

Consultation on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Evidence submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for Stage 1 scrutiny of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill.

About you

Adele Thomas

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1. The Bill's general principles

1.1 Do you support the principles of the [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#)?

Partly

1.2 Please outline your reasons for your answer to question 1.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1500 words)

There are positive aspects to the new Bill. For example, it leads to a broader, balanced, purpose-led curriculum. It also gives practitioners more freedom in creating a new curriculum. In a very positive move, it connects to community and the experiences of the learners.

However, there are some things that I am very concerned about. For example, the new Bill appears to fail to recognise the professionalism of staff in Catholic schools. It also doesn't consider the particular context of the Catholic community.

I fundamentally object to the change of name to Religion, Values and Ethics. In Catholic schools, values and ethics are instilled in the whole school and are across the school as part of the Catholic ethos. Religious Education is an academic subject that contributes to this as part of a wide curriculum. Additionally, the term values could be very widely interpreted, and is open to misinterpretation in schools.

Furthermore, Catholic schools shouldn't have to deliver a second syllabus. We already have in place a robust curriculum that allows for learning and dialogue about other faiths,

religions and philosophical convictions. Therefore, we already meet the legal requirements. What we teach and how we teach it is balanced, but it would appear that the government doesn't trust us to do this.

Providing a second syllabus will be a burden on schools in terms of workload and cost. Catholic schools are clearly being treated differently to other schools because of their nature; this is discriminatory practice. It is very worrying that a leading authority such as the Government would want to be seen to be actively discriminating against faith schools and the parents who have chosen a faith-based education for their children.

Additionally, the requirement to deliver a second RE syllabus may put faith schools in breach of their trust deeds. A change to the content of post-14 subjects by the Welsh Government may also force schools to be in breach of their trust deeds.

Finally, the removal of the right to withdraw is not a positive move here. I am against this because it takes away the right of the parents, and may also impact negatively on our relationships with parents as it cuts down the dialogue that has always existed.

1.3 Do you think there is a need for legislation to deliver what this Bill is trying to achieve?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

In key areas for Catholic schools, the law that already exists is balanced and fair, so there doesn't appear to be a need for change. For example, in the new Bill, there will be a burden on Catholic schools to provide two RE curricular. Under current legislation, this responsibility lies with the Local Authority when it is unreasonable for schools to provide this.

Additionally, the current legislation recognises the trust deeds of Catholic schools, but now there is a concern that we will be expected to deliver RSE and RE that doesn't comply with the tenets of the Church. For example, in RSE, the nature of Marriage and Families. Furthermore, any changes made to post-14 education in the future may require us to teach something that is contrary to our trust deeds.

2. The Bill's implementation

2.1 Do you have any comments about any potential barriers to implementing the Bill? If no, go to question 3.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

It would appear that there is a loss of trust in the professional colleagues at Catholic schools.

There also appears to be no understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on Headteachers and schools. The additional levels of work, the strain on educational staff, the lessened capacity to engage in professional learning, a completely different focus in schools currently with the emphasis on wellbeing and catch up, the fluctuating staff availability to government guidelines to self-isolate when waiting for a test, the list goes on. Personally, I have found the return to work very challenging this year due to concern about colleagues, vulnerable family members and friends, alongside the need to quickly learn new digital skills and provide a meaningful curriculum for pupils who cannot be in school for any length of time. This means creating resources for face to face teaching and digital learning, along with following all the safety measures in place to protect pupils and staff.

There is a very real workload issue with the new Bill. There is no real understanding of workload implication of the new curriculum evident, and there will be a further particular impact on faith schools as a second curriculum has to be prepared.

Finally, the right to withdraw may lead to many parental objections, as parents share their strength of feeling against these changes.

2.2 Do you think the Bill takes account of these potential barriers?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

The time frame hasn't been changed to allow for recent challenges, such as the impact on educational establishments of COVID-19. There is no additional time for implementation and this will add to the negative effect on the wellbeing of staff.

It is difficult to imagine how the Welsh Government has a clear picture of the situation, as all of the guidance hasn't yet been published and we have no idea how these will impact on schools. There is also no evidence that they have considered the impact of the additional work burden on Catholic schools.

The fatal flaw in this approach is that the Bill was discussed before the consultation period was finished. Therefore, ministers didn't have all of the information they needed to build a full picture of the potential barriers. This is disappointing to say the least, and makes a mockery of the consultation process.

3. Unintended consequences

3.1 Do you think there are there any unintended consequences arising from the Bill? If no, go to question 4.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

A clear unintended consequence of the Bill is that it is putting Catholic schools in breach of their legal duty to comply with trust deed. In post-14 education, the Welsh Government may require Catholic schools to engage in courses and studies which do not comply with the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales.

An additional burden on Catholic schools is to provide two parallel curricular with a potential financial impact to these schools. Not only will this have an impact on staffing and finance, it could lead to a legal challenge on its discriminatory nature.

There is a negative assumption here that RE in Catholic schools is not balanced and pluralistic in its content. This is absolutely not the case. It is clear to see from Estyn and Section 50 reports that there is RE of the highest quality happening in our Catholic schools that is academically rigorous and provides a balanced overview of society. In fact, at our school, an RE lesson on Humanism was noted in the Estyn report as an example of excellent practice. All of this hard work is being undermined by creating a very different and unfair impression.

4. Financial implications

4.1 Do you have any comments on the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#))? If no, go to question 5.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

The cost of developing the new curriculum, alongside the professional learning needed to make this successful will have a financial impact on schools that are already struggling.

A great deal of collaboration across schools is being encouraged, which is a positive thing. However, the question needs to be asked about the financial resources that need to be made available for this. Where will this financial support come from for schools?

In the longer term, the emphasis on experiential learning can be seen as a positive aspect of the new curriculum, but this will have significant budgetary implications. There will also be the additional financial burden of the preparation and delivery of two separate RE curricular.

5. Powers to make subordinate legislation

5.1 Do you have any comments on the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)). If no, go to question 6.1.

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

There are three key areas I wish to highlight here:

- The potential for the Welsh Gov to make changes to legislation in the future means that RVE could be removed as a mandatory element. This is hugely concerning, especially as RE is a key subject in addressing many of the issues within our society, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement, prejudice and discrimination, equality.
- For Catholic schools RE is a core subject, and removing it would impact on the heart of what it is to be a Catholic school.
- If RE was removed in the future, this would have huge consequences for all schools as it is important for all children in all schools to have a robust understanding of diversity and respect for others.

6. Other considerations

6.1 Do you have any other points you wish to raise about this Bill?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

As a professional working in a faith school, I do not feel as though the Welsh Government is listening to what faith schools are saying, nor do they want to engage in professional

dialogue about the future of our educational system. This is both frustrating and disappointing, and I think that this should be addressed as a matter of priority.

The change of name to RVE is a concern as it does not make clear what values are. It also fails to differentiate RE as an academic study and a core subject in faith schools. Taking away the right to removal will have an impact on our parents, who are the children's first educators. Perhaps this would result in a higher number of children being educated at home.

I am hugely disappointed at the perception of Catholic schools as unbalanced and exclusive. In fact, we pride ourselves on being inclusive and offering our pupils a pluralistic and interesting curriculum. However, it would seem the Welsh Government do not trust staff in faith schools to deliver RE in this way.

Catholic schools have an important place in the history of Welsh education. By making these changes, the Welsh Government will be taking away historic rights.

Making these changes to RVE and RSE makes it possible that we will be expected to teach in a way that doesn't reflect our community or traditions.

I would like to add that I am fully supportive of the CES and Diocesan responses to the consultation.

