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Faith in education



Faith in education

Audience	Faith communities; headteachers; senior management; teachers; governing bodies; colleges; training providers; local authorities; SACREs; church diocesan authorities; teachers' unions; national bodies in Wales with an interest in religious education; individuals with an interest in the role of faith in the education system.
Overview	This document provides an overview of the organisation and role of faith in the education system, including the role of schools of a religious character in the context of the wider schools system.
Action required	None.
Further information	Enquiries about this guidance should be directed to: Curriculum Division Department for Education and Skills Welsh Government Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ Tel: 029 2082 1750 e-mail: curriculumdivision@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Additional copies	Can be obtained by visiting the Welsh Government's website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills
Related documents	<i>Faith in the system</i> (Department for Children, Schools and Families, September 2007)

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Foreword by the Minister for Education and Skills

The Welsh Government believes strongly in celebrating the different and diverse cultures within Wales. Schools with a religious character are one aspect of the diversity within our communities, and the Welsh Government acknowledges the significant part faith has played in the development of the education system in Wales. Today, schools with a religious character continue to fulfil a valuable role in Welsh society.

The Welsh Government has produced this document jointly with representatives of providers of publicly funded schools with a religious character in Wales; these are the Church in Wales and the Catholic Education Service of England and Wales and I would like to thank both organisations for their commitment to the development of this document.

The aim of this document is to outline the nature of schools with a religious character in Wales at the present time, to delineate the ethos and character of these schools, to challenge preconceptions, and to emphasise and celebrate diversity.

In outlining the current structure of the sector, it is important to note that the nature of faith-based publicly funded education in Wales is predominantly of Christian denomination, and by necessity the descriptive information in this document has been drawn from a Christian perspective. However, this document has also been carefully designed to be a useful document for other denominations and faiths.

Faith in education portrays the dynamic, progressive nature of education with a religious character in Wales, and celebrates the unique character of faith schools in our culture.



Leighton Andrews
Minister for Education and Skills

Introduction

The Welsh Government and providers of schools with a religious character (commonly known as faith schools) set out in this document our shared understanding of the very positive contribution such schools make to the publicly funded system of education in Wales. This document reflects on, celebrates and communicates our shared enterprise in order to both sustain and develop further our mutual understanding and ways of working.

The Welsh Government acknowledges as reasonable the aspiration of parents and carers to educate their children in the context of a faith worldview. Our purpose here is to highlight the ways in which such schools are distinctive, but not exclusive, in how they approach education, promote community cohesion and help learners flourish and reach their potential. We hope to dispel some of the common myths and unhelpful presuppositions that commentators can sometimes express with regard to the place of such schools within the system. We aim, thereby, to promote respectful and intelligent dialogue and affirm our mutual understanding of the appreciable and constructive contribution schools with a religious character make to our common life as a nation.



Learners from Bishop of Llandaff Church in Wales High School at worship in Llandaff Cathedral.

While the document is primarily concerned with publicly funded schools which, in the present Welsh context, are all Christian, much of what is set out here is applicable to schools of other faiths, both within the existing independent sector and in any future maintained school established by a different religious tradition. Indeed, our shared aim is to foster greater partnership and cohesion among all the providers of education in Wales, wishing to acknowledge the contribution that all schools make – whether they are religious in character or not – to improving our society by educating the whole person and enabling learner well-being.

Each of the schools in the faith sector approach the shared vision, set out here, inspired by the life, words and actions of its faith-founder, expressing a genuine openness and desire to nurture the spiritual dimension of the lives of young people. As significant partners in education within Wales, we wish to convey our genuine commitment as integral and accountable partners in public life, consciously seeking to promote, through education, a more humane, just and inclusive society.

What is the historical basis for a faith dimension within education?

Faith organisations have an exceptionally long and pioneering tradition of providing education in Wales, dating back to medieval times but essentially consolidated through provisions made in the Victorian era. The church schools founded in the nineteenth century aimed to offer basic education to the poor at a time when the state made no such provision. The early providers were motivated by the firm Christian conviction that each child was made in God's image and that free access to education would help them realise their potential, flourish as human beings and thus escape poverty and degradation. As the state and faith communities are now partners in the provision of education, the role of the faith providers in education has evolved. The present purpose is not simply to provide the basic education needed for human dignity and a fair society, but to offer young people the explicit opportunity to explore a spiritual dimension to their lives while in education. Moreover, with a proven historical commitment towards inclusion, schools with a religious character are proactive in the provision they make for those with additional learning needs, helping them to achieve their full potential while in education. Both the Welsh Government and schools with a religious character believe that such historical goals remain valid today and make a significant case for offering parents/carers and children an additional choice when it comes to high-quality school provision.

Schools with a religious character now play an invaluable role as first-class providers within the system, providing an approach to education that helps to make an increasingly diverse Wales, a more tolerant nation characterised by justice and prosperity. As a family of schools, schools with a religious character share many common values and hold a mutual interest and respect for one another's ethos and spirituality. The schools are full partners with the Welsh Government in public life and together we wish to draw attention to our shared priorities, common purpose and overlapping values. We do this as the basis for greater mutual understanding and respect between us, while remaining true to the diversity of faith perspectives among the providers and respecting the dignity of all faith positions in Wales.

CASE STUDY

Meeting the needs of those with additional learning needs

In 2009, Cardiff local authority (LA) approached the Bishop of Llandaff Church in Wales High School with a proposal to open an extension to the school to provide education for learners with an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). The learners would include some who were unlikely to be able to be integrated into the mainstream school as well as others who might be able to share some of the regular classes. The school was chosen from Cardiff schools as a result of the success that it had developed with inclusion and especially with learners with special educational needs. Following staff and governor consultation, the LA made a bid to the Welsh Government for a capital grant and was successful in being granted over £4 million. The LA were able to add to this to allow a £5.2 million budget for the development. Temporary buildings for learners opened in September 2009 and two classes of six children are currently at the school. Each class has its own teacher and two classroom assistants.

The Marion Centre, as it is named, develops its own curriculum and tries to mirror the Key Stage 3 curriculum wherever possible. Integration of the learners is enabled through personalised learning so that some learners can join mainstream classes where it is appropriate to do so. The Marion Centre learners can also access some of the specialist facilities in the school such as music rooms and food technology rooms. All opportunities for integration are developed from coming to the dining hall to collect lunch to joining in whole school Eucharist and the annual Eisteddfod.

Significantly, the Marion Centre has been a focus for other learners in the school who wish to learn more about children with an autism spectrum condition. Lunchtime clubs and social events allow integration of all learners. Staff development has also enabled a growing awareness of learners with additional learning needs and this has been a clear focus for the whole school.

Inclusive education is integral to the mission at Bishop: a school that aims to include learners from all parts of society. This exciting development is a good example of the creative partnership between the Bishop of Llandaff High School, Cardiff LA and the Welsh Government.

What is the National Purpose for Schools in Wales?

The Welsh Government wholeheartedly supports parents'/carers' aspiration to educate their children within a faith context and expresses this support in a variety of ways, up to and including maintained denominational schools, where reasonable and appropriate to do so. Local authorities maintain a range of different types of school. While each type of school is different in its characteristics, their common purpose is expressed in the National Purpose for Schools in Wales¹, which envisages that all schools:

- enable all children and young people to develop their full potential by acquiring skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes, including personal, social and emotional skills, to enable them to become economically, socially and personally active citizens and lifelong learners
- promote a culture of social inclusion and respect for diversity, particularly through developing the well-being of learners and personalising their learning
- establish strong professional learning communities in schools where practitioners can develop and share their professional knowledge in learning and teaching
- offer children and young people a curriculum that engages and motivates them to learn and to achieve their potential
- provide a learning community for all those engaged in school life, with children and young people and their families at the centre, and including governors, teachers, other school staff and adults training to work in schools
- be a key player with other schools and partner service providers in planning and delivering integrated services for children and young people to improve their well-being
- provide or facilitate education so that schools contribute to meeting the needs of the community and engage the community as partners to ensure that all schools are community focussed.

¹ www.sefwales.co.uk/sef-p2-home/sef-p2-about-sef/sef-p2-about-sef-sef-and-schools/sef-p2-sef-national-purpose-for-schools/sef-p2-sef-national-purpose-for-schools-2.htm

What are the main school types and their associated religious characteristics?

In delivering this common purpose for all learners, local authorities maintain four different types of school each with their distinct duty of governance and approach to issues of ethos. Schools with a religious character sit comfortably within a typology that is characterised by the four types of provision described and set out below.

Community schools are maintained by the local authority, which is the admissions authority for that school. While these schools meet the legislative requirements for a daily act of worship and the delivery of statutory religious education (RE), they may not in themselves have a distinctive religious character. By contrast, **voluntary controlled schools**, although maintained by the local authority (which, again, is the school's admissions authority), nevertheless may well have a religious character, receive input from the relevant diocesan authority and even opt into a denominational syllabus for the delivery of statutory RE. Schools of the third category, **voluntary aided schools**, are once again maintained by the local authority but are their own admissions authority. They may have a religious character and are the employer of the staff and owner of the land and premises. Schools in this category have considerable diocesan input, with the school and/or faith community contributing to their capital requirements in the case, that is, of schools with a religious character. **Foundation schools** are also maintained by the local authority and are their own admissions authority, and may have a religious character, as well as acting as the employer of the staff and owning the school's land and premises.

School typology and religious characteristics

	Voluntary aided school with religious character	Voluntary controlled school	Foundation school (without foundation)	Foundation school (with foundation)	Community school – may not have a religious character
Staff employer	Governing body	Local authority	Governing body	Governing body	Local authority
Owner/holder of school's site and buildings	Charitable foundation	Charitable foundation	Governing body	Charitable foundation	Local authority
Owner/holder of playing fields	Local authority (usually)	Local authority (usually)	Governing body (usually)	Charitable foundation (usually)	Local authority
Admissions authority	Governing body	Local authority	Governing body	Governing body	Local authority
Religious education	Denominational body	Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education ('SACRE') (denominational if parents/carers request it)	SACRE	SACRE	SACRE

What statutory provision exists in relation to the faith dimension in education?

The system outlined on the previous page, consisting of voluntary schools supported by faith organisations and those schools without a religious character, is at the heart of the state school system in Wales. The Welsh Government continues to support the benefits to society that this system brings, both for parental choice and in the interests of raising standards through encouraging constructive diversity. The duality of the system offers learners the opportunity to be educated within or outside of a faith-based setting in accordance with the wishes of their parents/carers. This accords with the duty under Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR): 'to respect the right of parents to ensure education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions'. Accordingly, the Welsh Government welcomes the contribution schools with a religious character make to the school system – both as a result of their historical role and as present day partners in contributing to a more diverse school system with greater opportunities for parental choice and learner engagement.

Within the maintained system, the Welsh Government provides statutory support to education that recognises a religious dimension. This support is governed by way of statutory provision, regulations, guidance and the provision of funding and includes:

- continuing statutory provision for the existence of state-supported denominational schools, maintained by local authorities and funded by the Welsh Government through the Revenue Support Grant to local authorities
- support for denominational post-16 provision via direct funding from the Welsh Government
- continuing statutory provision for the right of voluntary aided schools to follow their own denominational RE curriculum, to give preference to members of the faith when appointing teachers, and to apply admissions requirements which prioritise applications from children of the faith of the school where such schools are oversubscribed
- comparable statutory provision in the case of other schools with a religious character to appoint a proportion of teachers adhering to the faith of the school to appropriate reserved positions
- provision for all schools with a religious character to appoint governors to the governing body expressly to safeguard that character

- a statutory requirement for an act of collective worship of a broadly Christian character in all state schools, whether a school has a religious character or not
- provision for statutory RE in the curriculum in all schools
- support for locally-determined agreed RE syllabuses through SACRE.



Children from around Wales take part in displays of traditional dancing at the Senedd, during the Year of Catholic Education celebration.

What is the distinctive ethos of schools with a religious character and how does it make a positive contribution to wider society?

As with all maintained schools, the providers of schools with a religious character in Wales share the common purpose outlined on the previous pages. They have wide-ranging commitments centred on the well-being and education of the young people in their care. Schools with a religious character fulfil this common purpose by intentionally predicating their approach to education on a vision of what it means to flourish as a human being, a vision made explicit by:

- cherishing the dignity of the human person within each individual – including both learners and staff
- promoting a strong sense of well-being and facilitating the welfare of all learners
- offering high standards of education in line with the National Purpose and encouraging young people to achieve their full potential
- striving to meet the personalised needs of all learners in the context of their individual faith journey and offering them opportunities to explore the spiritual dimension to life
- promoting community cohesion and social well-being by combating excessive individualism and encouraging young people to engage with others to discover and understand what they hold in common
- fostering a positive attitude to the diversity of faith and all other strands of equality that make up the common good
- working in a spirit of partnership with the Welsh Government, Estyn, local authorities and regional consortia.

Governors and staff of schools with a religious character are guided by these commitments in a way that enables them not only to meet the National Purpose and fulfil their legal requirements, but also to promote a positive attitude to diversity and operate as full and creative partners in public life. The distinctive ethos of schools in this sector enables learners to make a positive contribution to society precisely because they inspire learners to grapple successfully with questions of meaning and significance, ensuring young people develop into healthy and balanced individuals, mindful of their civic duties and capable of putting their faith at the disposal of society's well-being. This premise is an important component of education

within this sector: young people are encouraged to explore how their faith can support the common good and to listen to each other's beliefs in the cause of building a just and harmonious society. Schools with a religious character thus inculcate an ethos that offers an intentional approach to education, encouraging learners to draw on the value of faith as social capital to promote their own well-being alongside honouring the well-being of others.

CASE STUDY

Ethos Ambassadors

St Joseph's Catholic School and Sixth Form Centre in Port Talbot takes as its ethos statement: 'Becoming fully human in Christ'. Like other schools in the sector, the school aims to develop all aspects of humanity among learners, taking as its inspiration the words of Jesus found in St John's Gospel: 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full' John 10:10.

In order to safeguard and promote its ethos, St Joseph's elects two students from the sixth form to act as Ethos Ambassadors, in addition to the traditional roles of Head Boy and Head Girl. The Ambassadors work with the School Chaplain and play a full and active



Ethos Ambassadors dressing the altar ready for mass.

role in the spiritual and liturgical life of the school. The Ambassadors are trained to assist and support learners lower down the school, encouraging them to actively participate in worship, helping them to prepare prayers and readings appropriate for the liturgy.

The Ethos Ambassadors are also involved in the internal retreat programmes and reconciliation/restorative services and work alongside the staff and learners to encourage the participation and involvement of students. They are heavily involved in Christian-based charity work and help raise money for CAFOD, distributing Christmas hampers to the elderly and needy, sponsoring children in The Good Hope School in Uganda and assisting Father Giovanni Cefai in his missionary work in Peru, and learning from the process. Along with several other sixth form students, the Ethos Ambassadors attend the Welsh Annual Pilgrimage to Lourdes where they assist with the care for the sick.

The Ambassadors are currently looking to set up a 'liturgy group' in school with a view to further developing the spirituality of learners and offering opportunities for learner-initiated prayer. They are an important means of sustaining and promoting the ethos of the school.

How do staffing arrangements in the faith sector help ensure this religious ethos?

One of the ways in which schools with a religious character ensure that they sustain a clear religious ethos is through the recruitment of members of staff who fully support and contribute to the distinctiveness of the school. In all maintained schools – including those without a religious character – the governing body plays a key role in the governance and staffing structure of the school and in schools with a religious character, statutory provision exists to enable the governing bodies to safeguard and develop their faith-based ethos. In the case of voluntary aided schools with a religious character, the governing body has the statutory right to give preference to members of the faith when appointing all teachers. In voluntary controlled and foundation schools, the governing body may give preference to members of the faith when appointing up to one-fifth of teachers to ‘reserved posts’. These teachers are selected for their appropriateness to give RE in line with the expectations of the faith organisation.

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales summarised the importance of recruitment in their Memorandum on Appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools:

The preservation and development of the quality and distinctive nature of Catholic schools depends on the faith, practice and commitment of the teachers in the schools, working with their Governing Bodies.²

The posts of headteacher, deputy headteacher and head or coordinator of RE are to be filled with baptised and practising Catholics. Similarly, the National Society for the Promotion of Christian Education encourages schools to balance the need to secure a religious ethos with that of ensuring a diverse staff community when it states:

Schools may choose to employ practising Christians in some key posts. These usually include the Headteacher and, where appropriate, the Head of RE and Chaplain. Staff members generally come from a wide variety of social, cultural and religious backgrounds and this adds to the rich tapestry of the schools.³

² www.cesew.org.uk/standard.asp?id=267

³ www.churchofengland.org/education/national-society/staffing-governance.aspx

Careful staffing arrangements within schools in the sector enable them to create and develop a distinctive ethos with a faith-inspired, varied and hospitable culture of learning.

Those schools with a religious character currently working within the system in Wales are all from Christian faith organisations and approach issues of school leadership with a clear understanding of the nature of Christian authority and of the priority for leadership to serve its learners. They should take as their model the servant leadership of Christ, combining a desire to face difficult issues with courage and deep sensitivity to the needs and feelings of those most affected. In the future there may be maintained schools of other faith traditions and the Welsh Government would welcome and expect that they too would adopt a staffing structure and leadership approach that seeks to serve the best interest of learners.

What are the arrangements for admission?

All schools with a religious character are part of the learning community in their locality but, due to their special character, draw from a wider geographical area than a comparable school without a religious character. Indeed, those of a voluntary aided status will act as their own admissions authorities. This means that such schools are able to determine their own admissions policies, within the framework of the School Admissions Code. In supporting this, the Welsh Government has high expectations as to how the governing body will discharge this authority, ensuring due regard to learners in the wider area the school serves and the impact on other schools and education providers. Both the Welsh Government and faith providers are committed to fair admission arrangements which are easy for parents/carers to understand and contribute to fair access by all families, sometimes admitting learners not of the faith where circumstances allow and where the needs of the learner are best met from within a faith-based context. While mindful of the distinctive needs of its own sector, schools with a religious character act with sensitivity to the wider interest by collaborating with other providers and are committed to partnership working, as encouraged by Welsh Government initiatives.

CASE STUDY

Diversity in admission and culture

Admissions at Ysgol Gynradd Gatholig Ein Harglwyddes, Bangor help to create anything but a monochrome culture. This Catholic school has 120 children on the roll for whom 57 per cent English is an additional language. This school serves a diverse community such that the countries/languages represented in the school in 2011 were as follows: India – Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil; Philippines – Filipino, Tagalog; Sri Lanka – Sri Lankan; China – Cantonese, Mandarin; Iraq – Arabic; Iran – Arabic, Farsi; Kurdistan – Kurdish; Ghana – Ghanaian; Zimbabwe; Tanzania – Swahili; Rwanda – Rwandan; Zambia – Bemba; Malawi – Chichewa; South Korea – Korean; Poland – Polish; Portugal – Portuguese; France – French; Spain – Spanish; England – English; Ireland – Irish Gaelic; Wales – Welsh.

How does the sector ensure diversity when meeting the needs of learners?

There are 253 schools in Wales with a religious character representing 14 per cent of all maintained schools in Wales and educating a significant proportion of Wales' learners. In common with all other maintained schools, these schools are expected to provide an environment which offers good-quality pastoral care and ensures inclusion of all children, including those looked after, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with additional learning needs. This is important, as contemporary Wales presents a significant diversity of faith, language, culture and geography. There is a misconception that schools with a religious character serve a sectarian interest, are monochrome in their intake and outlook and bring together a socially narrow learner population. Evidence shows that schools in the sector draw learners both from their local neighbourhood and the wider community, often providing an environment of rich social diversity and one that can be less easy for schools serving a single focused community to achieve. In Catholic schools in Wales, for example, a third of all learners do not belong to the faith community and in many other schools with a religious character, a significant number of open places are offered to those of another faith (or indeed without particular religious affiliation). Growing collaboration across the faith consortia is also helping to develop constructive links between schools in different parts of Wales, with opportunities for partnership with learners in areas with a differing social or geographical make-up. There is scope to develop this further and we support the recommendations of the *Respect and resilience*⁴ document that schools should build active links between and across communities, and signal our willingness to look for opportunities to share good practice among schools and thereby enrich the learning experiences of learners. Professional Learning Communities also offer further opportunities for teachers within and beyond the faith sector, with many excellent partnerships in local school clusters, irrespective of whether they have a religious character or not.

What are the arrangements for inspection?

As discussed earlier, there exists a wide range of legislation and guidance governing the delivery of learning and in the management of relationships with their learners. This legislation applies equally to all maintained faith schools. Faith schools are subject to regular inspection by Estyn and in addition, the faith organisations undertake their own inspection of the religious life of their schools (known in

⁴ www.wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/110209respecten.pdf

schools as the Section 50 Inspection)⁵. This dual system of inspection has provided a very constructive opportunity for the faith community to work in partnership with Estyn, thereby avoiding narrow insularity and ensuring public accountability and compliance with statutory procedures. This strong partnership has led to the development of a protocol for Estyn and Section 50 inspectors alike, and a fruitful dialogue that encourages diocesan teams to support the improvement of standards within their schools. The recent Estyn agenda has placed a particular focus on considering issues of 'well-being' and schools with a religious character bring a particular perspective to this priority in a way that can develop and enhance a judgement. The aspiration to raise standards across Wales and to identify and share excellent practice, is a key concern of the Section 50 inspection and, alongside Estyn's agenda, helps to support schools in not only developing religious literacy but in delivering high-quality learning for all its learners.

How does the ethos of schools in the sector actively promote inclusion and community cohesion?

With learner diversity an important feature of the sector, schools with a religious character seek to create learning communities with a strong commitment to inclusion. Schools in the sector aim to demonstrate this by the way in which we welcome and teach learners with different needs and from different backgrounds. Guiding this vision is the belief that each child is fundamentally equal and is a unique gift of God. Respecting the dignity of all is driven by the concept of loving God through loving your neighbour, a belief lived out in school communities by welcoming and celebrating differences, and viewing them as positive contributions to life in the world. As such, schools in the sector are committed to enabling each person to reach his or her potential and be mindful of that entitlement in others. We believe that the quality of life within a community can be measured by its commitment to the care of the weakest and the vulnerable and by respect for their dignity. The ethos of schools in the sector holds that every individual has huge potential which faith inspired education seeks to harness, enabling each individual to flourish and make a unique contribution to the school and wider community.

⁵ The Education Act 2005 Section 50 states that in schools with a religious character, the governing body is responsible for ensuring that collective worship and denominational education is inspected.

Like all maintained schools, faith schools also promote inclusion through improving attendance and behaviour. Evidence shows that when learners are treated with respect and receive high-quality learning and teaching experiences, they are more likely to attend on a regular basis and less likely to face sanctions (and exclusions) for poor behaviour.

Alongside the commitment to inclusion stands a duty to promote community cohesion. Many of the schools are rich in ethnic diversity and prioritise the respectful teaching of other faiths alongside the exploration of our own. We are helped in this commitment by the work of the National Society⁶ and the Catholic Education Service⁷ of England and Wales who together, define community cohesion as embracing:

- a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities
- equality of opportunities and striving for excellence, which ensures all children and young people are able to access appropriate education and welfare support, helping them to achieve their full potential
- similar life opportunities available to all
- strong and positive relationships in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community.

This approach to cohesion is one that mirrors the understanding shared recently in the Welsh Government document *Respect and resilience*⁸. This document states that cohesion focuses on how people live alongside each other with mutual understanding and respect, where every person has the equal chance to participate and has equal access to services. Schools with a religious character bring to this concern the constructive contribution of their faith perspective, where cohesion is valued as a means of integration, differences are valued, and shared values are celebrated as a means of holding people together. As one learner quoted in the *Respect and resilience* document: "I like my school community because it's like a jigsaw puzzle. Without one piece it's never complete". This duty to promote cohesion builds on the existing good practice of schools in this sector and is one to which we wholeheartedly re-affirm our commitment.

⁶ www.churchofengland.org/education/national-society/staffing-governance/community-cohesion.aspx

⁷ www.bit.ly/communitycohesion

⁸ www.wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/110209respecten.pdf

CASE STUDY

Inclusion and cohesion

St Mary the Virgin Church in Wales Primary in Butetown is a school in the heart of Cardiff's historic Tiger Bay and reflects the community's traditional multiculturalism, with approximately 70 per cent of the learners coming from Muslim homes. The school ethos is one of Christian inclusiveness where sensitivity to the spiritual, emotional and religious needs of all members of the school community is viewed as fundamental. This cultural sensitivity enables St Mary's to create an ethos where barriers that can often divide the society are embraced and celebrated within the life of the school as a source of community celebration.

Learners bring with them a wide range of religious and cultural experiences, providing a focus for sharing values, beliefs and commitments. These principles are demonstrated on a day-to-day basis within the school timetable. In addition to daily collective worship, on a Wednesday, the Christian and non-Muslim learners attend a full Eucharist service at the Parish Church, while the Muslim learners take part in an assembly supported by Muslim members of staff and occasionally the Imam of the local mosque. Prayers are said at the end of each day and before lunch. On a Friday, when a whole school achievers assembly is held, all children say the school prayer and Muslim children lead an Islamic prayer.

Welsh language lessons are used in the classroom as a way of bringing children together. Many learners join the school without a wide vocabulary in English, and so the Welsh lessons are viewed as a fantastic opportunity for the children who are fluent in English to learn a subject together, from the same starting point as their classmates. The school takes every opportunity to allow children to celebrate their own particular cultural background and has created a prize-winning Islamic community garden, as well as regularly hosting storytellers and poets from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

What is the shape of the curriculum?

Like all maintained schools, faith-based providers are committed in line with legislation and guidance to ensuring 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum' offering personalised learning and equality of opportunity for all learners. Achieving a broad and balanced curriculum requires schools with a religious character to follow the same curriculum standards as all other maintained schools in Wales, but with an approach that also reflects the schools' values and beliefs. This includes the contribution that the school curriculum makes to learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, RE, collective worship, sex and relationship education and education about careers and the world of work.

The school curriculum for Wales expressly secures for all learners, irrespective of social background, age, disability, gender and gender reassignment, sexual orientation, race and religion or belief/non-belief, access to the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for life. The national curriculum applies to learners of compulsory school age in all maintained schools, regardless of the religious character of the school. For each national curriculum subject, programmes of study set out what learners should be taught. Attainment targets and level descriptions set out the expected standards of learners' performance.

While all aspects of the national curriculum are important in helping learners develop a range of skills, knowledge and understanding, literacy skills, particularly in Welsh and English, are especially important for schools with a religious character. Not only are such skills important in themselves but they take on an additional significance in the faith context as learners are helped to explore, understand and interpret religious texts in order that they can make balanced decisions and implement religious teachings in their lives. Learners are also encouraged to make use of a range of up-to-date sources to help them explore and discuss important issues and reach balanced judgements when challenging traditional and contemporary human, religious and ultimate questions that might impact on their own beliefs and values. Advances in science, for example, and a genuine appreciation of the critical scientific method, are taught responsibly. Science lessons are approached with a view to their contributing to the wider task of helping learners develop their understanding of meaning and significance in life by providing opportunities for critical exploration. Along with mathematics, schools in the sector recognise that science can help learners explore the complexity and order that can be found in the natural world and in doing so, provide them with an inspiration for awe and wonder.



Learners at Ysgol Gynradd Gatholig Ein Harglwyddes, Bangor learning about electricity.

CASE STUDY

Art and cultural exploration

Magor Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School and Nursery Unit serves the community of Magor and Undy as well as a number of rural Monmouthshire villages. Culturally, the school has hardly any children from an ethnic minority background or those who use English as an additional language. The school is therefore mindful of the need to raise the children's awareness of cultural differences in order to develop within them an understanding and respect for the influence of culture on the way people dress and appear.

Using art, the school has developed a project that aims to promote cultural literacy in its learners. The project builds on the fact that Christianity is a world religion but then goes on to explore how Christ is portrayed in various art forms from around the world. Through exploring a number of images the children engage with the fact that different cultures 'see' Jesus from within their own cultural frames of reference. The children display an amazing depth of knowledge and understanding of the project and often respond in a profound way by producing their own insightful and often beautiful artwork.

What is the provision for RE in all maintained schools?

All maintained schools – whether they have a religious character or not – are required to teach RE from Foundation Phase to age 19. While RE is part of the basic curriculum, it is not part of the national curriculum and is therefore not subject to statutorily prescribed attainment targets, programmes of study or assessment arrangements. Schools without a religious character, voluntary controlled and foundation faith schools, make use of the locally agreed RE syllabus, taking advice from the SACREs to help ensure that each RE syllabus reflects the religious make-up of the local area. In this regard, Wales enjoys a great deal of partnership and collaboration between the SACREs and the Welsh Government such that each agreed syllabus is now based on the *National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). The Framework provides a skills-based approach to programmes of study and level descriptions for each age range.

The Framework identifies three interrelated and equally important core skills for RE in providing opportunities for learners (from all faiths or none) to, firstly, engage with fundamental questions, secondly, explore religious beliefs, teachings and practices and, finally, to enable learners to express a personal response. The Framework stresses the importance that RE makes towards developing, in learners, respect for and sensitivity to the views of others through open, reflective, analytical debate and questioning. The Framework is itself an excellent example of the Welsh Government working collaboratively with local SACREs (and their faith representatives) in ensuring high-quality provision for RE in schools across the system.

What is the nature of RE in schools with a religious character?

For all children and young people in schools with a religious character, RE is a proper subject in its own right within the school's curriculum. RE is a rigorous academic discipline and must be taught as such, developed and resourced with the same commitment as any other subject. In schools with a religious character RE is regarded as being at the heart of the curriculum, bringing together and informing the whole curriculum and life of the school. It aims to deepen learners' understanding of their faith, not in a way that indoctrinates, but rather to promote knowledge and understanding

of the particular faith upon which it focuses. More widely, RE in the sector helps students explore their response of faith to the ultimate questions of human life, its origin and purpose. It is also concerned with teaching the skills required to engage in critical examination of and reflection upon a variety of religious beliefs and practices. When taught well, RE will also foster appropriate attitudes: for example, respect for the truth, respect for the views of others, awareness of the spiritual, of moral responsibility, of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life and especially of the challenges and rewards of living in a multicultural, multi-faith society and world.

Depending on the type of school, the nature of the trust deed and the preference of parents/carers, schools with a religious character will therefore view RE as a core subject and will either follow the locally agreed syllabus as mentioned or an appropriate denominational/religious syllabus. Every denominational/religious syllabus is distinctive in that it focuses on specific core religious beliefs, the way the religious teachings, as expressed through the Holy Book(s) and other religious writings convey the essentials of the faith and the main ethical traditions and practices that guide believers' lives. In addition to focusing on the religious tradition of the school, schools in the sector will also study a range of other religions/beliefs. It is recognised that an awareness of the tenets of other faiths not only includes all learners but it promotes understanding and respect and equips learners with the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to prepare them for life in the twenty-first century, as well as helping them become responsible 'global' citizens.

In all schools with a religious character learners will be required to undertake appropriate external qualifications in religious studies in order to embed the skills, knowledge and understanding of the religious tradition of the school. While this is likely to be the main focus of study, schools might also encourage learners to explore other religious traditions or undertake a more philosophical/ethically focused course. Where schools are involved with the Welsh Baccalaureate, schools welcome the opportunity to explore religious content/issues/values as an integral part of the course.

CASE STUDY

Religious extremism: the Getting on Together (GOT) project

The Bishop of Llandaff Church in Wales High School has been working with two other high schools in Cardiff (not of the sector) to pilot a project aimed at examining religious extremism, and particularly the perversion of the non-violent message of the Islamic faith. The project works with learners to help counter prejudice, discrimination, intolerance and radicalisation in both black and white young people. As a corollary, the project also aims to heighten tolerance and respect for all and to create a more cohesive community. The 2008 pilot was funded by the Welsh Government and developed by five University professors, the South Wales Police, the Church in Wales, the Muslim Council of Wales, the South Wales Jewry, the Catholic Archbishop of Wales and the Cardiff Hindu Community. GOT has received wide acclaim and among the expert evaluations of the project is that of Professor Vincent Biondo, Assistant Professor, California State University, who states:

The GOT Program is the pinnacle accomplishment of the successful interfaith efforts in Cardiff . . . That the Welsh Assembly and Church in Wales are working with the Muslim Council of Wales on the GOT Program demonstrates forward thinking in itself.

How are skills and issues of learning across the curriculum met and interpreted?

Some of the common requirements of the curriculum are embraced as opportunities to directly support learner cultural literacy and the place that faith has played in shaping the values of nationhood. In particular the Curriculum Cymreig will inevitably cover the spread of faith in Wales, Europe and the World and will explore how religious values and beliefs are expressed both locally and globally. In all schools with a religious character learners will be encouraged to foster an awareness of a range of cultures and religious traditions so as to gain understanding of their shared mutual values and beliefs.

CASE STUDY

Curriculum Cymreig

Penboyr Church in Wales Primary School in Carmarthenshire is proud of its clear and positive engagement with its local Welsh-speaking community. Penboyr's Christian character is founded on a strong relationship with the local church, and the school cherishes and promotes its language and culture as a Welsh-medium provision. This is reflected through the curriculum where Welsh is the language of the classroom. The school values the importance of Welsh as the first language of most local families. This is an important part of the school's vision to help its learners take the early steps of their learning in preparation for life, understanding the value of their cultural and linguistic heritage and setting this in the context of the challenges and opportunities of contemporary Wales. Penboyr School is therefore confident to describe itself as 'a family where we learn together', affirming a shared commitment to 'develop a sense of moral values and an awareness of the spiritual dimensions of life in a Christian environment, enabling each child to grow to participate fully in a society where both English and Welsh are used as a means of communication'.

All maintained schools in Wales are required to teach Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) across the curriculum. We believe that ESDGC has an important part to play in helping young people develop a full understanding of their roles as citizens in a modern, diverse society. In our schools, ESDGC is explored within a range of subject areas, but with a particular emphasis on the values and beliefs promoted by the faith tradition. For example, a Church in Wales or Catholic school believes that ESDGC will be enriched by focusing on the foundational concept of God's relationship with humanity – and each living creature – as Creator of the natural world. The school will ensure learners reflect on the responsibility that this relationship places on Christians as stewards.

CASE STUDY

Sponsoring The Good Hope School in Uganda

Awareness, service and, of course, gratitude are all themes in classrooms throughout schools in Wales. In any school, learners are encouraged to become involved in activities that allow them to reach out to the wider community and to those less fortunate than themselves. Recently, Pope Benedict XVI said: 'It is the desire of the Church to transform the world with the proclamation of the Gospel of love, and to bring the light of God into this world.' The Pope encouraged Catholics to 'reach out to the ends of the earth' through means of prayer for, and financial support to those disadvantaged. In answering this call, St Joseph's Catholic School and Sixth Form Centre in Port Talbot reached out to form a link with The Good Hope School in Uganda in 2007. They initially sponsored 17 children, paying for the children's school uniform, their education and two substantial meals a day for a year. Since then, through an active fundraising campaign, learners have been able to increase the number of individual student sponsorships and are now responsible for the education of all of the children in the scholarship class at the Good Hope School. Learners have also purchased sewing machines, musical instruments, books and art equipment for the school as well as several bicycles for use by the learners who have to travel a long distance every day to school. The letters received from the learners of Good Hope are heart-warming and express gratitude for the significant difference this sponsorship is making in their lives. Learners at St Joseph's are equally appreciative of the learning they have received from their ongoing engagement with Good Hope School and the enrichment it has brought to their understanding of issues of aid and development.

Where learners engage with work-based learning in our schools they focus on developing the whole person rather than predominantly on skills that prepare them for prospective careers. The emphasis is on vocation, with each learner encouraged to develop and use their talents with enterprise, and as a means to serve God and contribute meaningfully to society.

How is personal and social education (PSE) delivered?

In schools with a religious character PSE broadly follows the PSE framework but with the additional and discernable quality that emphasises the development of the whole person and the importance of faithfulness in relationships. A school with a religious character will stress the importance of developing mutual respect and tolerance together with an aspiration to inspire learners with a desire to help create and persevere a world of peace, justice and equality. PSE is embedded in every aspect of the curriculum and encompasses self-respect, self-esteem and confidence. It stresses that there is zero tolerance on all forms of bullying (including racist, sexist and homophobic bullying). A school with a religious character is likely to want to mirror the activities of the local/global faith community, encouraging learners to seek active and charitable involvement within society. Learners will also be encouraged to consider involvement in the school council to help them become responsible citizens, and many will undertake peer mentoring to support their fellow learners, helping them to deal with general pastoral issues and matters of faith.

In the delivery of the PSE programme, schools in the sector emphasise the important role that the family and faith community plays in conveying values and responsible attitudes towards relationships and especially the integrity of sexual relations. Where sex education is provided, it will reflect the sexual ethics of the faith community to which the school belongs and will uphold the values and beliefs of the faith community and the role of the family as the primary educator. This is helped by the responsibility vested in the governing body for the school's sex and relationships education policy and the important role played by foundation governors in its development.

How are learners encouraged to develop their spirituality?

In the interests of providing a broad and balanced curriculum for all learners, schools with a religious character also place significant emphasis on the spiritual development of learners. Through every aspect of school life, including the curriculum, learners are given opportunities to explain and explore their relationship with God and practice their faith through stillness, worship and reflection. As part of their spiritual development, learners are encouraged to develop self-esteem, respect for others and awe and responsibility for the natural world. They are also encouraged to grapple with challenging religious, human and ultimate questions.

CASE STUDY

Developing spirituality in nursery children

At Magor Church in Wales Primary, spirituality is approached relationally as a means of developing a child's relationship with God, others and self. Self-esteem is therefore viewed as an important aspect of spirituality; if a child knows that they are of ultimate worth to God then the child will be able to value themselves and show respect to others. Moreover, a child who knows that they are loved by God, will ultimately learn respect and care for the world that God has made. In light of this, in delivering spirituality, the use of the outside as a learning environment takes on special importance.

In the photographs the nursery children can be seen experiencing the power of the wind turning the windmill; they learn to appreciate that plants need water, light, warmth and soil to grow. Observing seeds germinating and growing, as well as watching the recently planted willow tunnel bursting into leaf, creates a tangible sense of awe and wonder among the children. In this way, children in a Church in Wales nursery setting learn about God's creation and the biblical story of Creation thereby comes alive for them. They develop a spiritual awareness that if the plants are not cared for, they will soon wither and die and thereby learn the importance of caring for God's creation. Spirituality becomes earthed in the urgent expression of care for the environment and in a call for the stewardship of all that God has given.



What is the role of collective worship?

Collective worship for all learners in school has been a statutory feature of state education since the 1944 Education Act (and maintained in the School Standards and Framework Act 1988). The Welsh Office Circular 10/94 describes collective worship in schools as offering:

. . . the opportunity for pupils to worship God, to consider the spiritual and moral issues and explore their own beliefs; to encourage participation and response, whether through active involvement in the presentation of worship or through listening to, watching and joining in the worship offered; and to develop community spirit, promote common ethos and shared values, and reinforce positive attitudes.



Collective worship at Ysgol Gynradd Gatholig Ein Harglwyddes, Bangor.

In schools without a religious character, acts of worship must be 'wholly or mainly of a broad Christian character' but in schools with a religious character, collective worship is offered in accordance with the practices of the school's particular religious designation. We believe that when embedded throughout the life of the school, collective worship helps promote its ethos: it sets the tone of each day, establishes the school as a community and builds up its distinctive religious character. As such, collective worship in schools with a religious character helps to

promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and as explicit community acts, overcomes excessive individualism. Worship celebrates the shared values that join staff and learners together. It offers a constructive opportunity to explore a faith worldview, critically grapple with questions of meaning and significance, practice stillness and explore the spiritual dimension of life in a way that contributes to the development of healthy, balanced and reflective personhood.

In partnership with the Welsh Government, schools with a religious character are mindful that a school's policy on collective worship must take account of the varied backgrounds of the learners (and staff) as well as of their ages and aptitudes. In this spirit, the schools respect the right of parents/carers to withdraw their children from

collective worship if they so wish, and acknowledge the change in the law that now allows sixth form learners, if they desire, to be able to withdraw from collective worship. Where this is the case, some schools in the sector may arrange alternative activities that pursue similar objectives and nurture students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

CASE STUDY

Leavers' worship at Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School, Rhyl

The photo below was taken at the Year 11 Celebration Mass and Presentation of Progress Files at Blessed Edward Jones Catholic School, Rhyl. The mass marked a moment of transition in the learners' lives and was a very special event. The students really rose to the occasion and were proficient in taking part in the mass, playing the music and singing solos. The Head Boy and Head Girl also gave a welcome presentation. The worship engendered a wonderful sense of community. Gifts were presented to all teaching staff as an expression of appreciation by the learners. The local church was packed out with students, school staff, parents, family and friends and proved to be a very special evening with prayers offered for the students preparing for their GCSE examinations.



What do the faith communities in Wales have to offer other schools and colleges not in the sector?

Firmly rooted in their local community, the faith communities in Wales value the daily contact they have with schools in their area and especially the welcome they receive from those schools that are not of a religious character. Faith organisations are in a position, and are willing, to offer practical input of a kind that can impact on the life, work and witness of schools with whom we are in creative partnership. Thus, the faith communities are keen to support schools in the provision of collective worship not only by facilitating them but also by providing resources and ideas or making connections with the broader faith community and thereby ensuring a broad and balanced programme for assemblies. Local faith communities also support the religious education syllabus, offering expertise, resources and field visits in order to enrich and develop the subject. Furthermore, given that faith communities are themselves founded on clearly articulated attitudes and values, they are often in a prime position to help schools to develop core values and set a clear ethos for a cohesive community, and are keen to do so.

As we look to the future, and work toward even greater partnership within the system, the faith providers are keen to explore more ways in which the resources and expertise it holds can be shared with all schools in Wales. One promising area for development lies in the area of pastoral care. Here the faith community has a particular expertise that has the potential to be used more widely in schools. Essential skills around counselling, chaplaincy and pastoral care could (and are being) supported by appropriate personnel within the faith community and can often prove to be very effective where the counsellor or pastoral carer is a person recognised and yet separate from the school community. More generally, the faith community is keen to support the whole vocation to teach. Research shows that many teachers express a strong sense of vocation when talking about their work, and also that a significant number of teachers are members of faith communities. Engagement within that community at local level can provide support and encouragement that expressly recognises the worth and value of the teaching profession. We will continue to work together to take forward these important opportunities, eager to demonstrate our commitment to all learners in Wales regardless of their religious affiliation.

CASE STUDY

Faith communities and local community schools

On the outskirts of Bridgend, Canon Edward Evans has developed a new focus for his ministry supporting the work of the local community schools in his parish. Nearby Laleston Primary School and Bryntirion Comprehensive School have valued the engagement and support of Canon Evans and strong relationships, built over time, have developed trust, friendship and support. Initially, the relationship with the schools was practical, with the local cleric involved with collective worship and available to offer practical help on religious matters. In return, the schools were able to offer a venue for local community events. As relationships strengthened, pastoral support began to be offered, with Canon Evans providing a pastoral presence in the school for learners and staff. From this, a spiritual dimension has emerged, with both schools able to express a broad and inclusive set of values that underpin their life, modelled on an open, inclusive relationship with their local church community.

Conclusion

In this document, the Welsh Government and the faith communities have set out our shared vision of the integral and positive part that schools with a religious character play in the publicly funded school system and in wider society. We offer our combined statement as a positive contribution to an informed debate as to how all schools in the maintained sector can continue to work with each other and help create a system of education founded on integrated, cohesive and sustainable communities. This document confirms our commitment both to build bridges towards greater mutual trust and understanding within and beyond the system and to re-affirm our pledge to nurture learners in their faith and foster within them a motivation towards the common good in the promotion of a just and inclusive society. We value the partnerships that exist between us and wish to use the resources offered by our distinctiveness as schools that contribute positively to the system, rather than a means of ensuring exclusivity. For we share the view that faith in education provides much positive social capital in supporting and enriching the system, contributing exciting and fruitful perspectives on the goals of public education.

Appendix: Wales – Diocesan boundaries

