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WILTSHIRE AGREED SYLLABUS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – UPDATED FOR ADOPTION IN 2011

Purpose of Report

1. To present the updated Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (RE) to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and to seek approval for the adoption of the 2011 Agreed Syllabus in Wiltshire.

Background

2. The local authority has a statutory duty under Schedule 31, Section 375 of the 1996 Education Act to adopt a locally Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (RE). The syllabus is required to be kept under review and appropriately updated every five years.
3. The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) is a permanent body established by the local authority under its statutory duties within the 1996 and 1998 Education Acts. The role of SACRE is to support the effective provision of RE for all pupils. SACRE must advise the LA on RE in accordance with an agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions as it may see fit. Its range of duties also includes the provision of advice and support on effective teaching, the monitoring of provision and quality of RE taught according to its agreed syllabus and the overall effectiveness of the syllabus.
4. At its meeting in autumn 2009, SACRE identified that the current agreed syllabus which was adopted in 2006, was due to be reviewed and updated in line with best practice. SACRE subsequently advised the LA of the need to review the Agreed Syllabus. The new syllabus is for adoption from 2011 until 2016.

5. To support this statutory duty the Local Authority is required to appoint an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to review and produce the agreed syllabus and to recommend an agreed syllabus for RE which meets legal requirements and is educationally sound. The ASC can specify what must be taught through the locally agreed syllabus but it may not require schools to allocate particular time to RE in the curriculum.
6. The ASC had its first meeting on 29 March 2010 and its membership was established from the Wiltshire SACRE, it is chaired by Councillor Mary Douglas. The ASC has been advised and guided by RE Today, the council's appointed RE Advisory Service. Two advisers, one primary and one secondary, both of whom have significant national experience, ensured that the review of the existing syllabus was undertaken against best national practice as well as the legal framework. They have used this experience and knowledge to develop the proposed syllabus supported by a senior primary adviser who has been leading on the Primary Curriculum and the Clerk to SACRE.
7. The ASC met at regular intervals throughout 2010 and 2011 (29 March 2010, 12 July 2010, 30 November 2010, 29 March 2011) and played an active role in reviewing the existing syllabus and shaping the new agreed syllabus attached in Appendix 1. Members of the ASC also shared and consulted on earlier drafts of the documents with their respective communities and this was a vital aspect of the development of the agreed syllabus.

Main Considerations for the Council

8. In developing the revised agreed syllabus, the ASC wanted to ensure that the syllabus supported teachers to empower pupils to think and question and to respect themselves and others. It also seeks to support teachers through a strong planning process, exemplified with models of delivery. The whole document is underpinned by clear aims for RE across the key stages, to attainment targets and assessment guidance. Through this approach it is intended that teachers feel empowered to plan, deliver high quality learning opportunities and be able to effectively assess pupil progress through the learning journey.
9. In April 2010 all primary schools were sent a questionnaire with the objective to gain feedback from teachers on how the new syllabus could be made more accessible and become a more effective tool to support the planning of excellent RE. The feedback received from teachers also supported the development of the agreed syllabus so that it would support delivery within the primary curriculum in a more flexible way. Thirty responses were received from primary schools. For secondary schools – 3 schools and 12 teachers' views on the current agreed syllabus were collated from a questionnaire sent in September 2009 and May 2010.

10. In addition to the questionnaires, every opportunity was taken to consult with teachers and headteachers on the development of the agreed syllabus, so they were able to play an active part in its development. On 23 May 2010 the primary conference, attended by fifty teachers and the secondary conference on the 10 June 2010, attended by 27 teachers were used as a further opportunity to consult with teachers on the proposed new syllabus. Further opportunities were created to share the latest work and receive feedback on:
- 09 November 2010 - The Working AS Review Group met for a full day and was attended by 8 teachers and 2 headteachers from both primary and secondary schools. After this review these teachers and headteachers liaised with the primary and secondary RE advisers via email with suggested amendments /comments and trialled units of work from the proposed agreed syllabus. This group significantly contributed to the development of the final syllabus
 - Three primary and three secondary school twilight meetings were held at local schools across the county to give teachers an opportunity to express their view on the plans for the new agreed syllabus. The secondary meetings were held on 11, 12 and 14 October 2010 and were attended by twenty teachers. The primary meetings were held on the 08, 09 and 25 November 2010 and were attended by 27 teachers/headteachers.
11. The agreed syllabus presented in Appendix 1 covers Key Stages 1, 2, 3, 4 and Post 16. The agreed syllabus sets out the Principal Aim in Wiltshire to 'engage pupils in enquiring into key questions arising from the study of religion and belief, so as to promote their personal and spiritual development'. The Principal Aim is then broken down further in order to capture the key areas of activity. The syllabus meets the Principal Aim through two Attainment Targets which run across all the key stages. They are Attainment Target 1 'learning about religion and belief' and Attainment Target 2, 'learning from religion and belief'.
12. In June 2011 three final workshops were held with teachers and headteachers in the primary and secondary phases with 106 and 25 teachers attending respectively. The feedback from these sessions was extremely positive and reinforced the shape of the agreed syllabus presented in Appendix 1 for adoption.

Environmental and climate change considerations

13. None known

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

14. The proposed agreed syllabus seeks to support children and young people to develop their knowledge and understanding of religion in the context of their local and national communities and world religions. Through the study of religion and belief in this context the learning experienced can make an important contribution to supporting community cohesion and the combating of religious prejudice and all forms of discrimination.

Risk Assessment

15. The council is required to review and adopt an agreed syllabus for Religious Education. The proposed agreed syllabus meets all legal requirements and reflects best practice and therefore its adoption will ensure the council meets all its duties and responsibilities.
16. The review of the existing syllabus and development the proposed syllabus was led as required by the Wiltshire Agreed Syllabus Conference alongside an extensive consultation with schools which has ensured that the proposed agreed syllabus has been effectively shaped by a wide range of professional colleagues and community representatives.

Financial Implications

17. None Known

Legal Implications

18. None known.

Conclusions

19. The revised and proposed agreed syllabus for Religious Education has been developed by the Agreed Syllabus Conference and is offered for adoption by Wiltshire Council. The agreed syllabus has been subject to wide consultation with schools and the community through the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

Proposal

20. That the revised Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education be adopted with immediate effect and is reviewed in 2016 in line with statutory requirements.

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Unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None

Appendices

- 1 Wiltshire Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2011.