they had received no further guidance on how the considerable expertise of WASACRE and NAPfRE is likely to be exploited in developing the new curriculum; and that,
- the stakeholders would receive a 'template' so that they could note which Areas of Learning and Experiences that they could support.

4. Other issues of concern and/or importance regarding the development of the new Curriculum for Wales

Our members noted that:

- some schools are reluctant to change anything until they have received further guidance;
- some schools are trying to be innovative but few are referring to the 'Qualified for Life' document;
- pupils in many schools are experiencing a 'narrower' curriculum since the introduction of the Numeracy and Literacy Framework, e.g. *comprehension exercises, retelling of Bible stories as opposed to undertaking an enquiry based on a fundamental or key question*;
- there is not a strong lead on curriculum design with subject specialist input, "*it's like the blind leading the blind*";
- their initial concerns regarding the place of RE in the new curriculum remained. *'How will rigour, depth and subject expertise be ensured – especially in KS3?'*
- neither WASACRE or NAPfRE had been formally invited to give an 'expert input' into the development of the 'areas of learning and experience';
- WASACRE/NAPfRE are trying to think *'what it might look like'* but are reluctant to share their thoughts with others in case they mislead teachers;
- *'the new specification for GCSE Religious Studies seems to take us further away from the principles set out in the Donaldson report rather than closer to it.'*
- SACREs have deferred their review of the locally agreed syllabuses. Currently all SACREs in Wales have adopted or adapted the 'National Exemplar Framework for Religious Education in Wales'. *Who will advise the SACREs on how a revised locally agreed syllabus should reflect the new curriculum for Wales?*
- ESTYN's case studies which refer to good practices regarding the development of the new Curriculum for Wales offer little specific guidance or details to help subject leaders;
- the subliminal messages regarding the new curriculum, e.g. *Twitter feeds*, seem to celebrate big 'events' organised by external organisations, or show children 'researching' on-line. Few of these messages convey the 'Curriculum Cymreig', e.g. *to what extent can Encyclopaedia Britannica help children learn about the nature of religion in Wales today?;* and that,
- schools may well use a publisher's interpretation of the new curriculum, limiting the possibility and vision originally expressed in successful futures.