

CYPE(5)-27-20 - Paper to note 10

Church in Wales response to CYPE supplementary questions.

In Church in Wales voluntary aided schools, the starting point for religious education would be the tenets of the Church in Wales. The starting point for objective, critical and pluralistic religious education would therefore be through a Christian lens. This would ensure that religious education is delivered in accordance with the Trust Deed requirements of the school. It should be noted that Trust Deeds themselves are not uniform and there may be variations in their specific requirements. However, several of our voluntary aided church school sites are held on trusts, which require that **all** religious education provided must not conflict with the tenets of the Church in Wales.

Religious education is not simply one of many subjects that form the curriculum, it is fundamental to the values and ethos of the whole school.

The Bill proposes that voluntary aided schools of a religious character will be required to develop and offer an additional curriculum that is in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus. Such a strict requirement means that if the locally agreed syllabus is incompatible with the Trust Deed of the school, the leaders and governors will potentially have to choose between being in breach of the legal requirements of the Trust Deed or not complying with the law related to Curriculum for Wales.

Currently the national Religion, Values and Ethics Framework has not been published for consultation, so it is impossible to know whether the additional syllabus, which voluntary aided schools may be required to follow, will be in breach of the Trust Deed. Even when the national framework is published, there is the potential for significant variation between the twenty two locally agreed syllabii and therefore the potential for significant variation in terms of what schools are expected to deliver.

This potential conflict and the uncertainty around it is exacerbated still further by the proposals to change the groups on Agreed Syllabus Conferences. Currently, the three committees of a conference must agree any new locally agreed syllabus for Religion, Values and Ethics. These three committees are made up of

- I. Religions and denominations representative of the area
- II. Teachers
- III. The Local Authority

The Bill proposes a fourth group (committee) comprising of those who hold philosophical convictions. This would significantly unbalance the decision-making ability of the ASC as, if is likely, the members of this committee comprise of members aligned to organisations who oppose the existence of schools of a religious character and therefore denominational religious education.

This uncertainty, particularly at local level, makes it difficult to state categorically whether RVE provided in accordance with the various Trust Deeds of the schools could also be “in accordance” with the locally agreed syllabus.

The issue here, is that Church in Wales voluntary aided schools, their governors, headteachers and practitioners are being set apart and are not being treated equitably with other schools. Not only do they have to provide an additional syllabus, but the Bill sets them further apart by stating that this additional syllabus should be “in accordance with” the locally agreed syllabus rather than “have regard to” as is the case for all other schools. In addition, much as paragraph 4(3) of Schedule 1 to the Bill requires additional provision, which accords with the agreed syllabus where the

denominational RVE does not accord with the agreed syllabus, paragraph 8(4) of Schedule 1 gives parents the absolute right to request that their child is taught the locally agreed syllabus. Parents do not have such a right in any schools without a religious character.

The potential burden on schools of a religious character in fulfilling the requirement of having to develop a supplementary syllabus was referenced in our original response to the CYPE consultation and is outlined below.

Professional learning: two syllabi will require two sets of professional learning, double the supply costs and double the time class teachers are taken from their regular classes.

In primary schools this would involve all staff due to the integrated nature of the new curriculum. In secondary schools this would require RVE teachers and those who teach within the Humanities AOLE (in a small secondary approximately 10 teachers in a large secondary school 20-25 teachers).

Curriculum development: time required for curriculum development is doubled as are the associated supply needs and financial costs. As above this will have an impact on teaching time with designated classes. There is a significant workload issue as staff will have to develop two syllabi and two sets of resources as well as two sets of assessment materials to meet this requirement. In addition, the agreed syllabus is locally determined with potentially 22 variants this means that VA schools would not be able to work together to mitigate some of the workload by developing a single response to the second syllabus.

Professional support: who will provide the support for staff? This is a significant issue for Diocesan RE advisors who do not have the capacity or the remit to advise on the development of a second curriculum. NAPFRE has raised the issue of the lack of capacity for advice and guidance from RVE specialists within the consortia to help deliver the agreed syllabus in schools which are not of a religious character. This problem will potentially be magnified if 234 church schools in Wales ask for support in delivering the additional RVE syllabus.

All of the above will have to take place irrespective of whether the parents of 1 child, many children or in fact no children ask for the agreed syllabus. There is an impact on pupils, staff and Governors who must ensure that two syllabi are developed, planned and reviewed regularly to deliver high quality learning and meet the requirements of Estyn and section 50 inspections.

Limited uptake of the agreed syllabus

Small numbers of requests for the agreed syllabus would have a significant impact on schools of a religious character. It is received wisdom that small classes are not financially viable, and it has been suggested that this may necessitate schools arranging for small numbers of pupils to receive agreed syllabus RVE in another local school in a partnership agreement. There are a number of potential problems with this solution:

- Disruption to the pupil's learning will occur as they will miss lesson time before and after their RVE lesson in another school due to travelling time.
- Timetables cannot be synchronised across schools e.g. a timetable cannot be written in school A of 1500 pupils to meet the needs of one student travelling from school B of 1000 children. It is not a practical model to develop a common timetable for thousands of students to meet the requirements of 1 student when there is pluralistic denominational RVE already available in their home school.
- The student travelling will have to settle into another school and class. This may well impact on wellbeing and transition arrangements will have to be made.

- Who will provide day to day support for this student with this element of their curriculum?
- How will assessment and reporting be managed? Two syllabi, two sets of assessments, two sets of assessment criteria.
- Who will be responsible for supporting a student who may have additional needs?
- There are workload issues regarding data transfer, communication, arranging transport.
- There are potential safeguarding issues around transporting students, particularly of primary school age, during the school day.
- There are financial implications in terms of the cost of transport, academic resources, payment to the host school and providing supervision whilst transporting the student during the school day.

All of these elements would present serious problems for secondary school students but would be impossible for primary school students of a young age. Also, there would be significant issues trying to develop this as a sustainable model in a rural setting where children may have to travel long distances between home and host school.

In-house solution

- Disruption to the pupil's learning will occur as they may miss a range of lessons before and after their class have an RVE lesson allocated on the timetable due to staff availability and/or timetable restrictions.
- Teaching a pupil in isolation will have a negative impact on their wellbeing and may lead them to be singled out by their peers.
- Timetables cannot be developed to meet the needs of 1 student. It is not a practical model to develop a common timetable for a whole year group of students to meet the requirements of 1. There may be a negative impact on the structure of the timetable for the rest of the school in order to meet this requirement.
- The student will not have the social interaction of working in a whole class setting and miss the benefits of working with their peers.
- Additional teaching capacity would have to be provided to cover the additional curriculum time. This potentially could mean that a member of staff is employed to deliver the second syllabus to a very small number of students over the course of a week. This will impose a financial burden on schools in a time of budget restrictions and it may be particularly difficult in secondary schools to recruit due to the spread of hours over the two -week timetable.
- Classroom accommodation may not be available to house an additional teaching group even if this group consists of one student. Allocated teaching spaces are in particularly short supply in primary schools and any spare accommodation is often allocated to support and intervention. To free up this space will make an impact on other students who are receiving specific interventions, often from outside agencies. Additionally, if a pupil is taught a subject discipline in a setting other than a classroom, the learning environment may not be stimulating or conducive to maximising the progress of the student.
- There are potential safeguarding issues to be considered if a member of staff is required to deliver one to one teaching. Would an additional member of staff be required? Risk assessments would have to be undertaken.

Larger scale requests to withdraw from denominational RVE.

- Accommodation: there would be a significant strain on available classrooms if multiple additional groups had to be provided. The need for additional classrooms is usually necessitated by an increase in pupil numbers and this is essentially capped by the PAN number of the school which is based on square footage available. There is no ability to plan as the numbers withdrawing could shift from year to year. Would funding be available centrally to meet the potential need for additional accommodation?
- Staffing: Very few if any schools carry additional staffing capacity. Additional classes require additional staffing for the school timetable to work effectively. There has been no financial planning reflected in the RIA to reflect this impact on budgets in VA schools. A working example of a teacher with a couple of years teaching experience so that they could manage curriculum development and assessment would cost £38,732 with oncosts. Only VA schools will have to face this potential burden. Will there be additional funding streams available?
- The legal requirement to accommodate large numbers of pupils opting for agreed RVE would place the school in breach of its Trust deed. Additional accommodation offsite would be required and the transport and staffing to deliver this alternate provision would push schools into deficit.
- Ethos: widescale alternative provision would undermine the ethos and potentially be divisive within the student and wider community.

General points

It may be difficult to recruit staff for posts which sit outside the structures of the school day and the denominational nature of the school.

There is potential for conflict with parents from those who withdraw their child from denominational RVE and do not feel that there is parity of provision.

Who will inspect the locally agreed syllabus?

There will be an impact on class teachers, middle leaders and Headteachers when managing the potential complexities. Indeed, if there are no requests for the agreed syllabus then the tension remains as practitioners will have to remain alert to the possibility of requests and challenge.

There may be longer term implications on the progress and opportunities for students who do not study denominational RE. What is going to happen in KS4 when full course RE becomes compulsory again? The early decision will have had an impact on the foundation of learning in this core subject and will impact on outcomes.