



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

### Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 18 April 2024

# The support and development of Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) in Swansea Schools

<b>Purpose:</b>	To brief/update the Scrutiny Panel on the support and development of RVE across Swansea schools
<b>Content:</b>	A briefing/update on the strategic plan to support and develop RVE within Swansea schools
<b>Councillors are being asked to:</b>	Consider the information provided and give views
<b>Lead Councillor:</b>	Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
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## 1. Introduction and Legislation

### 1.1 For all learners up to and including year 8:

- RVE is mandatory; there is no parental right to withdraw.
- RVE is a statutory requirement of the Curriculum for Wales and is mandatory for all learners from ages 3-16.
- Learners over the age of 16 can 'opt in' to RVE. If a learner chooses to opt in to RVE, then the school or college must provide RVE which is objective, critical and pluralistic.
- RVE must be delivered objectively, critically and pluralistically.
- RVE sits within the Humanities Areas of learning and experience (AoLE) with the five what matters statements which will contribute to learners realising the four purposes of the curriculum.
- RVE should be given parity with the other subjects within the Humanities area.
- In designing the RVE curriculum, practitioners must pay due regard to the Welsh Government RVE Guidance as well as the RVE locally agreed syllabus (2022 agreed syllabus).

- The RVE curriculum must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Wales are mainly Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Wales and must also reflect the fact that a range of non-religious philosophical convictions (within the meaning of section 375A(3)) are held in Wales (Curriculum and Assessment Wales 2021 Act).
- 1.2 Since September 2023, there has been a change to legislation. There is no right to withdraw from RVE in respect of years 8 and below as all schools and settings will have implemented the Curriculum for Wales for those learners.
- 1.3 Thereafter, the phased roll-out of the Curriculum for Wales will continue, and the right to withdraw will be removed for:
- Year 9 learners in September 2024
  - Year 10 learners in September 2025
  - Year 11 learners in September 2026
- 1.4 All learners from years 9-13:
- Parents/carers have the right to withdraw their child(ren) from Religious Education (RE). Schools should have a protocol to support with this process should it be needed.
  - RE must be delivered in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus for RE (2008 'legacy' agreed syllabus).
  - RE must be included in the curriculum for all registered learners excluding:
    - a. Learners in nursery provision
    - b. Learners aged 19 or over
    - c. Learners over 16 who are receiving part time education.
  - RE must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

## **2.0 The National Centre for RE, Bangor University: Research 2023-24**

- 2.1 In 2023, the National Centre for RE, Bangor University undertook research to explore how RVE was embedded within the Curriculum for Wales. Their research included both quantitative and qualitative research methods and included responses from 58 schools. The second phase of research will involve in depth interviews with colleagues from across Wales.

## **3.0 Swansea Standing advisory council for Religious Education (SACRE)/Standing advisory council for Religion, Values and Ethics (SACRVE)**

- 3.1 As RVE (and its predecessor RE) is a locally determined subject, it is the responsibility for each local authority to provide a SACRE/SACRVE (standing advisory committee for RVE/RE). The committee, in essence has the duty and responsibility to monitor the provision and quality of RE/RVE and collective

worship, across its schools and provide appropriate advice and support to aid its teaching.

#### **4.0 RVE Support for Swansea schools**

##### **4.1 Agreed Syllabus**

4.2 The 2022 Swansea RVE Agreed Syllabus was published, following extensive consultation with teachers, learners, SACRE members, faith groups and council officers in Swansea. The agreed syllabus is therefore a co constructed syllabus that meets legislative duties. Early evaluation of the syllabus has provided positive feedback. Examples include the following:

- *May I thank you for all your work in producing the Swansea Agreed Syllabus for Religion, Values and Ethics. This document was very much welcomed at a time when I was unsure of which direction to take our RVE planning. The syllabus effectively links the expectations from Curriculum for Wales with the Welsh Government RVE guidance; clearly identifying strong relationships between Humanities, the Four Purposes and What Matters' statements. One aspect of the guidance that I needed more support with was the inclusion of non-religious beliefs. The section on non-religious beliefs in the 'recommendations for knowledge, skills and experiences' section was very beneficial and reassuring.*
- *I believe that the Swansea Agreed Syllabus for Religion, Values and Ethics will support all schools to develop an inclusive RVE curriculum that will support the development of pupils' religious literacy. The example units provided will support schools with this construction in the early days and give teachers the confidence to further develop their RVE teaching and learning over time. The guidance notes on progression and assessment will support senior leaders to think about how they move learners through the progression steps. As a result, there should be a wealth of good practice to share in the future.*
- *An excellent example of collaborative working to support senior leaders and teachers with a critical change in education.*

#### **5.0 Resources**

5.1 Swansea SACRE secured grant funding of £12,000 in 2022-2023 to support with the development of RVE resources. Two national advisers for RE were commissioned to work on the resources with us. The resources, which include materials for both the primary and secondary phases, have been translated and are now freely available for schools to access bilingually.

5.2 We have secured grant funding of £12,500 (2024-2025) which will allow the development of further resources to support with early years and progression step 5 (age 14-16) RVE.

5.3 Feedback on the resources developed to date include the following examples:

- *The format is clear with the headings. Great that links to resources are provided i.e You Tube. Key ideas and vocab section is helpful. Lots of lovely ideas for teaching and learning activities.*
- *A really useful document which allows freedom in teaching whilst still providing valuable and enjoyable activities for the pupils. This has definitely given me more confidence in RVE teaching (Pentrechwyth primary school).*

## **6.0 Professional Learning**

6.1 School Leaders from the primary and secondary sector received professional learning in 2022 regarding the legislative changes. Legislative summaries were shared with school leaders at the beginning of this academic year. This has ensured that school leaders are made aware of their legislative duties and responsibilities and can work with their RVE/Humanities leads to ensure that their provision for RVE not only meets statutory requirements but also is designed placing the learner at the centre of curriculum design. To date, we have had no requests to support managing the removal of the right to withdraw from RVE.

6.2 Governors are invited to attend annual training to support them with their understanding around RVE. Twenty-four governors from across Swansea schools have received the training which seeks to enhance their understanding of legislation and how RVE fits within the curriculum for Wales. Moving forward, we have plans to provide a pre recorded webinar for schools to utilise with their own governing bodies at a time convenient to them.

6.3 All secondary RVE leads are invited to attend termly full-day network meetings. Nearly all schools have been represented at these meetings over the last year. These productive days provide RVE leads with local, regional and national updates for RVE, professional learning provided by a faith lead to support with the delivery of authentic RVE and the sharing of effective practice which will be led by a school on a rota basis.

6.4 In partnership with Partneriaeth, newly qualified and early career teachers are invited to attend annual training to support their work. Evaluation from the session in 2023 included the following:

- *The session helped to make the subject area more understandable and relatable. It emphasised the importance of RVE in the curriculum in a way that is useful to share within my school as it has often felt as though it is viewed as more of a secondary subject. Also, the range of ideas shared for planning activities/lessons.*

6.5 In 2022-23, four twilight sessions were offered to support schools with the following:

- (a) Legislation and RVE
- (b) The Agreed Syllabus
- (c) Curriculum development
- (d) Authentic and lived experience RVE

- 6.6 Feedback was positive and included the following:
- *I feel more confident discussing RVE with colleagues after listening to Jennifer's presentations, with very current information.*
  - *Providing excellent guidance on developing the new curriculum and what is needed to develop this in line with the Welsh government.*
- 6.7 In 2023-2024, ten twilight sessions were offered to support schools to develop their understanding of objective, critical and pluralistic RVE. These have been offered in partnership with the National Centre for RE, Bangor University and the Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK at Cardiff University. Feedback will be gained after the final session in June.
- 6.8 Partnering with Partneriaeth, twelve schools across the region have been funded to work collaboratively on projects to develop objective, critical and pluralistic RVE. This involved five Swansea schools. Funding teachers for three days has enabled high-quality collaboration and development of resources which will be shared across the region. Feedback on these sessions included the following:
- *This time has had an invaluable impact upon myself and my colleagues as professional leaders of RVE. Primarily, seeing the larger picture has improved strategic planning in line with reflection. Listening to Josh speak about how Ethics has been an underdeveloped area in the shift from RE to RVE has led me to research and include a greater number of philosophical discussions as part of our school curriculum. I have had time to work on learning episodes and implement these with monitoring to assess effectiveness.*
- 6.9 A large number of schools have received personal bespoke support to assist with curriculum development, resourcing and development of RVE across the whole school with further positive feedback received:
- *Just wanted to thank you for all you've done and are doing to support us to embrace and plan for the new RVE curriculum. I can't go into much detail, but I was able to confidently answer some difficult questions/line of enquiry, in our inspection this week. This certainly would not have been the case without all the fantastic training we've had so I wanted to thank you for this. I did sing your praises! (Brynymor primary school)*
- 6.10 Swansea SACRE/SACRVE members will join teachers from across Swansea on 11 April to participate in a day of professional learning. The high impact day will provide teachers with opportunities to creatively and strategically embed RVE within their curricula in a meaningful, purposeful and authentic way.
- 6.11 Since September 2023, 74% of Swansea schools have received support and professional learning.

## **7.0 Partnership working**

7.1 Over the last year, we have worked with Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to support RVE within our schools. Both the National RE Centre at Bangor and the UK Islamic School at Cardiff University have co-presented twilight professional learning for our teachers. We have partnered with University of Wales, Trinity St David's (UWTSD) to allow our teachers free access to their RE resources and artefacts. The RVE Adviser has developed professional relationships with national RE bodies, including National association of teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), Association of Religious Education Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants (AREIAC), National advisory panel for Religious Education (NAPfRE) and the RE Council for England and Wales.

## **8.0 National work**

8.1 RVE within Swansea has been positively recognised over the last year with many requests to share our work at a national level.

8.1.1 The RVE adviser has written several blogs around RVE curriculum development, and these have been published on the 'Reforming RE' blog space.

8.1.2 The RVE adviser has been commissioned to deliver/co-deliver two webinars for DARPL to support schools with antisemitism and working with traveller and gypsy pupils.

8.1.3 The RVE adviser has been involved in two panels discussing the RVE developments within Wales:

- (a) The Religion Media Centre – 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023
- (b) BBC Radio Wales; All Things Considered – 14<sup>th</sup> September 2023

8.1.4 The RVE adviser will be presenting at the AREIAC/AULRE joint national conference in June outlining our work in Swansea. The focus of the presentation will be *Finding the sweet spot – Supporting and empowering teachers to navigate their way through the subsidiarity afforded by the Curriculum for Wales with the knowledge, skills and experiences essential in supporting their learners to become ethical and informed citizens. The rationale, thinking and rigorous due diligence employed in co constructing our RVE Agreed Syllabi.*

8.1.5 The RVE adviser will be presenting a 'lunch and learn' session for Welsh Government in May sharing the work we have undertaken on antisemitism.

## 9.0 Monitoring the delivery and quality of (legacy) RE/ RS in Swansea schools

### 9.1 Examination entries (2023)

School	A level entries	GCSE (full) entries	GCSE (short) entries
Birchgrove		0	
Bishop Gore		182	
Bishop Vaughan	11	140	
Bishopston		31	
Cefn Hengoed		13	
Dylan Thomas		0	
Gowerton	9	40	
Maes Derw		0	
Morrison		12	
Olchfa		9	
Pentrehafod		203	5
Penyrheol		11	
Pontarddulais		12	
YG Bryn Tawe		5	
YG Gwyr	6	19	
All schools	26	677	5

9.1.2 All schools have a legislative duty to provide RE for all learners. For key stage 4 and 5 learners, this should be in accordance with the legacy Swansea RE Agreed Syllabus, or via an external qualification. The entry data above indicates that large numbers of learners in Swansea schools are not entered for an external qualification in Religious Studies.

### 9.2 Swansea entries for RS; 2014 – 2023 (ten-year trend)

Year	GCSE FC	GCSE SC	A2
2014	701	661	43
2015	715	820	53
2016	771	797	48
2017	870	577	55
2018	732	783	31
2019	666	534	32
2020	600	510	24
2021	695	148	16
2022	671	17	21
2023	677	5	26

The ten-year trend shows a significant decrease in entries for short course and A level RS. GCSE full course entries remain fairly static.

## **10.0 Estyn reports**

10.1 SACRE has examined the relevant sections of LA school inspection reports. During the academic year September 2022 – September 2023, sixteen primary schools in Swansea were inspected, and three secondary schools which included two engagement visits. The full report was shared with SACRE/ SACRVE members at the Autumn 2023 meeting. There were some positive comments regarding RVE in a number of schools, including:

- *The school provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual awareness and understanding of religion during classroom activities and collective worship. These include assemblies that focus on aspects of Christianity and other religions. There are close links with the community that provide valuable opportunities for pupils to engage with their community, such as participating in acts of remembrance and laying a wreath. The school works well to develop pupils' understanding of equality and diversity, and to support those in need, for example through raising money for a range of charities (Gwyrasydd primary school).*
- *Many pupils are developing well as ethical, informed citizens, who show empathy and compassion for others and recognise the importance of their rights, and the rights of others. Through a comprehensive curriculum offer, pupils explore different religions and beliefs from around the world. Visitors to the school, such as local volunteers, share their values and beliefs and this helps pupils to reflect helpfully on their own values, for example on the need to be kind and caring towards others (Casllwchwr primary school).*

## **11.0 Secondary RVE Audit**

11.1 Swansea SACRE undertook an audit of Key Stage 4 provision of RE in 2022. The audit indicated that whilst most schools offer RS as a GCSE option, the provision of statutory RE is erratic and inconsistent.

11.2 Undertaking an audit of provision at Key Stage 3 in 2024, 63% of Swansea secondary schools indicate that there is not equity between History, Geography and RVE. Where subjects are delivered as separate disciplines, the typical pattern of timetabled lessons is 3/3/2 (History/Geography/ RVE).

11.3 Furthermore, it is evident that within Humanities departments, RVE specialism is often the least represented. For example, in one 11-18 school with nine Humanities teachers, there is only one RVE/RE specialist.

## **12.0 School Improvement Reports**

12.1 In partnership with the School Improvement Team, we have a snapshot of Swansea school's implementation of RVE (primary schools) within their wider curriculum.



Number on roll	Dedicated lead?	Where is the school on its RVE journey?	SDP priority
19	Yes	Estyn just reflected that the curriculum and ethos allowed the pupils to reflect well on values.	Yes
357	Yes	Area in need of development	No
137	Yes	Aim to refine and <u>update provision</u> for RVE. An outline for teaching the Abrahamic religions has already been planned. Need to add to the recommendations for knowledge, skills and experiences and include non-religious worldviews and philosophical convictions. This will ensure that RVE is broad and balanced within school.	Yes
152	Yes	Teach RVE through:  Explicit teaching of world beliefs Exploring ideas through Big Questions Encouraging pupils to see links with real world events Reflection on our world and how we can make a difference Opportunities to study local and global contexts (Sustainable Development Goals) Developing critical thinking skills using our HABER model <u>Age appropriate</u> daily worship time and reflection Stories, school events and visitors	No
427	Yes	Early stages. Assigned different religions to be explored with different year groups	Yes
191	Yes	Further work needed	No
157	Yes	The religion values and ethics (RVE) curriculum has been thoroughly reviewed and recreated to include key elements – big questions, school values and similarities between religions in line with the agreed syllabus	Yes

145	Yes	RVE curriculum is in place, school leaders are aware of the need to ensure that this matches the agreed syllabus	No
301	Yes	School leaders are aware of the new agreed syllabus for religion, values and ethics (RVE) and <u>AoLE</u> leads have attended recent training. They are currently engaged in a cross-checking activity with the current curriculum to ensure appropriate coverage and progression; this requires further development.	Yes
242	Yes	There is a progressive curriculum in place to support the teaching of religion, values and ethics (RVE).	No
92	Yes	The school has an effective lead in place for religion, values and ethics (RVE); they have attended relevant training and are aware of agreed syllabus. The RVE lead is currently engaging in helpful PL and work with other schools to review and update the curriculum offer.	No
221	Yes	The school has a dedicated, recently trained lead for RVE who has implemented a clear approach to teaching in this area.	Yes
165	Yes	RVE is to be relaunched this year, a dedicated leader for this area of the curriculum engages with regular professional learning opportunities. Themes from the new agreed syllabus align strongly with inquiry approach	Yes
251	Yes	Further work is planned to support the effective implementation of RVE in line with the new agreed syllabus.	Yes

### **13.0 Suggested next steps**

- 13.1 Rigorous and robust system in place to monitor RVE in all schools in Swansea and ensure a consistently high level of provision that meets legislative duties.
- 13.2 Ensuring that Swansea SACRE is provided with the support it requires to deliver its statutory duties.
- 13.3 Undertaking research across the local authority to compare with the national findings.
- 13.4 Collaboration with the Humanities team within the regional consortium to ensure a consistency of approach for professional learning.
- 13.5 Partnering with ITE in Swansea to offer support for trainees in RVE.

### **14. Legal implications**

- 14.1 There are no legal implications within this report.

### **15. Finance Implications**

- 15.1 There are no financial implications within this report.

### **16. Equality and Engagement Implications**

- 16.1 The report is for information and not for decision.

**Background papers:** None

**Appendices:** None