

# 2015 REVIEW OF SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ETHICS IN NSW GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

23 MARCH 2016

## Acknowledgments

ARTD would like to thank the many members of the New South Wales (NSW) community; the Department of Education; NSW schools (principals, assistant/ deputy principals and school Special Religious Education coordinators); the religious providers, including their Special Religious Education coordinators and volunteer and employed Special Religious Education teachers; Primary Ethics, including their Special Education in Ethics coordinators and volunteer teachers; and other stakeholders who contributed to the Review. We would like to acknowledge and thank the publishers who made available their Special Religious Education curriculum materials for the Review, and Primary Ethics for providing its curriculum materials. All contributions were read and considered. We thank all concerned for their time and insights and trust that their views are adequately represented in this report.

### **ARTD Consultancy team**

Wendy Hodge, Chris Milne, Marita Merlene, Yvana Jones (associate), Alexandra Ellinson, Kerry Hart, Ofir Thaler and Jasper Odgers



**ARTD Pty Ltd**  
**ABN 75 003 701**  
**764**  
**Tel 02 9373 9900**  
**Fax 02 9373 9998**

**Level 4, 352 Kent St**  
**Sydney**  
**PO Box 1167**  
**Queen Victoria**  
**Building**  
**NSW 1230 Australia**

# Contents

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Tables and figures .....</b>   | <b>iv</b>   |
| Tables .....  | iv          |
| Figures.....  | vii         |
| <b>Glossary .....</b>   | <b>viii</b> |
| <b>Abbreviations and acronyms.....</b>  | <b>xi</b>   |
| <b>Executive summary.....</b>   | <b>xii</b>  |
| Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics.....  | xii         |
| The independent Review .....  | xii         |
| Review methodology .....  | xiii        |
| Main findings and recommendations.....  | xiv         |
| <i>Part A: Special Religious Education .....</i>  | <i>xiv</i>  |
| ToR 1: The nature and extent of Special Religious Education .....   | xv          |
| ToR 2: Department of Education implementation procedures for SRE .....  | xvi         |
| ToR 3: Development of complaints procedures and protocols .....   | xxi         |
| ToR 4: SRE providers' training structures.....  | xxiii       |
| ToR 5: Registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees.....   | xxiii       |
| ToR 6: New modes and patterns of delivery using technology .....  | xxv         |
| ToR 7: Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SRE<br>across all Years K to 10—and teaching and learning in SEE in Years K to 6<br>in a variety of demographics.....   | xxvi        |
| ToR 8: The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice<br>or opting out .....  | xxviii      |
| ToR 9: Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend<br>SRE or SEE .....   | xxviii      |
| <i>Part B: Special Education in Ethics.....</i>   | <i>xxix</i> |
| ToR 1: The nature and extent of Special Education in Ethics .....   | xxix        |
| ToR 2: Department of Education implementation procedures for SEE.....   | xxx         |
| ToR 3: Development of complaints procedures and protocols .....   | xxxii       |
| ToR 4: SEE provider training structures .....   | xxxiv       |
| ToR 5: Registration of SRE and SEE Boards, Associations and Committees.....   | xxxv        |
| ToR 6: New modes of patterns of delivery using technology.....  | xxxv        |
| ToR 7: Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in—<br>SRE across all Years K to 10 and teaching and learning in SEE in Years K to 6<br>in a variety of demographics ..... | xxxv        |
| ToR 8: The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice<br>and opting out.....  | xxxvii      |
| ToR 9: Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend<br>SRE or SEE .....   | xxxvii      |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>1. Introduction.....</b>   | <b>1</b>   |
| 1.1 Background and context.....   | 1          |
| 1.2 Approach to the Review.....   | 3          |
| 1.3 Report structure.....   | 11         |
| <b>A: Review of Special Religious Education .....</b>   | <b>13</b>  |
| <b>2. The nature and extent of Special Religious Education .....</b>  | <b>14</b>  |
| 2.1 Responsibilities for provision of Special Religious Education and what is intended or required .....                        | 14         |
| 2.2 Providers.....  | 16         |
| 2.3 School participation in SRE .....   | 24         |
| 2.4 Student participation in SRE .....  | 28         |
| 2.5 Conclusions .....   | 32         |
| <b>3. Approval, authorisation and registration.....</b>   | <b>34</b>  |
| 3.1 Religious education implementation procedures and guidelines.....   | 34         |
| 3.2 Approval of SRE providers by the Department of Education.....   | 40         |
| 3.3 Authorisation of volunteer teachers .....   | 42         |
| 3.4 Authorisation of SRE curriculum .....   | 46         |
| 3.5 Registration of Boards, Associations and Committees.....  | 52         |
| <b>4. Implementation processes: enrolment practices and complaints.....</b>   | <b>57</b>  |
| 4.1 Parent/ Caregiver choice through the enrolment process and opting out.....  | 57         |
| 4.2 The need for annual confirmation by parents/ caregivers on SRE choice .....   | 66         |
| 4.3 Complaints procedures and protocols .....   | 68         |
| 4.4 Perceived benefits and main challenges of providing SRE .....   | 76         |
| <b>5. Curriculum review .....</b>   | <b>81</b>  |
| 5.1 SRE curriculum outlines.....  | 81         |
| 5.2 SRE teachers' manuals.....  | 85         |
| 5.3 SRE student activity books and resources.....   | 88         |
| 5.4 Case examples from the curriculum assessment.....   | 91         |
| <b>6. Pedagogy/ teaching and teacher training structures.....</b>   | <b>96</b>  |
| 6.1 SRE providers' training structures.....   | 96         |
| 6.2 Pedagogy and appropriateness of teaching and learning across in SRE across Years K to 10 in a variety of demographics ..... | 106        |
| 6.3 New modes and patterns of delivery using technology.....  | 115        |
| <b>7. Alternative activities .....</b>  | <b>120</b> |
| 7.1 What is required or intended .....  | 120        |
| 7.2 What occurs in practice .....   | 120        |
| <b>B: Review of Special Education in Ethics .....</b>   | <b>131</b> |
| Introduction .....  | 131        |
| <b>8. The nature and extent of SEE.....</b>   | <b>132</b> |

|            |   |            |
|------------|---|------------|
| 8.1        | The nature of ethics classes .....                                    | 133        |
| 8.2        | Shared responsibilities, governance and management .....              | 133        |
| 8.3        | Patterns of organisation .....  | 134        |
| 8.4        | School participation .....  | 135        |
| 8.5        | Number of SEE teachers and Ethics coordinators .....                  | 136        |
| 8.6        | Student participation in SEE.....                                     | 137        |
| 8.7        | Conclusions .....   | 137        |
| <b>9.</b>  | <b>SEE approval and authorisation.....</b>                            | <b>139</b> |
| 9.1        | SEE implementation procedures .....                                   | 140        |
| 9.2        | Approval of SEE providers .....                                       | 143        |
| 9.3        | Authorisation of teachers.....  | 145        |
| 9.4        | Authorisation of the SEE curriculum .....                             | 149        |
| <b>10.</b> | <b>SEE implementation processes: complaints and challenges.....</b>   | <b>153</b> |
| 10.1       | Development of complaints procedures and protocols .....              | 153        |
| 10.2       | Perceived benefits of SEE.....  | 160        |
| 10.3       | Main challenges for delivering SEE classes .....                      | 160        |
| 10.4       | Conclusions .....   | 164        |
| <b>11.</b> | <b>SEE curriculum review.....</b>                                     | <b>166</b> |
| 11.1       | SEE curriculum outlines .....   | 166        |
| 11.2       | SEE teachers' manuals.....  | 168        |
| 11.3       | Conclusions .....   | 171        |
| <b>12.</b> | <b>Pedagogy/ teaching and teacher training structures.....</b>        | <b>172</b> |
| 12.1       | Primary Ethics training structure .....                               | 172        |
| 12.2       | Pedagogy and appropriateness of teaching and learning.....            | 179        |
| 12.3       | New modes and patterns of delivery .....                              | 184        |
| <b>13.</b> | <b>Part C: Recommendations .....</b>                                  | <b>186</b> |
| 13.1       | SRE Recommendations by Terms of Reference .....                       | 186        |
| 13.2       | SEE Recommendations by Terms of Reference.....                        | 190        |
|            | <b>Appendix 1: Survey of Principals: demographic comparison .....</b> | <b>194</b> |
|            | <b>Appendix 2: Source of curriculum documents .....</b>               | <b>196</b> |
|            | <b>Attachment: Survey instruments .....</b>                           | <b>199</b> |

## Tables and figures

### Tables

|           |   |    |
|-----------|---|----|
| Table 1.  | Consultations with schools and providers.....   | 7  |
| Table 2.  | Consultations with the community, peak groups and other interested parties.....                             | 8  |
| Table 3.  | Report structure: Terms of Reference by report chapter and section.....                                     | 12 |
| Table 4.  | Main areas of responsibility .....  | 14 |
| Table 5.  | Main faith groups providing SRE in 2015 .....   | 17 |
| Table 6.  | Main faith groups' participation in schools in 2015, by location and type of schools .....                  | 18 |
| Table 7.  | Proportion of providers offering combined Christian SRE.....  | 19 |
| Table 8.  | Number of SRE teachers by main faith groups .....   | 22 |
| Table 9.  | Coordinator responsibilities held by survey respondents .....   | 24 |
| Table 10. | Proportion of responses to Survey of Principals by type of school.....                                      | 25 |
| Table 11. | Proportion of schools with SRE in 2015, based on Survey of Principals.....                                  | 25 |
| Table 12. | Proportion of primary schools holding SRE, by size.....   | 26 |
| Table 13. | Student groupings for SRE delivery, by type of school .....   | 27 |
| Table 14. | Frequency of SRE delivery in schools by type of school .....  | 27 |
| Table 15. | Indicative SRE student numbers from providers, 2015.....  | 31 |
| Table 16. | Trends in SRE attendance by main faith groups .....   | 32 |
| Table 17. | Guidelines for SRE providers produced by provider organisations.....  | 35 |
| Table 18. | Whether SRE teacher is formally authorised to teach SRE.....  | 45 |
| Table 19. | Where providers source authorised curriculum materials.....   | 50 |
| Table 20. | Chronology of school enrolment form release and associated actions.....                                     | 58 |
| Table 21. | Extent provider SRE coordinators and principals are concerned about enrolment and opting out processes..... | 61 |

|           |   |     |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Table 22. | Source of complaints about SRE to principals in the past two years.....                               | 70  |
| Table 23. | Main reasons for complaints received by principals about SRE.....                                     | 71  |
| Table 24. | The nature of complaints by parents in relation to SRE.....   | 73  |
| Table 25. | Clarity of complaint processes: views of provider SRE coordinators.....                               | 74  |
| Table 26. | Provider SRE coordinators' satisfaction with complaints.....  | 74  |
| Table 27. | Main challenges schools and providers face in facilitating SRE classes.....                           | 79  |
| Table 28. | How often SRE coordinators and principals are concerned about specific areas of SRE delivery.....     | 80  |
| Table 29. | The main challenges for delivering SRE .....  | 80  |
| Table 30. | SRE curriculum outlines evidence matrix .....   | 82  |
| Table 31. | Findings for SRE curriculum outlines .....  | 83  |
| Table 32. | SRE teachers' manuals evidence matrix.....  | 85  |
| Table 33. | Findings for SRE teachers' manuals .....  | 86  |
| Table 34. | SRE student activity books evidence matrix .....  | 89  |
| Table 35. | Findings for SRE student activity books .....   | 90  |
| Table 36. | Providers' training policies .....  | 97  |
| Table 37. | Proportion of providers that offer basic training topics.....   | 99  |
| Table 38. | Hours of training .....   | 100 |
| Table 39. | Internal and external training provision .....  | 100 |
| Table 40. | SRE teacher's reports about ongoing training and support.....   | 104 |
| Table 41. | SRE providers' reports about the ongoing support provided to SRE teachers....                         | 104 |
| Table 42. | Parents' satisfaction with students' learning experiences in SRE.....                                 | 107 |
| Table 43. | SRE teachers' views on training and support provided .....  | 112 |
| Table 44. | SRE teachers' views on student engagement in SRE.....   | 112 |
| Table 45. | SRE teachers' ratings of their confidence in teaching and learning skills.....                        | 113 |
| Table 46. | Level of confidence about SRE teachers' ability to use technology tools to help deliver lessons ..... | 119 |

|           |  |     |
|-----------|--|-----|
| Table 47. | Level of parent satisfaction in supervision for alternative activities .....   | 123 |
| Table 48. | Supervision of alternative activities.....   | 123 |
| Table 49. | Adult to student ratio for students doing alternative activities .....   | 124 |
| Table 50. | Alternative activities by type of school.....  | 125 |
| Table 51. | Alternative activities reported by parents.....  | 127 |
| Table 52. | Level of parent satisfaction with types of activities.....   | 127 |
| Table 53. | Principals' satisfaction with arrangements for alternative activities .....  | 128 |
| Table 54. | Activities that principals would like to offer during this time for students not attending SRE or SEE .....  | 129 |
| Table 55. | Main areas of responsibility for SEE.....  | 133 |
| Table 56. | Extent coordinators and principals report a good working relationship.....   | 135 |
| Table 57. | Extent that a lack of SEE teachers is a challenge for Ethics coordinators.....   | 136 |
| Table 58. | Primary Ethics' roles and responsibilities .....   | 141 |
| Table 59. | Complaints in relation to SEE - received by schools, and made by parents .....   | 154 |
| Table 60. | Source of complaints to schools that offered SEE in 2015.....  | 156 |
| Table 61. | Main reasons for complaints to schools that offered SEE in 2015.....   | 156 |
| Table 62. | Most common complaints by parents in relation to SEE in 2015.....  | 157 |
| Table 63. | Parent satisfaction with complaints in relation to SEE.....  | 159 |
| Table 64. | How often Ethics coordinators and primary principals are concerned about administration/ timetabling, behaviour issues and large class sizes.....                  | 163 |
| Table 65. | How often Ethics coordinators and primary principals are concerned about child safety, enrolment processes, supply of SEE teachers and information about SEE ..... | 164 |
| Table 66. | The main challenges for delivering SEE.....  | 164 |
| Table 67. | SEE curriculum outline evidence matrix .....   | 166 |
| Table 68. | SEE curriculum outline findings .....  | 167 |
| Table 69. | SEE teachers' manuals evidence matrix .....  | 168 |
| Table 70. | Findings for SEE teachers' manuals.....  | 170 |



|           |   |     |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Table 71. | SEE training subjects and number of hours training .....  | 173 |
| Table 72. | Training attended by SEE teachers.....  | 175 |
| Table 73. | SEE teacher participation in ongoing training and support .....   | 176 |
| Table 74. | SEE teachers' reports about ongoing training and support .....  | 177 |
| Table 75. | Parents' satisfaction with the learning experience their child gets in SEE.....   | 181 |
| Table 76. | SEE teachers' views on students' engagement in SEE.....   | 183 |
| Table 77. | SEE teachers' ratings of their confidence in teaching and learning skills.....  | 183 |
| Table 78. | Level of confidence in SEE teachers' ability to use technology tools to help deliver lessons .....  | 185 |
| Table 79. | Demographics for NSW Government schools and Survey of Principals responses .....  | 194 |
| Table 80. | Demographic comparison of NSW Government primary and secondary schools, Survey of Principals responses and sample of survey responses that provided figures on SRE student participation..... | 195 |

## Figures

|            |  |     |
|------------|--|-----|
| Figure 1.  | Christian: NSW and Sydney area.....                              | 20  |
| Figure 2.  | Baha'i: NSW and Sydney area .....                                | 20  |
| Figure 3.  | Buddhist: NSW and Sydney area.....                               | 20  |
| Figure 4.  | Hindu: NSW and Sydney area .....                                 | 21  |
| Figure 5.  | Islam: NSW and Sydney area .....                                 | 21  |
| Figure 6.  | Jewish: NSW and Sydney area.....                                 | 21  |
| Figure 7.  | Sikh: NSW and Sydney area .....                                  | 22  |
| Figure 8.  | Primary schools: proportion of students enrolled in SRE .....    | 29  |
| Figure 9.  | Secondary schools: proportion of students enrolled in SRE .....  | 30  |
| Figure 10. | Enrolment form released on 20 June 2014 .....                    | 59  |
| Figure 11. | Enrolment form released on 20 October 2015 .....                 | 60  |
| Figure 12. | SRE training organisations, and which providers they train ..... | 102 |
| Figure 13. | SEE availability: NSW and Sydney metropolitan area .....         | 132 |
| Figure 14. | Estimated student enrolments in SEE over time .....              | 137 |

# Glossary

| Term   | Explanation   |
|--|---|
| Approval processes   | Refers to Department of Education processes for approving providers.  |
| Authorisation processes  | Refers to processes used by providers of Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics to authorise volunteers to teach Special Religious Education and volunteers to teach Special Education in Ethics. These processes must include Working With Children Checks.   |
| Central school   | Central schools provide rural and isolated communities with comprehensive education for children from Kindergarten to Year 12   |
| Catholic Conference of Religious Educators in State Schools (CCRESS) | CCRESS was established in July 1987. This SRE peak body is made up of diocesan directors from each Catholic diocese in NSW/ACT. The group meets for two days twice in a year in a different city and country diocese annually. CCRESS is a support group sharing ideas, resources and programs as well as dealing with issues of concern. Four members of CCRESS are on the state ICCOREIS committee and three members are representatives on the DoE Consultative Committee. Training for SRE teachers in NSW is based on guidelines developed by CCRESS. The CCRESS agreed standards for training were endorsed in 1996. The SRE Curriculums used by the Catholic Church are developed by educational experts approved by the Church and are publicly accessible.   |
| The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD)                        | The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine are in each Catholic Diocese and give parish-based support to the teaching of religious education for Catholic children who attend government schools. CCD provide for central organisation and support services to parishes.   |
| Curriculum   | At a fundamental level curriculum represents the 'what' of teaching. It refers to structured and unstructured learning experiences that lay the foundations for ongoing learning. Curriculum is interpreted, enacted and experienced in a wide range of ways depending on your perspective, for example, whether you are a teacher or a student) as well as your understanding, expectations and prior experiences. Curriculum can be viewed as having multiple dimensions including: the written curriculum: the intended, published curriculum content; the hidden curriculum: everything that is learnt that is not part of the official curriculum; the observed curriculum: what actually takes place in classrooms; and the experienced curriculum: the aspects of the curriculum (hidden and observed) that connect meaningfully with students. While all dimensions of curriculum impact student learning and therefore |

---

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | represent important considerations, the focus of this desk review is on the published curriculum documentation. |
|--|---|

---

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Curriculum outline | Provides a brief overview of the overall structure and focus of the curriculum. An effective curriculum outline provides sufficient detail for readers to gain an understanding of what is being taught and the kinds of learning experiences students will have. |
|--------------------|---|

---

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Curriculum scope and sequence | Summarises what is to be taught and the sequence in which it will be taught. Scope refers to the breadth and depth of content to be covered in a curriculum at any one time, for example, a year. Sequence refers to the order in which content is presented to learners. |
|-------------------------------|---|

---

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Faith group | Group that share a set of religious doctrines. |
|-------------|--|

---

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| General religious education | Education about the world's major religions, what people believe and how that belief affects their lives. This is taught through the school curriculum. |
|-----------------------------|---|

---

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Generate Ministries | Generate Ministries is a joint ministry of Presbyterian Youth (NSW), Scripture Union (NSW), the Baptist Union of NSW and Anglican Youthworks. Generate supports combined churches secondary school SRE Boards and employs their SRE teachers in NSW Government secondary schools. Generate also employs chaplains in both primary and secondary government schools. |
|---------------------|---|

---

|   |  |
|---|--|
| The Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (NSW) Inc. (ICCOREIS) | ICCOREIS is a peak body that represents many churches that provide religious education in public schools in NSW, with the goal to support, promote and develop quality religious education in public schools. Members include 13 different Christian faith groups. ICCOREIS estimates that it represents about 80% of all Christian SRE teachers across NSW. |
|---|--|

---

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Meaningful alternative activities | Examples given in implementation guidelines are private reading, completion of homework. |
|-----------------------------------|--|

---

|          |                                       |
|----------|---------------------------------------|
| Pedagogy | The methods and practice of teaching. |
|----------|---------------------------------------|

---

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Religious persuasion | Refers to the denomination as opposed to the broader religion. For example, Catholic (religious persuasion) is part of Christian religion. |
|----------------------|--|

---

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Schools for Specific Purposes | Schools for Specific Purposes or SSPs are for students from Pre-school to Year 12 who require intensive levels of support. Classes in SSPs are similar to the range of classes in regular schools. They include a range of support services depending on the needs of the student. |
|-------------------------------|--|

---

---

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Special Education in Ethics | Education in ethical decision-making, action and reflection within a secular framework, based on a branch of philosophy.  |
| Special Religious Education | Education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion by authorised representatives of that persuasion.  |
| Secular                     | Oxford English definition= <i>Not connected with religious or spiritual matters: secular buildings, secular attitudes to death. Contrasted with sacred.</i> However, according to the Rawlinson Report <sup>1</sup> the original meaning (as used in education legislation over the last 100 years) is that secular instruction shall be held to include general religious teaching as distinct from dogmatic or polemical theology <sup>2</sup> . During the late twentieth century it has come to mean not so much non-sectarian, or neutral, as non-religious. |
| Working with Children Check | The Office of the Children’s Guardian explains a Working With Children Check as a pre-requisite for anyone in child-related work. It involves a national criminal history check and review of findings of work-place misconduct. The result of a Working With Children Check is either a clearance to work with children for five years, or a bar against working with children. Cleared applicants are subject to ongoing monitoring, and relevant new records may lead to the clearance being revoked.  |
| Youthworks                  | The Anglican Church has been integral in the delivery of religious education since 1880 and Youthworks is the largest Christian provider of curriculum and SRE training in NSW. Primary and secondary SRE curriculum is produced through Christian Education Publications. Youthworks is responsible for the administration, accreditation and provision of on-going training services to over 2,500 SRE teachers and helpers.  |

---

---

<sup>1</sup> Rawlinson Report on Religion in Education in NSW Schools (1980).

<sup>2</sup> Rev Professor Gary Bouma, UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations - Asia Pacific, at Monash University, and Associate Priest at St John's Anglican Church, East Malvern.

## Abbreviations and acronyms

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| CCD                  | Confraternity of Christian Doctrine                                  |
| CCRESS               | Catholic Conference of Religious Educators in State Schools          |
| DoE                  | Department of Education  |
| The Department       | Department of Education  |
| Generate             | Generate Ministries  |
| ICCOREIS             | Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (NSW) Inc. |
| ICT                  | Information and communications technology                            |
| K                    | Kindergarten   |
| LGBTI                | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex                     |
| NSW                  | New South Wales  |
| PERG                 | Program Evaluation Reference Group                                   |
| SEE                  | Special Education in Ethics  |
| SRE                  | Special Religious Education  |
| SSP                  | School for Specific Purposes   |
| The Rawlinson Report | Rawlinson Report on Religion in Education in NSW Schools (1980)      |
| ToR                  | Terms of Reference   |
| WWCC                 | Working with Children Check  |

## Executive summary

### Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics

Special Religious Education (SRE)—as distinct from general studies of religion—has been provided in NSW Government schools since the nineteenth century. Special Education in Ethics (SEE) has been available since 2011.

Section 32 of the Education Act (1990) says that 'In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion.' It further says that 'No child at a government school is to be required to receive ... special religious education if the parent of the child objects to the child's receiving that education.'

Section 33A of the Education Act (1990) allows for SEE '...as a secular alternative to special religious education at government schools where parents object to their child receiving special religious education, it is reasonably practical to be made available and the parent requests the child to receive it.' SEE is only offered in primary schools.

### The independent Review

In 2014, the Department of Education (DoE) commissioned an independent review of the implementation of SRE and SEE classes in NSW Government schools 'to examine the implementation of SRE and SEE and report on the performance of the Department, schools and providers'. The Review was commissioned in response to Recommendation 14 of the Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No. 2: Report No. 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012) which also specified areas for the review to cover. These became the basis of the Terms of Reference:

1. The nature and extent of SRE and SEE
2. Department of Education implementation procedures for SRE and SEE including: parent/carer choice through the enrolment process and opting out; approval of SRE and SEE providers by DoE; authorisation of volunteer teachers and curriculum by providers
3. Development of complaints procedures and protocols
4. SRE and SEE providers' training structures
5. Registration of SRE and SEE Boards, Associations and Committees
6. New modes and patterns of delivery using technology
7. Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning across all Years K to 10 and teaching and learning in SEE in Years K to 6 in a variety of demographics
8. The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice or opting out
9. Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE.

The Review examined the implementation of SRE and SEE in NSW Government schools in 2015. This report outlines findings related to each Term of Reference and makes

recommendations. Because SRE and SEE are quite distinct, they are dealt with separately throughout this report.

In the current context, there are polarised views in the community about the place of SRE or SEE in NSW Government schools. While the continuation of SRE or SEE in NSW Government schools is out of scope of this Review, this was a concern for many people and influenced responses to the Review.

## Review methodology

The Review used a comprehensive mix of methods to collect quantitative data across all schools, and the wider community, as well as in-depth and qualitative data from key stakeholders. The methods were chosen to allow all interested stakeholders and the community the opportunity to present their views so that the findings and recommendations are based on a systematic and balanced assessment. Evidence was reviewed and data collected between December 2014 and September 2015.

The main methods for the Review were:

- **Document scan.** Departmental and provider documents/ websites were reviewed, including the 2014 and 2015 SRE and SEE policy and implementation procedures, and the websites of all current providers in December 2014 for their SRE or SEE curriculum scope and sequence documents and outlines.
- **Curriculum review.** An experienced education expert conducted a systematic criterion-based assessment of curriculum materials, based on materials from current SRE providers and the current SEE provider.
- **Consultations**
  - **Surveys and interviews.** Systematic data were collected via surveys of key stakeholder groups. Opportunity to respond was offered to all principals (46% response rate), all SRE and SEE providers (80% response rate), all providers' SRE coordinators (60% response rate) and all SEE coordinators (48% response rate). SRE and SEE teachers contributed via an online portal. These data were complemented by semi-structured interviews with members of the program evaluation reference group, and with peak provider, education and other relevant groups.
  - **Cases studies.** To examine how SRE and SEE is delivered in schools at the local level, the Reviewers undertook 14 case studies involving 12 SRE providers from 11 faith groups; and two case studies of the delivery of SEE. The case studies used face-to-face interviews with coordinators, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders. They were effective in telling the story of local delivery in very different contexts.
  - **Online community consultation.** To collect perspectives from the broader community under the Terms of Reference, online contribution portals for parents/ caregivers; and other interested parties were set up and accessible for six months. The Review received over 10,000 responses, reflecting the high level of interest in

sections of the community. The Reviewers recognise that while the responses reflect significant issues for those who responded, to some degree they reflect the two polarised positions in the community around SRE and SEE, and cannot be considered as representative of the whole NSW community. Indeed, the Reviewers are aware that some groups were active in encouraging their constituents to contribute, and in some cases suggested wording.

### ***Confidence in the findings***

Overall, the Reviewers are confident that the findings from these methods reflect the broad patterns of implementation of SRE and SEE and provide a sound basis for addressing the Terms of Reference and making suitable recommendations. The methods were implemented effectively and there was a high degree of consistency between the wider findings from the surveys; the interviews/ group discussions with significant stakeholders; and the on-ground findings from the local case studies. The data from the online contribution portals is less balanced and has been used with caution, but it is generally not inconsistent with the other methods, and has been useful in raising issues.

## **Main findings and recommendations**

### ***Part A: Special Religious Education***

The NSW Government, through legislation and related policy, recognises the diversity of Australian society and supports parental choice in educating children about their faith. The NSW education system has a long history of providing SRE in government schools, dating back to the nineteenth century. The provision of SRE is not funded by government.

The delivery of SRE is managed by religious persuasions, which are approved as SRE providers by the Department of Education (the Department). There is a great deal of diversity in how different providers manage and coordinate the delivery of SRE reflecting the way the religious persuasion and often the broader faith group is structured and organised. As such, some of the conclusions outlined below will be more or less relevant to individual providers depending on the strengths and weaknesses of their approach to delivering SRE. The resources available to support SRE depend on how much funding each religious persuasion or faith group is willing and able to dedicate. Consequently, smaller groups are less well-resourced than are larger groups. The differences between providers in the amount of resources available for SRE delivery has a large influence on how SRE is delivered as well as providers' ability to fulfil their obligations as expected by the Department and overcome any challenges to delivery.



## **ToR 1: The nature and extent of Special Religious Education**

SRE maintains a substantial presence in NSW Government schools with high levels of provision within schools, although fewer secondary schools participate than primary and there is a relatively low participation rate of secondary school students compared with primary students.

### **Who provides SRE**

Christian providers deliver the majority of SRE classes either as individual churches or through combined arrangements where local churches share resources and jointly deliver SRE to their local school/s. At the beginning of 2015, there were 101 approved SRE providers; 87 Christian providers and 14 providers from another seven faith groups. In order of size of SRE involvement these are: Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Baha'i, Vedic and Sikh. Based on the size of their SRE teacher workforce, the largest SRE providers are those from the Catholic, Anglican and Baptist denominations.

A large, mainly volunteer workforce of an estimated 11,400 authorised SRE teachers, deliver SRE lessons. Three percent of SRE teachers are paid employees of SRE Boards, of whom almost all deliver SRE in secondary schools.

### **Participation in SRE**

There is no centralised data source for student participation in SRE. An important source of information for the Review was the survey of principals, which included questions on student participation. The results from this survey show that in 2015 SRE classes were held in 87% of schools that responded, with 92% of primary schools having SRE, and 81% of secondary schools.

A sample of schools that provided SRE enrolment numbers for their school showed overall student participation in primary schools of 71% and overall student participation in secondary schools of 30% (noting that the sample for secondary schools is small). The low participation rates of secondary students have influenced how SRE is provided in secondary schools and how providers organise themselves.

Almost half of principal respondents (48%) have observed a decrease in SRE enrolment over the past four years, with a higher proportion of primary schools (53%) compared with secondary schools (38%) identifying this trend. Principals suggested a range of factors driving the trend, including changing demographics in schools. While the introduction of SEE has had some impact on participation in SRE in some schools, the experience is mixed, with students often shifting from non-SRE. Changes in participation can be very context specific.

### **Patterns of organisation**

The patterns of organisation differ between primary and secondary schools; most primary schools offer SRE on a weekly basis (generally 30-45 minute lessons) whereas secondary schools are more diverse in their approach. SRE may be offered weekly, fortnightly or

occasionally. Just under one-fifth of secondary schools offer SRE one to three times per term or semester, often in seminar format.

The survey evidence shows that a majority of schools have good working relationships with most SRE providers at the school. However, there is evidence that the different world views of providers and principals and different understandings about the role/ objectives of SRE in schools, can impact on the strength of relationships.

Common challenges faced by schools and providers include negotiating class times, class sizes, access to classroom space especially where there are a number of SRE providers and SEE is also available, and managing volunteer teachers' absences.

## Recommendations

1. The Department of Education investigate and then implement ways to provide accurate and regular monitoring data about the nature and extent of SRE in NSW Government schools. The Department explore:
  - the feasibility of establishing a state-wide monitoring system for SRE, drawing on locally collected data from school enrolment forms—acknowledging this would be complex and there are problems with accuracy of data
  - alternative approaches for monitoring the nature and extent of SRE such as commissioning periodic surveys of a stratified random sample of schools to provide up-to-date data on the extent of SRE.

## ToR 2: Department of Education implementation procedures for SRE

The Department's *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (July 2015) are readily available online for the school community and other interested members of the public. The principles that shape the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (July 2015) are availability, universality and resourcing. Following these principles, the procedures set out what is essentially a form of self-regulation for the delivery of SRE in government schools. Self-regulation in public policy always involves rights and responsibilities. For SRE the rights relate to the ability of SRE providers to access schools, determine teachers and the curriculum. The responsibilities are to fit within the Department's overall commitment to the education and welfare of children as expressed in the Department's policies and also fit into the way schools are managed. The procedures emphasise the need to implement SRE in a flexible way based on consultation and cooperation.

The current procedures reflect historical practices and have been adapted over time in response to requests for clarification from providers, schools and parents, and public discussions. They do not adequately address the complexity in SRE delivery, such as combined arrangements, (including the role of Boards and Associations and the use of third parties) or the intersection of the procedures with other government policies in schools. Nor

do they account for the different operating contexts in primary, central and secondary schools or the relatively low participation rate in secondary schools. It is now timely for a full review of the implementation procedures, which should then be well promoted to all schools.

## Recommendations

2. The Department—in consultation with the sector— review the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) to ensure the procedures provide principals, school staff, parents/ caregivers and providers with clear and comprehensive information regarding the implementation of SRE in current and emerging contexts, consistent with broader departmental policies. These should be well promoted to all schools and providers.
  - There should be separate but related implementation procedures for secondary/ central schools and primary schools because of their different operating contexts. This will allow secondary schools/ central schools to deal with the challenges posed by low student participation rates in SRE and other logistical challenges. See also Recommendations 9, 22, 27, 38 and 39.
  - The revised implementation procedures should include advice about minimum standards for teacher authorisation; developed by providers (see Recommendation 17).
3. All advice and related documents about SRE produced by the Department be clearly dated and the updates identified for ease of implementation of the advice.
4. To meet parents' information needs, schools to make information about the provision of SRE in the school publicly available on websites and during school induction days and at enrolment in school.

## Parent/ Caregiver choice through school enrolment processes and opting out

Schools largely respect parents' rights to have their child either attend SRE or withdraw from SRE. The survey of principals suggests approximately 1 in 5 secondary schools do not participate in SRE, but most non participating schools (83%) say this is due to no demand.

The changes in the school enrolment form in June 2014 and October 2015 were a point of contention during the Review. The evidence from interviews with providers and principals was that the change introduced in June 2014 was strongly contested by SRE providers as not in line with implementation procedures, resulting in confusion and inconsistency in application.

The opt-out process is one where all students who have a religion entered on their school enrolment forms automatically participate in that religion's SRE classes (if they are available), unless parents write to the school to withdraw them. An opt-in process, where parents indicate their approval for their child/ren's participation in SRE before they can attend classes, could be expected to decrease the level of attendance in SRE, through changing the default position. This was experienced by some schools in 2015, with the introduction of the new school enrolment form.

The argument for retaining the opt-out process is that it facilitates widespread participation in SRE, which is easier for schools and providers to plan for, while still providing parents with the choice for their children to not participate. Parents need to be informed and proactive to exercise this choice. The argument for moving to an opt-in process is usually made in terms of transparency and informed parent choice.

Stakeholder views about the opt-out process were sought for the Review. Secondary principals showed a clear preference for opt-in SRE participation (73%), as did principals from central schools (63%) and Schools for Specific Purposes (84%). Primary principals did not have a clear preference for opt-out or opt-in.

Given the different operating contexts for secondary schools, particularly the lower student participation in SRE coupled with the disproportionate administrative burden and the preferences of secondary principals, an opt-in process would be more suitable for secondary schools.

### **Recommendations**

5. The Department assess the suitability of the new school enrolment form (October 2015) and processes to ensure these are clear and working as intended. Such an assessment should canvas the views of all stakeholders.
6. The Department provides clear, consistent and easily accessible information for parents about their SRE participation choices and processes including alternative activities and SEE where this is offered.
7. The Department makes clear on all information materials relating to SRE participation that parents have the right to withdraw their child from SRE.
8. The Department retains the current method of opt-out SRE participation for primary schools
9. An opt-in SRE participation process is more suitable for secondary school students and the Department should facilitate this change, which may require changes to the current legislation.

### **Approval of SRE providers**

From the Department's and providers' perspectives (and the Reviewers), the seven criteria used for making decisions about approval of SRE providers are appropriate. In the absence of publicly available information about the rationale for approving individual providers, it is difficult to make an objective assessment about how well the criteria for decision-making are being applied. However, one of the criteria is to have an age appropriate curriculum. The Review's independent review of SRE curriculum indicates that this element is often a weakness of SRE curriculum, which suggests that the Department's assessment relies on assurances from the providers who in turn, often rely on publishers of curricula.

Regarding how non-compliance is dealt with, the current approach is to ask providers to address areas of non-compliance, where these come to the attention of the Department. Neither providers nor the Department monitors compliance in any systematic way, and as such, non-compliant practices and behaviours can and have occurred. In a self-regulated

system the monitoring of performance is the responsibility of providers, and monitoring systems should be developed or strengthened and non-compliance with implementation procedures addressed promptly. Regarding compliance with the criteria for approval and with reporting obligations, the Department should make publicly available the circumstances under which a provider could lose their approval should they fail to address areas of non-compliance.

## Recommendations

The Department

10. Revises the provider application form to collect a broader amount of information about potential providers to allow fuller consideration of appropriateness and governance structures and identify radical groups or cults.
11. Provides clear advice to potential providers about the approval process including timing of meetings and processes.
12. Makes it clear in information materials accompanying the application form and in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*, the reasons a provider would lose their status as an approved SRE (nature of breach and frequency).

## Transparency of information about SRE

The Department publishes the list of approved providers, however, it does not make publicly available the criteria used as a basis for decisions, guidelines about the provider approval process or application forms. Changes are needed to make the process more transparent and to better communicate to providers (and the public) what information is used as a basis for decision-making. A more transparent process will assure providers and the wider community about the rigour of the process and decisions made. Transparency could be achieved through the publication of the application forms, criteria for approval and the reasons for decisions to approve or not approve a religious persuasion as a SRE provider.

Under the responsibilities of self-regulation, providers also have a responsibility for transparency to parents, the Department, school communities and the wider public, through publication of important information and the provision of regular monitoring. The transparency of information about SRE activities and processes varies considerably across providers. This is an area where providers could improve the governance and management of SRE and increase the confidence of the school community in SRE.

## Recommendations

13. The Department takes steps to make the provider approval process more transparent by publishing the application form and criteria for decision-making on the Department website.
14. Schools place online annual and updated information about approved SRE providers working in their school, links to the SRE curriculums and a list of SRE volunteers so parents are fully informed about SRE provision for their child. This information should be given to schools by the providers who access them.

### **Authorisation of volunteer SRE teachers**

Authorisation of SRE teachers is an important process that is rightly the responsibility of providers. They know the volunteers and must be confident that the SRE teacher will be a good representative of their religion, faithfully teach their curriculum and cope with the task of instructing students in SRE. The Department and the school community must also be able to trust that the process works to confirm that volunteers are suitable to work with children in that they are trustworthy and sufficiently skilled.

The evidence indicates that for the most part, SRE teachers are being authorised by providers as is required. Authorisation of SRE teachers generally occurs after completion of mandatory minimum or basic training. All providers include training in child protection and classroom management, and most include a session on the curriculum.

Faith groups have similar approaches and understanding about what a quality authorisation process should require, although some aspects vary and only some make public what their authorisation processes entail. To increase the confidence of schools and make more transparent what authorisation involves, the Review suggests the sector consider a best practice approach to authorisation of SRE teachers and agree on minimum standards. These standards should be included in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*. Authorisation must balance due diligence with what is reasonable for all providers to achieve.

### **Recommendations**

15. Providers to place in the public domain a sufficiently detailed description of the processes they use to authorise their SRE teachers and the minimum requirements, qualifications and basic training they require of their SRE teachers.
16. Providers conduct regular audits of SRE teaching and use of approved curriculum, and report the results of the audits and any efforts to address any identified issues.
17. Faith groups consider forming a joint committee of **all** faith SRE providers to:
  - assist with development of shared guidelines/ understanding of requirements
  - develop common minimum standards for authorisation of teachers to increase the confidence of schools and parents that the person is known, suitable and adequately prepared. These should be widely promoted to all providers.

### **Authorisation of the SRE curriculum**

Sourcing and then authorising curriculum materials is the responsibility of the provider. The evidence available for the Review suggests that providers' authorisation processes do not consistently produce good quality curricula from an educational perspective.

Providers are required to make the curriculum scope and sequence publicly available. This is not happening consistently: just over one-third (39%) of providers had SRE curriculum information accessible on a website (their own or associated faith group) at the start of the Review (December 2014). Further, it is unclear how a parent/ caregiver might find curriculum scope and sequence documents where SRE is being delivered by combined Christian arrangements. Given that authorisation processes are self-regulated, it is important that

sufficient information about SRE curriculum is available for parents so they can decide for themselves if the values and teaching espoused by providers match their own values.

Providers direct SRE teachers to use specific approved curriculum materials and are generally making these available; 95% of respondents to the SRE teacher survey indicated they were given authorised curriculum materials and workbooks, and this was confirmed by case studies. However, the Reviewers are aware of instances during 2015 where SRE teachers were found to be using either age inappropriate materials that had been authorised or non-authorised teaching and learning materials.

There are considerable differences in the human and financial resources available across providers to develop and authorise SRE curriculum materials. While some employ staff to develop materials, and others purchase published materials, for some providers developing curriculum is an incremental process, reliant on volunteers donating their professional expertise.

The evidence from the way SEE curriculum materials are developed suggests the Department could have a role in reviewing the age appropriateness of SRE curricula. Expanding the Department's role would only be possible if resources for SRE oversight within the Department are increased. To assist providers, the Department could provide guidance/ frameworks/ advice for providers about curriculum scope and sequence and about what kinds of content are age appropriate, and how sensitive issues should be addressed during lessons.

### **Recommendations**

18. All providers to place in the public domain their curriculum scope and sequence and that this be in sufficient detail for parents/ caregivers and schools to be able to understand what is covered in SRE lessons.
19. The Department negotiates and sets clear timelines for all faith groups and providers to comply with placing their curriculum scope and sequence in the public domain.
20. The Department monitors adherence to clearly stated expectations on a regular basis (e.g. five-yearly basis).

### **ToR 3: Development of complaints procedures and protocols**

The Department's *Complaints Handling Guidelines* are used should a member of the school community or a provider wish to make a complaint about the delivery of SRE and these procedures are being utilised. The *Guidelines* allow for nuanced responses, which are commensurate with the nature of complaints, and for complaints to be escalated should they not be resolved at the school level. In practice, the evidence indicates that complaints procedures are fairly well known and complaints, including those about classroom issues, are usually resolved to the satisfaction of the school and the provider at the local level. Resolution mostly involves representatives of both the school and the SRE provider.

More serious issues about compliance with the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*, the Department's Code of Conduct or *Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People Policy* may be first dealt with at the school level but may also be escalated where local action has not been effective or where the issue is likely to impact on other schools.

Complaints made to providers are dealt with according to their own complaints processes. The Review did not examine individual provider's complaints processes and procedures and these may or may not need further development; however, 83% of SRE coordinators indicated that these work well in practice

More than half (58%, n=649) of the principals who responded to the survey question on complaints had received one or more complaint related to SRE during the past two years. The most common complaints were about:

- the content of SRE lessons (58% of respondents who received complaints)
- the effect on the child of SRE (29% of school respondents who received complaints), and
- the alternative activities for those not attending SRE or SEE (26% of respondents who received complaints).

A low proportion (10%) of parents who responded, reported they had made a complaint concerning SRE; four percent reported being satisfied that their complaint was handled appropriately and six percent were not satisfied. Comments suggest that amongst those who were not satisfied it was commonly because they were dissatisfied with the outcome rather than the process, although this was not always the case. Communication about the outcome of complaints was an important factor influencing satisfaction with the process.

## Recommendations

21. Schools communicate with complainants about the outcomes of every complaint made about SRE and the reasons for the outcome.
  - Schools make clear to parents and representatives of SRE providers what issues are the responsibility of the school to resolve and which are the responsibility of the provider to resolve.
  - Any resolution/ action taken is communicated in a timely way to parents.
22. The Department's *Complaints and Handling Policy* be clearly referenced in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and a link provided to the policy on the Department's Religious Education Webpage.
23. Providers make publicly available their complaints policy and procedures.



## **ToR 4: SRE providers' training structures**

Most providers require some form of basic training as part of their authorisation process to teach SRE and the majority of SRE teachers surveyed had completed a variety of topics in basic training.

Setting up training structures is a challenge for smaller providers because they do not have sufficient resources or capabilities. As a result, it is common for small providers to tap into the structures established by faith groups or larger providers and third party organisations. This is particularly well organised for Christian providers. Around half of all Christian SRE teachers complete their SRE training through organisations external to their provider. GodSpace (Baptist) and Youthworks (Anglican) are the main external SRE training providers.

The evidence about how much and how often SRE teachers are involved in ongoing training is mixed, and there is considerable variability between providers. There is no evidence of regular, embedded mentoring practices in any of the data, although mentoring does occur on occasions, often for a short period of time for new SRE teachers. Where mentoring is provided, generally by SRE coordinators or more experienced SRE teachers, it was highly valued. Only the Jewish SRE provider reported they do formal annual evaluations of their employed SRE teachers' skills.

### **Recommendations**

24. Providers consider offering the same basic training for all SRE teachers and more regular on-going training and greater support including mentoring and observation of individual SRE teachers' practices.

## **ToR 5: Registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees**

SRE Boards, Associations and Committees are usually formed to provide governance for combined SRE delivery arrangements. Combined delivery arrangements allow providers to pool scarce local resources and so improve their capacity to meet parent requests for SRE at a school or cluster of schools. The stated common functions and roles of SRE Boards include managing resources and organising key SRE functions such as liaison with schools, training, promotion, recruitment, employment and support of local SRE teachers. Some SRE Boards, Associations and Committees also work to raise funds from local churches and supporters.

Although no organisation collects systematic data about these groups, the Reviewers estimate there are at least 170 SRE Boards operating in NSW. SRE Boards with oversight of combined secondary school SRE frequently outsource human resource functions (recruitment and selection of SRE teachers and training) to third party organisations, the largest of which is Generate Ministries.

An SRE Board, Association or Committee that operates successfully benefits schools because these governance structures are capable of bringing sufficient resources together to meet

schools' and parents' demands for well organised SRE lessons. However, the activities and composition of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees are not always transparent to the school community. All SRE Boards associated with Generate Ministries provide details about the approved providers involved in combined arrangements. Other local SRE Boards, Associations and Committees are not as transparent. Where combined SRE arrangements are in place, it is not easy for parents to identify the curriculum being used or find out which provider has authorised a teacher or know about the role of the paid SRE teacher in organising SRE. Registration is one mechanism for making the role and composition of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees publicly known.

The Reviewers consider there is a need for a government response to acknowledge the important role and influence that SRE Boards, Associations and Committees and other third party organisations have in the delivery of combined SRE arrangements. However, it is not certain that establishing a registration scheme is the most commensurate response in this complex environment. Other approaches, for example, publishing details on school websites annually about combined SRE arrangements including the names of providers, paid SRE teachers and any third parties involved, would use fewer departmental resources and place less administrative burden on providers while giving more transparency.

Some argue that regulation of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees could be a mechanism for improving the quality of SRE delivery. But the Department's *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) already provide this mechanism—albeit these procedures need strengthening and closer monitoring—and these procedures apply to all providers. Combined arrangements have already 'professionalised' the delivery of SRE in secondary schools because of minimum qualifications being required for paid SRE teachers and the professional learning support available, so it is difficult to see what additional value a government registration scheme would bring in improving the quality of SRE in secondary schools.

Evidence from the Review indicates that having a paid SRE teacher in a school can 'squeeze out' other SRE providers because schools find it convenient to have that person organise SRE lessons and SRE lessons may be timetabled around their commitments. Providers not involved in combined SRE arrangements should not be disadvantaged and schools should be alerted to this possibility should they have a paid SRE teacher in the school. To ensure that the school principals are well-informed about the role of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees and third party organisations, the Department should draft advice as part of the Review of the *Special Religious Education Implementation Procedures*. This advice should cover how and on what basis a paid SRE teacher is involved in organising SRE and explicitly limit their role in broader school activities because they are not under the management of the school principal.

## Recommendations

25. Providers inform the Department annually what SRE Boards, Associations and Committees they are part of and where. The Department publishes a list of Boards, Associations and Committees which includes their membership by school network areas on the Departmental website.
26. SRE Boards, Associations and Committees inform schools they work with on an annual basis, which religious persuasions are part of the SRE Board, Association or Committee and which curriculum has been cross-authorized. Schools to publish this information on the website and update annually. They should also inform schools of any third party organisation to which they have delegated human resource management functions
27. The revised *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* should recognise the role of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees and third party organisations in supporting SRE delivery. The revised procedures should make it clear to schools and providers the limits of their influence, the rights of other providers and where conflicts of interest may apply.

## ToR 6: New modes and patterns of delivery using technology

Large Christian providers want SRE to use the same patterns of delivery as those used as best practice by DoE school teachers. As such, the large Christian curriculums include resources that use information and communications technology (ICT) in classrooms to help deliver SRE material. Their curricula provide materials such as interactive games, PowerPoints, mp3s and CDs for use via interactive whiteboards or other devices.

Evidence from case studies confirmed that new modes of delivery using technology tend to relate to interactive white boards and supplementing the curriculum with online resources, e.g. YouTube clips. The latter raises issues around approval of these materials: some providers are clear that any such materials need to be approved by the SRE coordinator before use, but others are less clear about this, and there is mixed practice among teachers.

There can be challenges associated with the use of technology including accessibility, functionality and short lesson times. One key challenge is whether or not a school allows an SRE teacher access to interactive whiteboards (varies across schools). The Department advice is that schools be able to restrict the use of interactive whiteboards as they see fit, given that they are often set up to link directly to school internal networks, which are inappropriate for visiting SRE or SEE teachers to access.

While most provider SRE coordinators and SRE teachers expressed a high level of confidence about SRE teachers' ability to use technology tools in their delivery of SRE lessons, a sizable minority of each group (approximately 20% of both) were not confident about this, suggesting that further training in this area would be useful.

## Recommendations

28. Providers put in place processes for approval of any materials and internet resources that are used by SRE teachers in their classes and educate SRE teachers about these approval processes.
29. Providers consider making available training in use of interactive whiteboards and digital projectors for SRE teachers.

## ToR 7: Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SRE across all Years K to 10—and teaching and learning in SEE in Years K to 6 in a variety of demographics

An educational review of a sample of SRE curricula and curriculum materials found that the information about the curriculum scope and sequence made available to the public was often insufficient or patchy and the educational quality of curriculum materials varied widely.

### Curriculum scope and sequence

At the start of the Review, 43 SRE curriculum outlines/ scope and sequence documents were downloaded from the websites of approved providers or their associated faith group. All of these documents were reviewed. Over half of these documents (58%) had insufficient detail to provide clarity to the general reader about what was being taught or the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. Only nine of the 43 documents expressed desired student learning in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills.

### Curriculum materials

SRE curriculum documents include teacher's manuals, student activity books and other student resources. Large Christian SRE providers that produce curriculum resources used widely in Christian SRE classes across NSW provided the Review with a comprehensive set of materials in hardcopy. Other providers made curriculum materials available to the Review through the Survey of Providers and at case study interviews. A total of 121 documents were reviewed using the evaluation framework developed for the Review. The sources of the curriculum documents that have been reviewed are those used by at least 86%<sup>3</sup> of approved providers.

The quality of the pedagogy, relevance and age appropriateness of SRE teaching and learning, as demonstrated in the sample of teacher manuals and student resources, was variable. Two-thirds of the documents reviewed under this category provided clarity about what was to be taught. A considerable proportion of teachers' manuals privileged teacher-directed lessons and activities for students that required relatively low levels of cognitive

---

<sup>3</sup> Combined evidence from Survey of Providers, case study interviews and DoE information from approved providers.

demand. A considerable proportion of student resources also required relatively low levels of cognitive demand.

Of note is the lack of quality advice in relation to age appropriate learning experiences. Only 12 manuals (28%) included explicit advice and examples of age appropriate learning experiences. Half (53%) of the manuals did not provide teachers with assistance in selecting and using teaching strategies to support intended learning experiences. Teachers' manuals did not consistently provide practical guidance on strategies to maximise student engagement and participation in lessons.

It is apparent from the case studies that the individual skills of SRE teachers influence the quality of children's experiences and their ability to control classes and facilitate the flow of the discussions varies. Given most are volunteers this is not an unexpected finding. Schools are under no obligation to place classroom teachers in SRE lessons, but it is a reasonably common practice, particularly in primary schools, that does assist in the management of student behaviour.

## Recommendations

30. SRE curriculum developers would benefit from having access to guidelines on what constitutes well-structured curriculum documentation. Providers should seek advice from education experts (the Department is one source of advice) to gain a shared understanding of
  - what is meant by the term 'curriculum outline'
  - what is meant by the term 'curriculum scope and sequence'
31. SRE developers would benefit from having access to guidelines on elements that constitute a well-structured teachers' manual. Providers seek advice from education experts (the Department is one source of advice) to clarify
  - sequence of learning for each school term
  - lesson plans or lesson planning templates
  - advice on how students can be challenged and supported in age appropriate ways,
  - advice on strategies to increase student engagement and participation ,
  - advice on strategies to accommodate student needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests,
  - access to resources to support teaching and learning.
32. Providers seek to improve the quality of SRE pedagogy, relevance and age appropriateness of teaching and learning materials.
33. Providers and SRE curriculum developers consider effective pedagogies and age appropriate opportunities for learning when reviewing and developing curriculum.
34. Providers and SRE curriculum developers review their curriculums on a cyclical basis (e.g. five-yearly basis).
35. Providers seek advice from education experts (the Department is one source of advice) to develop a shared understanding about what is meant by the term
  - 'effective pedagogies'
  - 'relevant learning experiences'

- ‘age appropriate learning experiences’.
36. The Department consider providing SRE curriculum developers with access to advice that highlight and support effective teaching practices, in particular age appropriate learning experiences.
  37. The Department monitors adherence to clearly stated expectations on a regular basis (e.g. five-yearly basis).

## **ToR 8: The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice or opting out**

The different views about the annual confirmation process encompass two sets of issues. The first are competing views about encouraging or discouraging SRE in schools. The second are pragmatic concerns about administering the process of annual confirmation. While the two sets of issues will inexorably overlap for many stakeholders, the first are beyond the scope of this Review, while the second go to the core of implementation. For this reason, the Reviewers have concluded that the views of principals are the most significant when considering findings in this area.

### **Recommendations**

38. Schools continue the practice of continuing enrolment as for the previous year without further confirmation. If principals wish to confirm annually as part of their school practice, that should be allowed under the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*.

## **ToR 9: Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE**

The question of alternative activities for students not participating in SRE or SEE is one of the most problematic areas for schools and for parents who withdraw their children from SRE. Most (75%, n=397) parents who contributed to the Review, for whom it was relevant, expressed dissatisfaction with the types of activities their children do while other students are in SRE or SEE.

Seventy-one percent of primary principals and 60% of secondary principals who responded to the survey were satisfied with the arrangements for alternative activities, while the rest (29% of primary and 40% of secondary principals) would like to be able to offer different activities to their students. In some cases, they are constrained by the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015), but in others it is a question of available resources, both material and human. Many principals, at both primary and secondary levels, believe that students should be engaged in structured activities such as coursework and sport during all their timetabled sessions, and that not to do so weakens the culture of spending teaching time productively, and so reduces students' academic motivation.

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) apply to all schools, but do not address the challenges faced by schools (mainly secondary schools) where the majority of students do not participate in SRE. The main issues in these circumstances are the logistical challenges and an imbalance in resourcing allocation to provide for meaningful alternative activities where the majority of students are not in SRE. The NSW Secondary Principals' Council expressed serious concern that the choice of some students denies the opportunity for learning for others. At some schools, particularly secondary schools, this could be the majority of students.

Parents are generally satisfied with the level of supervision that their children receive while doing alternative activities. Increasing numbers of students not participating in SRE creates pressure on schools to find suitable spaces for students to be located during SRE and to provide adequate supervision.

### **Recommendations**

39. In revising the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* for secondary and central schools the Department should allow students not participating in SRE to continue their regular classwork. This provision would apply in secondary/ central schools where there is a low rate of student participation in SRE e.g. affecting more than half of the students.

## **Part B: Special Education in Ethics**

Special Education in Ethics (SEE) is offered as an option for children whose parents have withdrawn them from SRE under an amendment of the Education Act 1990 (section 33A). The provision of SEE is not government funded and Primary Ethics—currently the only approved provider—relies on a combination of volunteers and public donations to fund its activities.

### **ToR 1: The nature and extent of Special Education in Ethics**

SEE covers ethical decision-making, action and reflection within a secular framework, based on a branch of philosophy that examines ethical concepts and issues, asking what is right or wrong in particular circumstances. SEE is currently only offered to primary school students where it has been requested by parents and local SEE teachers are available.

SEE is experiencing rapid growth with increasing numbers of primary schools offering SEE and students participating. At the beginning of 2015, 451 NSW Government primary schools (29%) offered SEE classes and an estimated 25,000 students were enrolled. The numbers of students has increased 16-fold from 1,530 in 2011, when SEE commenced. However, demand for SEE amongst parents is variable and appears to be related to the demographics of an area, with SEE not currently available in some areas in Sydney (for example, Western Sydney) and parts of rural NSW.

The evidence indicates that to date, Primary Ethics has been fairly successful in meeting the increase in demand for SEE classes. In 2015, there were some 1,212 active authorised volunteer SEE teachers and 330 Ethics coordinators. However, in some schools for some Year groups, Primary Ethics has not been able to keep up with demand for classes because they cannot source sufficient volunteers and there is a lag between recruitment and authorisation. To date, no other organisation has applied to become an SEE provider. Primary Ethics has recruitment strategies in place and in 2015 increased the number of training sessions available in regional areas of growth.

At the school level, delivery is well coordinated with the patterns of organisation reflecting those in place for SRE. Students appear to be mainly moving into SEE from participation in alternative activities rather than moving directly from SRE to SEE classes.

### **Recommendations**

40. Primary Ethics has systems in place to provide data on student participation in SEE, and data on participation rates are publicly available. Departmental processes for regularly monitoring participation in SEE should be established if and when other SEE providers are approved.

## **ToR 2: Department of Education implementation procedures for SEE**

As for SRE, the principles that shape the *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* (2015) are availability, universality and resourcing. Following these principles, the implementation procedures set out what is essentially a form of self-regulation for the delivery of SEE in government primary schools, with a limited role for the Department in reviewing the age appropriateness of the curriculum. Self-regulation in public policy always involves rights and responsibilities. For SEE, the rights relate to the ability of Primary Ethics to access schools, and determine teachers. The responsibilities are to work within the Department's overall commitment to the education and welfare of children as expressed in departmental policies, within the way schools are managed and in alignment with the delivery of SRE. A closely related responsibility under self-regulation is transparency to parents, the Department, school communities and the wider public, through publication of important information and the provision of regular monitoring of participation in SEE.

### **Transparency of information about SEE**

Primary Ethics' activities and processes are transparent. The public can readily access detailed information on their website about the management and governance of SEE, the outline and scope of the curriculum, criteria for recruiting and vetting volunteer SEE teachers and the schools where SEE is being offered.

The Department's *Implementation Procedures for Special Education in Ethics* (last updated in February 2015) are also readily available online for the school community and other



interested members of the public. As for SRE, the Department also makes available resources for principals such as letter templates and advice about enrolment procedures, which are being used. Principals can and do seek further advice from Directors, Public Schools NSW and the Department's Special Religious Education and Ethics Officer when they need to.

However, there is evidence that the Department's *Implementation Procedures for Special Education in Ethics* need clarifying and updating to provide better guidance for schools, parents/ caregivers and Primary Ethics volunteers about the delivery of SEE. The current procedures contain ambiguities most likely arising from the fact that they closely reflect the structure and wording encompassed in the related *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*.

Some of the advice in the SEE procedures about the provision of information about SEE to parents/ caregivers is inconsistent with other publicly available guidelines (for example, the *SEE Fact Sheet*). Neither of these two key documents is dated, which has caused some confusion for principals. As part of the revision, more focus is needed on the specifics of SEE delivery, for example, acknowledging the management structures Primary Ethics have in place to support SEE. Dating key documents and any updated advice on procedures (including in fact sheets) would assist principals, Primary Ethics and parents/ caregivers to understand and comply with the procedures.

## Recommendations

41. The Department—in consultation with the Consultative Committee for Special Education in Ethics—reviews the *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* to ensure these provide principals, school staff, parents/ caregivers and providers with clear and comprehensive information regarding the implementation of SEE in current and emerging contexts, consistent with broader departmental policies. The review should take account of considerations for changes to the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*.
  - As part of the revision, greater focus be placed on the specifics of SEE delivery, for example, acknowledging there is one provider and referencing the specific coordination and management structures Primary Ethics have in place to support SEE.
42. The Department ensure all advice and related documents about SEE produced by them are clearly dated and the updates identified for ease of implementation of the advice.
43. To meet parent's information needs, schools to make information about SEE in the school, publicly available on websites and during school induction days and at enrolment.

## Parent/ Caregiver choice

The findings related to parent/ caregiver choice regarding SEE are discussed in the SRE section. It is worth noting here that parents are concerned about a perceived lack of information on the availability of SEE lessons and the clarity of processes for choosing SEE for their child.

### **Approval of SEE providers**

Although it is possible to approach the Department to become a provider in SEE, the Department is yet to establish an 'open and transparent expression of interest process' for other groups wishing to become an SEE provider, as recommended in the Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012). The Department has indicated that an application process will be established should they receive any enquiries. It is difficult for the Reviewers to know if the lack of enquiries about becoming an SEE provider is related to how information about approval is provided by the Department on their website or whether other reasons prevail. The Review received no submissions about the lack of open and transparent approval processes for becoming an SEE provider. This implies that, four years on from the enquiry in 2011 into the *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011*, there is little interest from other groups. Since that time, SEE delivery has increased substantially as have Primary Ethics' support and management structures to support SEE delivery.

### **Recommendations**

44. The Department establishes an open and transparent application process for groups wishing to become providers of SEE.
45. The Department makes it clear in information materials accompanying the application form and in the SEE implementation procedures, the reasons a provider would lose their status as an approved SEE provider (nature of breach and frequency).
46. Schools place annual and updated information about SEE provision in their school, links to the curriculum and a list of SEE volunteers so parents are properly informed about SEE provision for their child.

### **Authorisation of volunteer SEE teachers**

Primary Ethics has a comprehensive and robust process in place to authorise suitable volunteers to teach SEE, which is supported by a centralised information management system that appears to be being used as intended. The authorisation processes include interviews of individuals and other checks, which according to schools and SEE volunteers, are stringently applied and work well in practice. Complaints about SEE teachers' attitudes or teaching inappropriate content are very infrequent. The Reviewers have found no reason to suggest changes to the current teacher authorisation processes. However, it is apparent that some Ethics coordinators would like more opportunities to attend training about their role in authorisation and recruitment. Primary Ethics could consider providing this.

The authorisation process is clearly outlined on the website, so is transparent to those who may be considering volunteering to teach SEE. This is good practice as it allows the school community to understand and have confidence in the authorisation process.

### **Recommendations**

47. Primary Ethics to conduct regular audits of SEE teaching and use of approved curriculum and publicly report the results of the audits and any efforts to address any issues identified.

### **Authorisation of the SEE curriculum**

Primary Ethics is fulfilling their obligation to be transparent by making their curriculum scope and sequence available online.

The curriculum authorisation process—which involves education and subject experts—appears to be effective in that it has produced a high quality curriculum. The curriculum outline provides sufficient detail for the general reader to gain an understanding of what is to be taught and the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. The scope gives an overview of what is to be taught and the sequence outlines the order in which it is to be taught, by Stage of learning and school term.

The authorisation of the SEE curriculum is only partly self-regulated, with Primary Ethics developing the curriculum and authorising the materials and pedagogy. The Department continues to review the age appropriateness of curriculum materials and checks on their alignment with Departmental policies. The Department offered to assist Primary Ethics when the original SEE curriculum was being developed and then in response to Upper House review, confirmed to Minister that the Department would continue to review age appropriateness and provide general feedback on new materials and anything updated. In 2015, eight topics were reviewed. The feedback from Primary Ethics suggests that the organisation values the Department's role in reviewing age appropriateness of the curriculum teaching materials/ topics.

### **Recommendations**

48. The Department continue its role in reviewing the age appropriateness of the SEE curriculum.
49. The Department monitor adherence to clearly stated expectations on a regular basis (e.g. five-yearly).

## **ToR 3: Development of complaints procedures and protocols**

Both the Department and Primary Ethics have complaints procedures and protocols in place should a member of the school community wish to make a complaint about the delivery of SEE; and these procedures are being utilised. Complaints about SEE made to schools are dealt with under the Department's *Complaints Handling Guidelines*. Complaints made to Primary Ethics are dealt with according to their own complaints processes. In practice, the handling of complaints may involve representatives of both the school and Primary Ethics. The procedures and protocols of both organisations allow for nuanced responses, which are commensurate with the nature of complaints, and for complaints to be escalated should they not be resolved at the school level.

The Review found that the current complaints handling procedures and procedures are effective. In many cases, the issues raised are resolved satisfactorily and swiftly and at the school level. However, two fairly common complaints from parents relate to the lack of SEE

classes for individual children, and inadequate information available about SEE delivery in the school. These are often not able to be resolved to parents' satisfaction leaving them frustrated. The solution is not the further development of complaints procedures and protocols. Rather the Department needs to communicate better to parents about the separate roles of schools and Primary Ethics in the provision of SEE. Schools control the allocation of classroom space and Primary Ethics is responsible for supplying SEE teachers on the request of the school. Primary Ethics is not always able to meet a request for SEE teachers in the short term, especially where student numbers are low.

### Recommendations

50. Schools communicate with complainants about the outcomes of every complaint made about SEE and the reasons for the outcome.
  - Schools make clear to parents and representatives of Primary Ethics (and any future providers of SEE) what issues are the responsibility of the school to resolve and which are the responsibility of the provider to resolve.
  - Any resolution/ action taken is communicated in a timely way to parents
51. The Department's *Complaints and Handling Policy* be clearly referenced in the *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* and a link provided to the policy on the Department's Religious Education Webpage.
52. Any future providers of SEE should make publicly available their complaints policy and procedures.

### ToR 4: SEE provider training structures

Primary Ethics has training structures in place to prepare volunteer SEE teachers for their role. There are some gaps in the regularity of training especially as Primary Ethics expands into new regional areas, leading to delays in having SEE teachers authorised. The training combines a mix of online and face-to-face sessions, which allows volunteers to fit the training around their other commitments, whilst ensuring that the volunteers are able to practice lesson delivery.

SEE teachers must attend training before being authorised. The training appears to prepare teachers well (from their perspective) in terms of child protection and understanding curriculum content. Skills in managing classrooms and teaching in practice are covered in initial training but there is evidence that the amount of time spent on developing these skills is insufficient and ongoing support is required. The increased focus by Primary Ethics on this area in 2015 is laudable and reflects SEE teacher needs. Primary Ethics should continue to promote its online behaviour management training and provide support through their Classroom Support Team for SEE teachers who are less confident in this area.

Although Primary Ethics provides ongoing training and support through online forums and some observations of delivery of classes, the extent to which volunteers are accessing such

support is not clear. SEE teachers would benefit from more regular access to structured observations and feedback to improve their skills.

### **Recommendations**

53. Primary Ethics regularly monitors SEE teachers' performance and learning needs and provide more individual support to address these needs including mentoring and observation of individual SEE teachers' practices.

## **ToR 5: Registration of SRE and SEE Boards, Associations and Committees**

Primary Ethics has a Board that provides governance for Primary Ethics in its role as the only approved SEE provider. This Term of Reference is discussed in the SRE section and does not apply to SEE because Primary Ethics does not employ SEE teachers or participate in combined SEE arrangements.

No recommendations specific to SEE.

## **ToR 6: New modes of patterns of delivery using technology**

The evidence indicates that while the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to deliver SEE lessons can be useful, it is not necessary to support the delivery of the scenario-based SEE lessons. Even so, the quarter of SEE teachers who expressed a lack of confidence in using the common technology tools such as interactive whiteboards would benefit from instruction in their use.

### **Recommendations**

54. Primary Ethics provides training in use of interactive whiteboards and digital projectors for SEE teachers.

## **ToR 7: Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in—SRE across all Years K to 10 and teaching and learning in SEE in Years K to 6 in a variety of demographics**

A review of the age appropriateness and relevance of the curriculum by the independent education expert found that the SEE curriculum and teaching materials are aligned with the learning continuum for ethical understanding outlined in the *Australian Curriculum* (Education Council, 2015). On the whole, there is evidence of identified age appropriate learning experiences across the SEE curriculum and teaching materials. By contrast, the summaries for each topic are written in an inconsistent style, which has resulted in the learning experiences in some topics not being adequately described.

Overall, the evidence available from the independent review of the curriculum and from the case studies indicates that the teaching and learning practices used in SEE lessons are age appropriate, relevant and the pedagogical approach is effective. The SEE lesson plans rely on a repetitive lesson structure, which predominantly comprises beginning with a stimulus text and/or picture followed by activities for focused discussion.

SEE teachers who participated in case studies and completed surveys described how they closely follow the lesson plans provided by Primary Ethics. The review of the curriculum found that all SEE lesson plans provided teachers with clear aims and objectives and that they provide teachers with sufficient detail to clearly describe what was to be taught and the kinds of learning experiences intended for students. The lesson plans also include background information, resources and suggested timings, and provide teachers with a clear sequence of learning. Lesson plans reflect the three organising elements in the 'Ethical understanding General Capability' (Australian Curriculum) and provided opportunities for learning reflected in the learning continuum.

SEE teachers are successfully engaging most students in SEE lessons, and students from a range of backgrounds and ages relate well to the scenario-based lessons. This reflects the evidence from the review of a sample of lesson plans, all of which included opportunities for students to work collaboratively and to share their thinking and reasoning. In addition, the review of the SEE lesson plans showed these plans included age appropriate opportunities that could promote student engagement and participation. However, they did not include specific advice on teaching strategies to support inclusive practices. This could be an area for improvement.

It is apparent from the case studies that the individual skills of SEE teachers influence the quality of children's experiences and that there is some variation in SEE teachers' ability to control classes and facilitate the flow of the discussions.

There is evidence from parents and some SEE teachers that older primary students sometimes find SEE lessons repetitive and boring. Primary Ethics could consider examining how repetition could be reduced in future iterations of the curriculum.

## **Recommendations**

55. Primary Ethics curriculum developers to map the SEE curriculum against the learning continuum provided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Requesting the curriculum developers to note aspects of the SEE curriculum that support content descriptions and learning areas within the Australian Curriculum where applicable and appropriate.
56. Primary Ethics curriculum developers consider whether there is a need to reduce the amount of repetition in the curriculum to prevent older primary aged students from disengaging.

## **ToR 8: The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice and opting out**

This Term of Reference was not directed at SEE.

See SRE Recommendation 36, Response to Terms of Reference 8 for SRE.

## **ToR 9: Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE**

This Term of Reference already addressed in discussion of SRE. No recommendations applicable to SEE.

# 1. Introduction

This chapter describes the background to the Review, the Review's Terms of Reference, and gives an overview of the Review methods.

## 1.1 Background and context

Special Religious Education (SRE)—as distinct from general religious education—has been provided in NSW Government schools since the nineteenth century. Special Education in Ethics (SEE) has been available since 2011.

Section 32 of the Education Act 1990 says that 'in every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion ...' It further says that 'No child at a government school is to be required to receive ... special religious education if the parent of the child objects to the child's receiving that education.'

Section 33A of the Education Act 1990 allows for SEE 'as a secular alternative to special religious education at government schools but only if: (a) it is reasonably practicable for special education in ethics to be made available to the child at the government school, and (b) the parent requests that the child receive special education in ethics.'

### 1.1.1 Special Religious Education

SRE is education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion by authorised representatives of that persuasion. The NSW Government, through legislation and related policy, recognises the diversity of Australian society and supports parental choice in educating children about their faith.

#### ***Delivery***

Many NSW metropolitan schools offer a wide range of choice for SRE. Community members as volunteer SRE teachers have an opportunity to be directly involved in teaching children in their faith.

The rights of parents/ caregivers and the responsibilities of schools and approved providers are set out in the Department of Education (the Department's) *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*. For example, a school must ensure that the organisation(s) providing SRE are approved by the Department, and allow no less than 30 minutes per week for SRE instruction. The SRE provider is responsible for training and authorising the teachers they engage (often as volunteers), and must provide assurances that only curricula approved by the provider are taught. While schools must give information to parents/ caregivers at the time of enrolment, in newsletters and on the school's website about the SRE that is available,



SRE providers are responsible for informing parents about the content of the lessons, putting the curriculum scope and sequence materials online and responding to requests for more information.

The Department also chairs a Consultative Committee for Special Religious Education that provides advice on its implementation and operation.

Today, SRE is delivered in NSW by 29 faith groups, through more than 100 providers, and is generally available in government schools from K–10.

## **Resourcing**

SRE providers do not receive any government funding to deliver their classes in schools; and the resources available to providers to manage and coordinate the delivery of SRE vary widely from provider to provider.

### **1.1.2 Special Education in Ethics**

Since 2011, primary schools may include a course in SEE as an option for students whose parents have requested their child be exempted from SRE. According to Primary Ethics (currently the sole provider), SEE is education in ethical decision-making, action and reflection within a secular framework, based on a branch of philosophy. Principals may not refuse the establishment of SEE classes, where there is an Ethics coordinator and at least one trained SEE teacher available and it is 'reasonably practical'. NSW is the only jurisdiction in Australia to make legislative provision for SEE.

## **Delivery**

SEE is provided by Primary Ethics for students from K–6. Primary Ethics is responsible for all aspects of course delivery, including providing trained volunteers and resources. The Department has implementation guidelines for the delivery of SEE and a Consultative Committee for Special Education in Ethics.

While Primary Ethics allows parents to register interest in ethics classes through its website, the composition of classes is determined by the school principal once the parent body has been notified of the availability of SEE classes at their school for children whose parents have sought exemption from SRE.

Parents whose children attended SRE but who wish for their children to participate in SEE classes must first formally seek exemption from SRE. This must be done in writing. Places should only be offered in SEE classes (if available) after the written application has been confirmed.

## Resourcing

Primary Ethics is a not-for-profit public company that, in 2013, received Deductible Gift Recipient status. This has aligned its tax status with religious and charitable organisations.

## 1.2 Approach to the Review

### 1.2.1 Purpose

The Department of Education commissioned an independent review of the implementation of SRE and SEE classes in NSW Government schools in response to Recommendation 14 of the Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012) which states

*That the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) commission an independent review of both Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics in NSW government schools to be conducted by appropriately qualified early childhood educational reviewers in 2014-2015.*

The Review is not being conducted to determine whether SRE or SEE should be offered in NSW public schools.

### Terms of Reference and Review questions

The Review examined the following Terms of Reference and was guided by the related Review questions. Recommendations have been provided against each Term of Reference.

| Terms of Reference                            | Review questions   |
|---|--|
| The nature and extent of SRE and SEE          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the student participation rate in SRE and SEE in NSW Government schools?</li> <li>▪ Has the participation rate changed over the last five (5) years?</li> <li>▪ Who delivers SRE and SEE, and where?</li> <li>▪ What curricula are delivered in NSW public schools and how are they delivered?</li> </ul>   |
| DoE implementation procedures for SRE and SEE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How aware are the school community and providers of the implementation procedures for SRE and SEE?</li> <li>▪ How closely are the implementation procedures for the provision of SRE and SEE complied with by schools, providers and DoE?</li> <li>▪ To what extent are parents/ caregivers able to exercise their rights to make a choice about their child/ren's participation in SRE and SEE?</li> </ul> |

| Terms of Reference  | Review questions  |
|---|---|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent are changes needed to policy and implementation procedures to better support the successful delivery of SRE and SEE in NSW schools?</li> <li>▪ To what extent do the Department, providers and schools have adequate policies, processes and protocols in place to support the successful delivery of SRE and SEE and ensure that emerging issues and complaints are adequately addressed?</li> </ul> |
| Development of complaints procedures and protocols  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent are changes needed to policies and complaints processes to strengthen these to better protect children and young people and ensure SRE and SEE are delivered according to the approved curriculum?</li> </ul>   |
| SRE and SEE providers' training structures  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent are SRE and SEE teachers sufficiently prepared and skilled, and supported to successfully deliver SRE and SEE in the classroom?</li> <li>▪ To what extent are SRE and SEE teachers appropriately screened to protect children from persons who have a history of misconduct with children?</li> </ul>   |
| Registration of SRE and SEE Boards, Associations and Committees   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a) How effective are the processes used by DoE to approve providers?</li> <li>▪ b) Is there a need for registration of SRE and SEE Boards, Associations and Committees?</li> </ul>   |
| New modes and patterns of delivery using technology   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What computer-based technology is being used and how does it support the delivery of SRE and SEE?</li> </ul>   |
| Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SRE across all Years K to 10 and teaching and learning in SEE in Years K to 6 in a variety of demographics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How appropriate are the approved curricula for different Stages (age groups) and students from different backgrounds?</li> <li>▪ To what extent are SRE and SEE teachers successfully implementing approved curriculum materials in the classroom?</li> <li>▪ To what extent are SRE and SEE teachers following the approved curricula in the classroom?</li> </ul>  |
| The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice or opting out  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is annual confirmation of parents'/ caregivers' choice regarding their child/ren's participation in SRE needed? Why or why not?</li> <li>▪ Which stakeholder groups support an annual confirmation of parents'/ caregivers' choice regarding their child/ren's participation?</li> </ul>   |
| Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What do students who do not attend SRE or SEE do during scheduled SRE and SEE classes and how are they supervised?</li> </ul>  |

## 1.2.2 Scope

This Review examined the implementation of SRE and SEE in NSW Government schools in 2015, with a view to providing recommendations about improving the delivery of SRE and SEE.

The Review included:

- NSW Government primary and secondary schools. Primary schools cover Years K–6 and include primary, central, community and infants schools, and Schools for Specific Purposes. Secondary schools cover Years 7–10 and include secondary schools, central schools, community schools and Schools for Specific Purposes. One thousand and three principals (45%) completed a survey about SRE and SEE, and 43 schools participated in case studies.
- 29 broad faith groups, represented by 101 individual organisations providing SRE in schools.
- Primary Ethics, the only approved SEE provider.

The Review did not evaluate student learning outcomes of SRE teaching and SEE teaching sessions, nor did it cover general religious education classes.

### Context

The continuation of SRE in NSW Government schools is beyond the Terms of Reference for this Review. At the same time, there are polarised views on this question in the community that form a larger context to this Review and the type of evidence it gathered. Groups who place a high value on tradition argue that the historic position of SRE in schools is grounds for its continuation. They see it as providing a much needed spiritual component to the holistic education of children in government schools. Others claim that in our contemporary society, SRE has lost its relevance and is potentially damaging in the views it espouses.

The introduction of SEE in 2010–11 was contested, highly scrutinised and politicised. SEE was promoted as an alternative to non-SRE rather than to SRE, with enrolment guidelines formulated accordingly. This position and its related processes have been publicly debated during 2015, with the release of new enrolment forms in 2014 and 2015.

## 1.2.3 Overview of methodology

The Review methods were chosen to allow all interested stakeholders and the community the opportunity to present their views; so that the findings and recommendations of the Review are based on a systematic and balanced assessment of these views and other available evidence. Evidence was reviewed and data collected between January and September 2015.

## **Document scan**

Departmental and provider documents/ websites were reviewed, including the 2014 and 2015 SRE and SEE policy and implementation procedures<sup>4</sup>, and the websites of all current providers in December 2014 for their SRE or SEE outlines/ curriculum scope and sequence documents which formed part of the curriculum review.

## **Consultations**

Those wishing to contribute to the Review could do so through specific modes: in-depth interviews, answering surveys, and by making a contribution via an online contribution portal (Tables 1 and 2). All contributions were used as evidence for the Review. Contributions to the online contribution portals were coded in NVivo against a coding frame to facilitate the analysis of respondents' views.

The **online contribution portals** were set up to allow those interested in making a contribution to the Review to raise issues under the Terms of Reference (ToR), which are documented in section 1.2.1. While the responses reflect significant issues for those who responded, they cannot be considered as representative of the whole NSW community. Indeed, the Reviewers are aware that groups with an interest in the Review were active in encouraging their constituents to contribute via the Review online contribution portal and directly to the Department. This encouragement included providing suggested wording for responding to the Terms of Reference and using the web and social media networks to raise awareness of the Review. The Christian denominations were particularly active with submissions to the 'other interested parties' portal, which overwhelmingly came from Christian congregation members, church ministers and other church groups including SRE Boards, Associations and Committees. The parent/ caregiver online contribution portal had a high proportion of submissions from parents who identified themselves as Christian, and from parents whose children attend SEE lessons.

**Case studies** covering 12 SRE providers from 11 faith groups, and the delivery of SEE by Primary Ethics in two locations (Sydney metropolitan and NSW regional) were completed. In each case study, up to four schools where the provider delivers lessons were also consulted. Across the different faith groups, the sampling frame ensured that two SRE providers were serving predominately non-metropolitan communities, three were operating in communities with a high proportion of English as a second language, up to two were recently approved (within the last five years), and three have developed their own curriculum and own training (not purchased from a third party).

---

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/spec\\_religious/REimplementproced.pdf](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/spec_religious/REimplementproced.pdf)

A case study covers the local organising structure for a provider, plus the provider's centralised policy, management and support functions for SRE or SEE, with some of the local schools with which the provider collaborates to deliver SRE or SEE. The local organising structure represents the smallest geographic level on which SRE or SEE is coordinated, and is essentially the organising 'unit' that principals will deal with. This is of necessity a broad definition, because the provision of SRE is very diverse and linked closely to the organising structure of each faith group or religious persuasion and to available resources. There are multiple providers for each faith group. Because of this diversity, what each case study includes depends on the provider's organisational structure.

By contrast, SEE is managed by one provider, where volunteer Regional Managers manage up to 25 active schools and their Ethics coordinators in a geographical region.

**Table 1. Consultations with schools and providers**

| Consultation method                                   | Purpose  | Responses received  |
|---|--|---|
| Survey of principals.                                 | To collect evidence about the nature and extent of SRE and SEE, activities for non-participants and about complaints.  | 1,003 schools returned a Survey of Principals, which is a response rate of 46%. See Appendix 1 for comparison of demographics with all NSW schools.<br>855 schools that responded to the survey held SRE in 2015.   |
| Survey of SRE and SEE providers.                      | To understand roles and responsibilities within provider organisations, obtain curriculum materials, learn about training of SRE teachers and views on enrolment policy. | 81 responses from 101 providers, response rate of 80%.<br>Twelve follow-up phone calls with providers who did not complete a survey, of whom 4 were not currently offering SRE. There were 10 new providers in 2015 |
| Survey of provider SRE coordinators.                  | To collect evidence about how SRE is delivered to schools from the perspective of providers.   | 617 responses, response rate of 60%.<br>96% responses from Christian SRE coordinators, three percent Hindu, one percent from other faith groups.  |
| Survey of provider SEE coordinators.                  | To collect evidence about how SEE is delivered.  | 154 responses, response rate of 48%.  |
| Semi-structured interviews with PERG representatives. | To gain a broad understanding of how different providers manage, coordinate SRE and SEE, and their approaches to the support and training of SRE and SEE teachers.       | 15 interviews.  |

| Consultation method  | Purpose  | Responses received  |
|--|--|---|
| Online contribution portal where SRE teachers could make contributions, included closed and open questions.  | To collect evidence about the implementation of SRE from SRE teachers' perspectives.   | 3,035 responses.<br>99% Christian SRE.<br>81% volunteers/ 19% employed.<br>86% giving lessons in primary schools, seven percent secondary schools and six percent both.<br>56% Sydney metropolitan schools, 44% rural/ regional.  |
| Online contribution portal where SEE teachers could make contributions, included closed and open questions.  | To collect evidence about the implementation of SEE from SEE teachers' perspectives.   | 414 responses.<br>65% giving lessons in Sydney metropolitan schools, 35% in rural/ regional schools.  |
| 12 case studies: Face-to-face interviews with SRE coordinators, SRE teachers, principals, school-based SRE coordinators.<br>SRE providers consulted: 2 x Catholic dioceses, 1 x Anglican, 3 x combined Christian, 2 x Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Baha'i. | To gain an in-depth understanding of how SRE is delivered in schools on the ground and at the local level; exploring the perspectives of all those involved. | 23 SRE coordinators (for providers) and 60 SRE teachers.<br>Across 39 SRE case study schools, interviews with 24 principals and 25 coordinators of SRE. These schools included 9 secondary schools and 1 School for Specific Purposes (SSP) (students with disability). |
| 2 case studies: Face-to-face interviews with SEE coordinators, SEE teachers, principals, school-based SEE coordinators.  | To gain an in-depth understanding of how SEE is delivered in schools on the ground and at the local level; exploring the perspectives of all those involved. | Interviews with 6 provider SEE coordinators and 21 SEE teachers.<br>Across 4 SEE case study schools, interviews with 3 principals and 2 school-based coordinators of SEE.   |

**Table 2. Consultations with the community, peak groups and other interested parties**

| Consultation method   | Purpose  | Responses received   |
|---|--|--|
| Online contribution portal where parents/ caregivers could make contributions, included closed and open questions based on the Terms of Reference and the Review questions. | To allow parents/ caregivers to give feedback about their own and their child/ren's experience of SRE and SEE. | 5,406 responses.<br>3,894 respondents have children in primary school, 1,243 in both primary and secondary school, and 269 in secondary school only.<br>3,921 respondents' children attend Christian SRE, 142 non-Christian SRE, 1,428 attend SEE classes. |

| Consultation method   | Purpose  | Responses received  |
|---|--|---|
| Online contribution portal where other interested parties could make contributions against each Term of Reference, open responses only. | To allow other interested parties to give their feedback about the implementation of SRE and SEE in NSW.       | 4,609 individual responses.<br>85 organisational responses including 30 churches; 20 SRE Boards, Associations and Committees; 11 other Christian groups; 12 non-faith based groups/ organisations   |
| Semi-structured interviews/ group discussions with peak provider, education and other relevant groups.                                  | To allow peak groups to represent the views of their organisation on the implementation of SRE and SEE in NSW. | 9 consultation meetings: Department of Education Learning and Leadership, ICCOREIS, CCRESS, NSW Office of the Children's Guardian, NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, NSW Secondary Principals' Council, NSW Primary Principals' Association, The Centre for Volunteering, and Generate Ministries. |

### Curriculum review

The curriculum review was completed by a Queensland-based education expert with extensive experience across K-12 in curriculum development, pedagogy, effective teaching and assessment.

A criterion-referenced matrix was developed to provide the framework for evaluating the curriculum materials. The framework was refined through consultation with the NSW Department of Education. The criteria-referenced matrix was organised into three distinct but interrelated categories of curriculum documentation:

- Category 1: Documents that provide an outline of the curriculum or a scope and sequence of what is to be taught. It is the responsibility of approved providers to make these publicly accessible on a website.
- Category 2: Documents that provide guidelines and strategies to support SRE or SEE teachers.
- Category 3: Resource materials developed for students.

To ensure a systematic and unbiased review of curriculum materials, specific indicators were identified for each category. Indicators directly related to Recommendations 3, 4 and 14 of the Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012), and were numbered accordingly.

Documents assigned to Category 1 (scope and sequence) were reviewed according to the following specific indicators:

- an outline of the curriculum is provided (Recommendation 4)



- a curriculum scope and sequence is presented in the order in which it is to be taught (Recommendation 4)
- learning is sequenced across Year levels and/or phases of learning (Recommendation 3)
- age appropriate learning experiences are clearly identified (Recommendation 3), and what is to be taught in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills is clear.

Documents assigned to Category 2 (SRE teacher resources) were reviewed according to the following specific indicators:

- provides clarity to SRE or SEE teachers about what is to be taught (Recommendation 14)
- articulates a clear sequence of learning (Recommendation 4)
- identifies age appropriate learning experiences that support and deepen student learning, understanding and skills (Recommendation 3)
- overarching themes and/or units of work and/or lesson plans assist SRE or SEE teachers to identify the focus for learning (Recommendation 14)
- assists SRE or SEE teachers to plan opportunities for students to actively engage with and participate in lessons (Recommendation 14)
- assists SRE or SEE teachers to include the range of students in their classes, for example, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, students with a range of learning needs and students across a range of ages in multi-age classes (Recommendation 14).

Documents assigned to Category 3 (student resources) were reviewed according to the following specific indicators:

- organise learning into manageable 'chunks' that can be taught in available time with available resources (Recommendation 14)
- provide age appropriate learning experiences with opportunities for students to actively participate in lessons (Recommendations 3 and 14)
- provide opportunities for all students to achieve success (Recommendation 14)
- reflect the range of students in classes, for example, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, students with a range of learning needs and students across a range of ages in multi-age classes (Recommendation 14)
- include the use of ICTs and multi-media resources (Recommendation 14).

A three-point rating scale was applied to each specific indicator.

- 0 was allocated when there was no evidence of the indicator in the document under review
- 1 was allocated when there was some evidence of the indicator in the document under review
- 2 was allocated when there was sufficient evidence to meet the indicator in the document under review.

A double blind-marking procedure was used to check the ability of the evaluation framework to support consistent judgments about the curriculum materials under review. Both the external consultant and a staff member from DoE with expertise in SRE marked a set of seven

randomly selected curriculum documents. The double blind-marking procedure revealed the need to increase the clarity of the evaluation framework to further support consistent and unbiased judgments. This was achieved by: defining key terms used as the basis to review curriculum documents (glossary), and developing more detailed descriptions of the evidence used to allocate the three-point ratings.

At the start of the Review, 44 curriculum outlines/ scope and sequence documents were downloaded from the websites of approved providers or their associated faith group. All of these documents were reviewed.

Curriculum documents include teacher's manuals, student activity books and other student resources. Large Christian SRE providers that produce curriculum resources used widely in Christian SRE classes across NSW<sup>5</sup> provided the Review with a comprehensive set of materials in hardcopy. Other providers made curriculum materials available to the Review through the Survey of Providers and at case study interviews (see Appendix 2 for an overview of the source of documents reviewed). Where comprehensive sets of documents were provided they were sampled across a selection of Years or Stages, outlined in the case examples (section 5.4). A total of 274 documents were received, of which 77 were reviewed using the evaluation framework.

Category 1: Curriculum outline/ scope and sequence documents.

- 43 SRE documents were collected and reviewed using the indicators for category 1
- 1 SEE document was reviewed using the indicators

Category 2: Teacher Guideline/ Handbook for SRE or SEE teachers

- 47 SRE documents were reviewed using the indicators from Category 2.
- 6 SEE documents were reviewed using the indicators from Category 2.

Category 3: Resources/ Activity books for students

- 24 SRE documents were reviewed using the indicators from Category 3.
- No SEE documents were reviewed using the indicators from Category 3. This is because SEE lessons are based on discussions, not completion of work sheets.

## 1.3 Report structure

The report has three parts: Part A addresses SRE, Part B addresses SEE and Part C gives the Review recommendations. The ToR have been grouped together in related areas, so that some chapters cover several ToR, while some ToR containing multiple parts are split over more than one chapter. Part B follows the structure of Part A, but some ToR only apply to SRE

---

<sup>5</sup> Christian Education Publications (Anglican Church), Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, GodSpace (Baptist Churches of NSW and ACT), PREP (Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW)

or are covered fully in Part A. This is acknowledged in the text. The following table shows where the ToR are addressed in the report.

**Table 3. Report structure: Terms of Reference by report chapter and section**

| Terms of Reference |  | Chapter and section |          |
|--------------------|--|---------------------|----------|
|                    |  | SRE                 | SEE      |
| 1                  | The nature and extent of SRE and SEE   | 2                   | 8        |
| 2                  | Department of Education implementation procedures for SRE and SEE including:   | 3.1                 | 9.1      |
|                    | ▪ parent/ carer choice through the enrolment process and opting out  | 4.1                 | See 4.1  |
|                    | ▪ approval of SRE and SEE providers by DoE   | 3.2                 | 9.2      |
|                    | ▪ authorisation of volunteer teachers by providers   | 3.3                 | 9.3      |
|                    | ▪ authorisation of curriculum by providers   | 3.4                 | 9.4      |
| 3                  | Development of complaints procedures and protocols   | 4.3                 | 10       |
| 4                  | SRE and SEE providers' training structures   | 6.1                 | 12.1     |
| 5                  | Registration of SRE and SEE Boards, Associations and Committees  | 3.5                 | See 3.5  |
| 6                  | New modes and patterns of delivery using technology  | 6.3                 | 12.3     |
| 7                  | Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning across all Years K to 10 and teaching and learning in SEE in Years K to 6 in a variety of demographics | 5; 6.2              | 11; 12.2 |
| 8                  | The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice or opting out   | 4.2                 | See 4.2  |
| 9                  | Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE  | 7                   | See 7    |

## A: Review of Special Religious Education

This part of the report describes findings of the Review of the implementation of Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW in 2015. The first chapter describes the nature and extent of SRE. The remaining chapters are structured around the Terms of Reference, to first describe what is intended or required, examine what occurs in practice and then draw conclusions about how implementation might be improved and any issues are addressed. Where evidence is available the role of providers and the Department are drawn out and different stakeholders' perspectives on what occurs in practice captured.

## 2. The nature and extent of Special Religious Education

This chapter describes the nature and extent of SRE, covering the integral roles of the Department of Education (the Department) at all levels; the many faith organisations that deliver SRE to students, and the numbers of volunteer and paid SRE teachers and coordinators; schools and students.

### 2.1 Responsibilities for provision of Special Religious Education and what is intended or required

Responsibility for the implementation of SRE is shared between the Department (including principals) and the organisations that provide SRE to schools. Departmental policy outlines the broad parameters of SRE with guidelines for implementation provided in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*.

**Table 4. Main areas of responsibility**

| Group responsible       | Areas of responsibility  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Department of Education | <p><i>Religious Education Implementation Procedures</i></p> <p>Approval of providers</p> <p>Resolution of complaints not resolved at the school level</p> <p><b>Principals</b></p> <p>Oversight of the implementation of SRE within the school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Providers are approved by the Department</li> <li>▪ SRE teachers are authorised by their provider and have WWCC</li> <li>▪ Parents receive information</li> <li>▪ Enrolment processes are followed</li> <li>▪ Students not participating in SRE or SEE have adequate supervision and meaningful activities</li> <li>▪ Resolution of complaints</li> </ul> |
| Approved providers      | <p>Authorisation of SRE teachers</p> <p>Arrange WWCC for SRE teachers and inform the Department</p> <p>Provide training for SRE teachers</p> <p>Authorisation of curriculum</p> <p>Provision of curriculum outline on website for parent information</p> <p>Satisfactory complaints procedures</p>   |

Parents and caregivers also have a responsibility to take an active interest in what their children participate in at school.

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (July 2015) state that:

*A range of patterns is used to organise special religious education in schools. Care is taken not to adopt any form of organisation which could be of more benefit to some providers than to others.*

*Any pattern of providing special religious education must be equivalent to an average of at least 30 minutes per week and no more than one hour per week.*

#### *Class groups*

*In many schools, class-based organisation will support SRE because it features regular contact, and planned and systematic teaching. Time assigned for these classes will reflect the age and attention span of students and will be no less than 30 minutes.*

#### *Combined arrangements*

*Religious persuasions may decide to provide a combined arrangement. If this occurs, each religious persuasion must be an approved provider of SRE in NSW Government schools. SRE lessons in combined arrangements must be delivered by authorised representatives who are authorised by at least one of the approved providers within a combined arrangement. The curriculum delivered through a combined arrangement must be authorised by at least one of the approved providers. No religious persuasion should be compelled to participate in this form of organisation. A combined arrangement should be reviewed periodically by the school and the religious persuasions involved. In a combined arrangement, only those students whose parents/ caregivers have nominated them to attend SRE classes of one of the participating religious persuasions are to be included.*

Schools are responsible for facilitating SRE in schools: liaising with providers, scheduling SRE classes, maintaining SRE records, arranging spaces for SRE classes to be held, and informing about and monitoring SRE teachers' compliance with departmental policies and resolving complaints (Section 4.3).

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* state that schools have the following responsibilities:

*Principals allow time for special religious education where authorised representatives of approved providers are available.*

*Special religious education is an integral part of school activities, taking place in school hours and under the jurisdiction of the school.*

*Principals support special religious education by ensuring that no academic instruction or formal school activities occur during time set aside for special religious education. Such activities create conflict of choice for some parents and students attending special religious education.*

*Principals also support special religious education by making adequate facilities available for the provision of special religious education and special education in ethics, including timetable provisions and classrooms.*

*School special religious education coordinator*

*Where appropriate, a member of staff is appointed as the school's special religious education coordinator. Duties of the coordinator include:*

- arranging meetings early in Term 4 between the school and representatives of the approved religious providers to discuss special religious education organisation for the following year.*
- liaising with special religious education teachers to familiarise them with the procedures and operations of the school, especially at the beginning of the year and advise them of any variations of school routine affecting special religious education.*
- maintaining special religious education records, including: an up-to-date list of the authorised special religious education teachers from the approved religious providers and a list of the names of students in each class for special religious education teachers .*
- advising parents/ caregivers of arrangements for special religious education classes for the next year and ongoing information about any changes as they occur.*

## **2.2 Providers**

SRE has a long history in NSW, having been legislated for in the nineteenth century. It has grown and diversified in recent years, reflecting the multicultural community in NSW. Currently there are over 100 faith organisations providing SRE in NSW Government schools representing a diversity of faith groups: Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Islam, Buddhist, Baha'i, Sikh and Vedic. Many of the faith groups are multi-denominational including Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Islam SRE. Christianity is the largest faith group and includes Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, Orthodox and independent churches, some of whom are working together to offer combined Christian SRE in some areas, particularly regional and rural locations.

The resources and organisational structures supporting SRE providers vary enormously. Large Christian denominations have peak groups that provide support, but smaller churches may work independently. In other faith groups, providers usually work independently from each other. While some larger bodies provide SRE, e.g. the Buddhist Council of NSW, and the Islamic Council of NSW, their structures and relationship with their faith communities vary.

## 2.2.1 Main faith groups providing SRE

At the beginning of 2015, there were 101 SRE providers with 87 being Christian groups and 14 providers offering SRE from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Sikh and Vedic faith groups (Table 5).

**Table 5. Main faith groups providing SRE in 2015**

| Christian           | N               | Other faiths | N               |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Catholic            | 11              | Baha'i       | 1               |
| Anglican            | 7               | Buddhist     | 3               |
| Evangelical         | 13              | Hindu        | 3               |
| Baptist             | 1               | Islamic      | 3               |
| Independent Baptist | 9               | Jewish       | 1               |
| Presbyterian        | 3               | Sikh         | 2               |
| Other groups        | 43              | Vedic        | 1               |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>87 (86%)</b> |              | <b>14 (14%)</b> |

Source: Approved providers 2015, Department of Education

Note: Other groups includes Apostolic, Armenian Apostolic, Associated Christian Ministries, Australian Christian Churches/ Kids R Us (Hillsong), Australian Indigenous Ministries, Brethren, Christian Reformed Churches, Churches of Christ, Congregational, CRC Churches International, independent Christian, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventist, The Salvation Army, Uniting Church.

Christian SRE is offered across the state, and in many settings. The larger denominational providers—Catholic, Anglican and Baptist—provide SRE in all types of schools (primary, secondary, central, and Schools for Specific Purposes) in Sydney, regional towns and rural areas. Other Christian groups can also be found across these different settings.

Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Sikh and Vedic faith groups all provide SRE in primary schools in Sydney. Four groups offer SRE in secondary schools (Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Jewish), and two in Schools for Specific Purposes (Hindu and Islamic). Baha'i SRE and Buddhist SRE are offered in some regional towns and rural areas. Islamic SRE is offered in some regional towns, and Jewish SRE in some rural areas (Table 6).



**Table 6. Main faith groups' participation in schools in 2015, by location and type of schools**

| N=81                  | N  | Sydney metro | Regional towns | Rural | Primary schools | Secondary schools | Central schools | Schools for Specific Purposes |
|-----------------------|----|--------------|----------------|-------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Christian             |    |              |                |       |                 |                   |                 |                               |
| ▪ Catholic            | 11 | ✓            | ✓              | ✓     | ✓               | ✓                 | ✓               | ✓                             |
| ▪ Anglican            | 5  | ✓            | ✓              | ✓     | ✓               | ✓                 | ✓               | ✓                             |
| ▪ Evangelical         | 11 |              | ✓              |       | ✓               | ✓                 | ✓               |                               |
| ▪ Baptist             | 1  | ✓            | ✓              | ✓     | ✓               | ✓                 | ✓               | ✓                             |
| ▪ Independent Baptist | 8  | ✓            |                |       | ✓               | ✓                 |                 |                               |
| ▪ Presbyterian        | 2  | ✓            | ✓              |       | ✓               | ✓                 | ✓               | ✓                             |
| ▪ Other groups        | 32 | ✓            | ✓              | ✓     | ✓               | ✓                 | ✓               | ✓                             |
| Baha'i                | 1  | ✓            | ✓              | ✓     | ✓               |                   |                 |                               |
| Buddhist              | 3  | ✓            | ✓              | ✓     | ✓               | ✓                 |                 |                               |
| Hindu                 | 2  | ✓            |                |       | ✓               | ✓                 |                 | ✓                             |
| Islamic               | 2  | ✓            | ✓              |       | ✓               | ✓                 |                 | ✓                             |
| Jewish                | 1  | ✓            |                | ✓     | ✓               | ✓                 |                 |                               |
| Sikh                  | 2  | ✓            |                |       |                 |                   |                 |                               |
| Vedic                 | 1  | ✓            |                |       | ✓               |                   |                 |                               |

Source: Survey of Providers.

Note: other groups includes Apostolic, Armenian Apostolic, Associated Christian Ministries, Australian Christian Churches/Kids R Us (Hillsong), Australian Indigenous Ministries, Brethren, Christian Reformed Churches, Churches of Christ, Congregational, CRC Churches International, Independent Christian, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventist, The Salvation Army, Uniting Church.

### **Combined delivery of SRE**

It is a common practice for Christian groups to share resources and provide a combined Christian SRE, especially in regional and rural areas, although this is also found in Sydney. Catholic and Anglican dioceses vary in their participation with shared SRE delivery: both groups have one diocese that always is part of shared arrangements, while other dioceses

sometimes offer SRE in this way. There are four Catholic dioceses<sup>6</sup> where they do not take part in shared SRE delivery. One Hindu and the Vedic provider said that they sometimes share SRE delivery with other providers.

SRE Boards, Associations and Committees (SRE Boards) are usually formed to provide governance for Christian combined SRE delivery arrangements. The stated functions and roles of SRE Boards include managing resources and organising key SRE functions such as liaison with schools, training, promotion, recruitment, employment and support of local SRE teachers (see also section 3.5.2).

**Table 7. Proportion of providers offering combined Christian SRE**

| Faith group         | N  | Always | Sometimes | Never | Total | Unsure | No data |
|---------------------|----|--------|-----------|-------|-------|--------|---------|
| Catholic            | 10 | 10%    | 50%       | 40%   | 100%  | 1      |         |
| Anglican            | 4  | 25%    | 75%       | 0%    | 100%  |        | 1       |
| Evangelical         | 9  | 67%    | 22%       | 11%   | 100%  |        | 2       |
| Baptist             | 1  | 100%   | 0%        | 0%    | 100%  |        |         |
| Independent Baptist | 7  | 29%    | 43%       | 29%   | 100%  |        | 1       |
| Presbyterian        | 2  | 50%    | 50%       | 0%    | 100%  |        |         |
| Other Christian     | 29 | 54%    | 38%       | 8%    | 100%  | 3      |         |

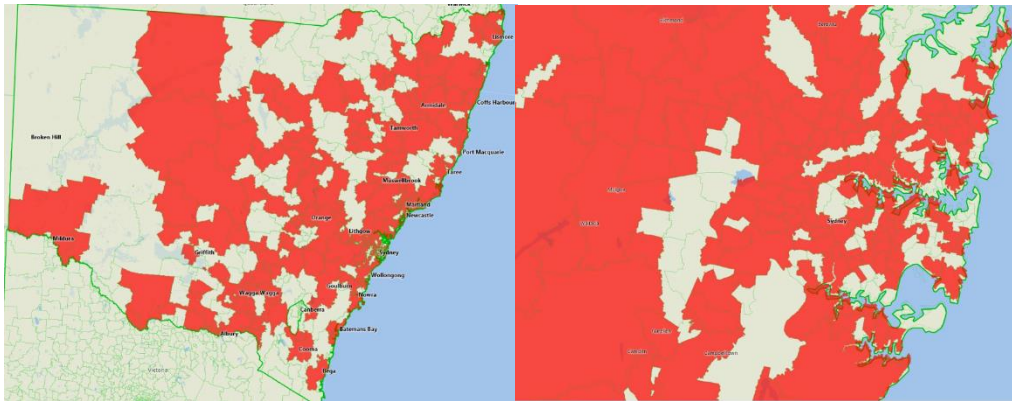
Source: Survey of Providers.

### ***Mapping the distribution of the provision of SRE***

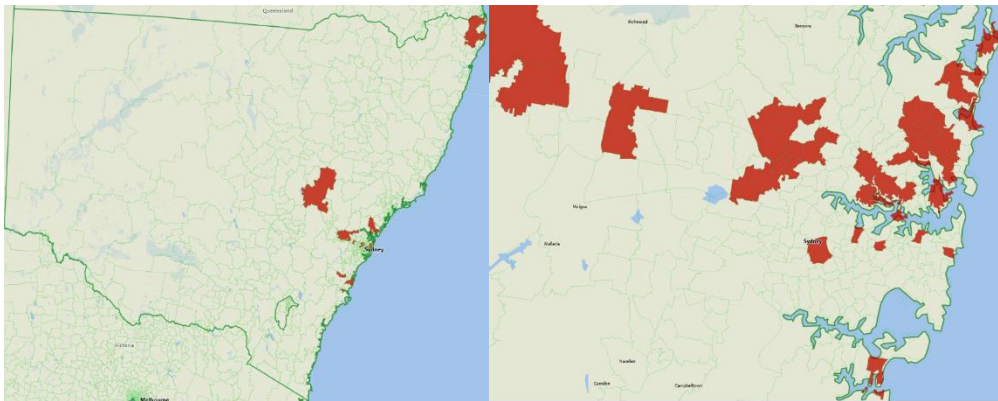
Figures 1 to 7 illustrate the provision of SRE in NSW and metropolitan Sydney. The maps show postcode areas where SRE of different faith groups is delivered, based on data provided by the Survey of Principals. These maps may underestimate the coverage of some faith groups, particularly larger ones such as Christian. Vedic is not shown because no principal who returned a survey listed them as a provider.

<sup>6</sup>Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, Catholic Diocese of Sydney, Catholic Diocese of Armidale, Catholic Diocese of Wollongong.

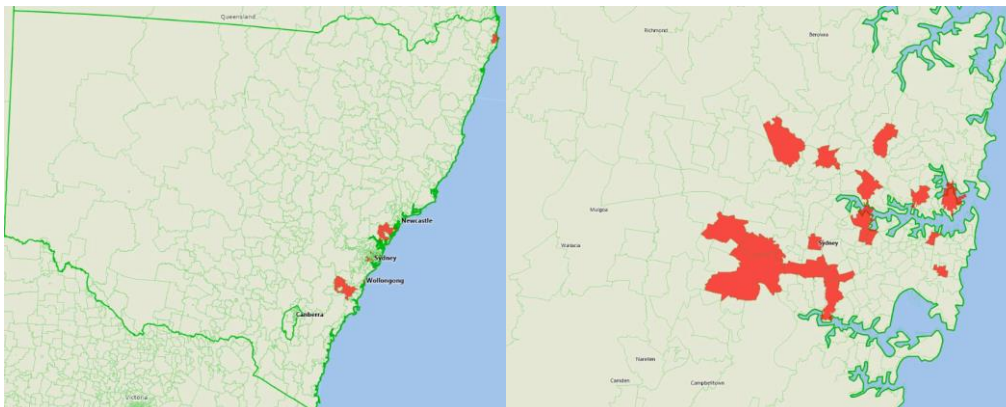
**Figure 1. Christian: NSW and Sydney area**



**Figure 2. Baha'i: NSW and Sydney area**



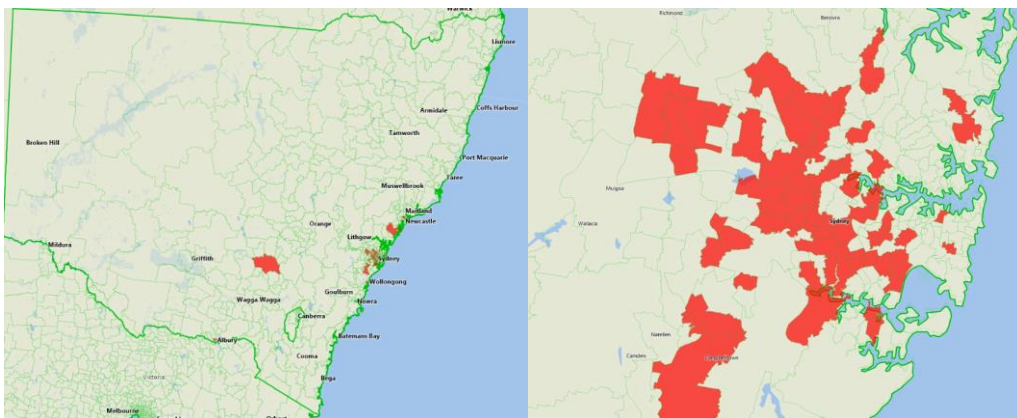
**Figure 3. Buddhist: NSW and Sydney area**



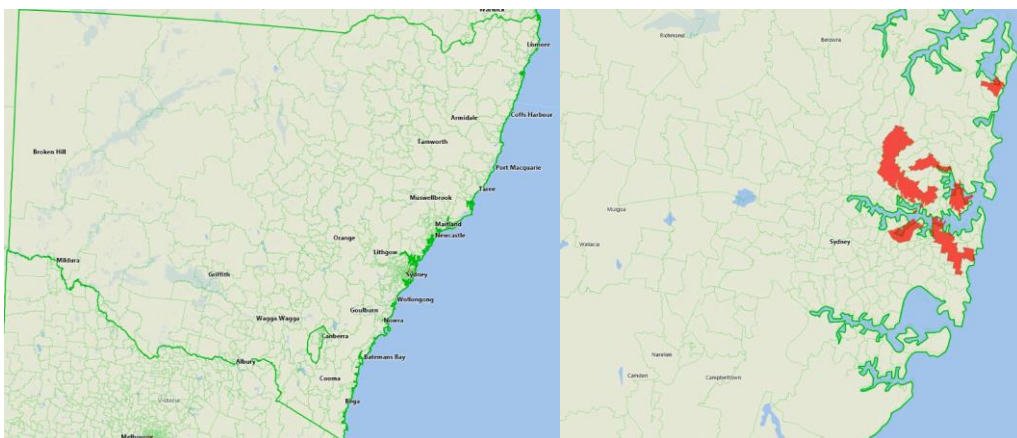
**Figure 4. Hindu: NSW and Sydney area**

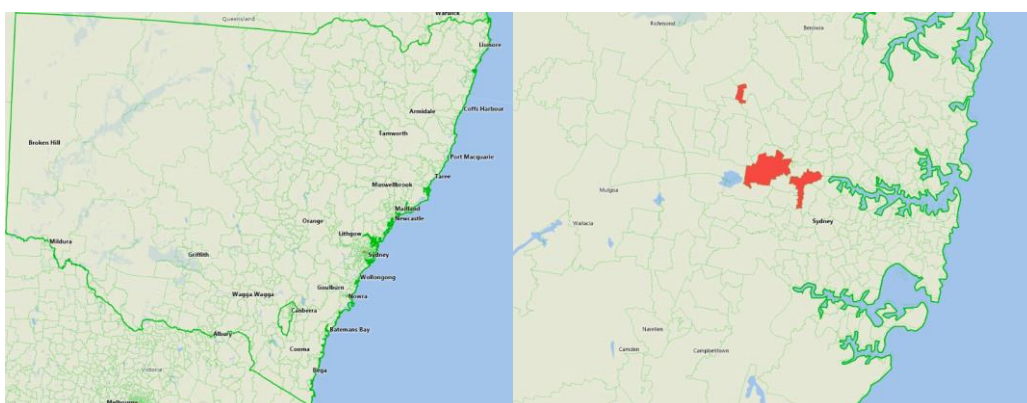


**Figure 5. Islam: NSW and Sydney area**



**Figure 6. Jewish: NSW and Sydney area**



**Figure 7. Sikh: NSW and Sydney area**

## 2.2.2 SRE teachers

Providers who responded to the survey provided information about numbers of volunteer and paid SRE teachers (Table 8).

**Table 8. Number of SRE teachers by main faith groups**

| Faith group           | N         | Volunteer           | Paid            | Total         |             | No data  |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|----------|
| Christian             |           |                     |                 |               |             |          |
| ▪ Catholic            | 11        | 5,368               | 15              | 5,383         | 52%         |          |
| ▪ Anglican            | 3         | 2,400               | 16              | 2,416         | 23%         | 2        |
| ▪ Evangelical         | 9         | 120                 | 6               | 126           | 1%          | 2        |
| ▪ Baptist             | 1         | 817                 | 83              | 900           | 9%          |          |
| ▪ Independent Baptist | 7         | 29                  | 9               | 38            | <1%         | 1        |
| ▪ Presbyterian        | 2         | 333                 | 80              | 413           | 4%          |          |
| ▪ Other               | 28        | 1,114               | 16              | 1,130         | 11%         | 4        |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>61</b> | <b>10,181 (98%)</b> | <b>225 (2%)</b> | <b>10,406</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>9</b> |
|                       |           |                     |                 |               |             |          |
| Baha'i                | 1         | 50                  |                 | 50            | 5%          |          |
| Buddhist              | 3         | 54                  | 0               | 54            | 5%          |          |
| Hindu                 | 2         | 290                 | 40              | 330           | 33%         |          |
| Islamic               | 2         | 530                 | 0               | 530           | 52%         |          |

| Faith group        | N         | Volunteer           | Paid            | Total         |             | No data   |
|--------------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Jewish             | 1         |                     | 40              | 40            | 4%          |           |
| Sikh               | 0         |                     |                 |               |             | 1         |
| Vedic              | 1         | 8                   |                 | 8             | 1%          |           |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>10</b> | <b>932 (92%)</b>    | <b>80 (8%)</b>  | <b>1,012</b>  | <b>100%</b> | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Grand Total</b> | <b>71</b> | <b>11,113 (97%)</b> | <b>305 (3%)</b> | <b>11,418</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>10</b> |

Source: Survey of Providers.

SRE teachers were surveyed for the Review via an online contribution portal that relied on providers informing their teachers about, and sending them the web link to access the survey. Most (87%) gave SRE lessons in primary schools only. Seven percent of SRE teachers who completed this survey offer SRE in secondary schools, and a further six percent offer SRE in both primary and secondary schools.

According to providers, in secondary schools, nearly two-thirds (63%) of the SRE teachers are paid employees. In primary schools, there is a much lower proportion of paid SRE teachers (13%). These figures include those who offer SRE as part of their paid employment (e.g. local ministers or youth worker employed by the church), as well as those who are being employed as SRE teachers.

### 2.2.3 SRE coordinators

SRE coordinators play an important role in the organisational structure of providers. Almost all of the SRE coordinators who responded to the Survey of Provider SRE Coordinators (96%, n=617) provide Christian SRE, and 69% do this as part of combined arrangements with other church denominations. While most respondents are volunteers, nearly one-quarter (23%) are paid employees. They are located across the state (37% of respondents are from country areas, and 23% from regional towns).

SRE coordinators can operate at different levels within their organisation, and hold many different responsibilities (Table 9). A third of survey respondents (34%) liaise with only one school, and the majority (83%) coordinate between one and five SRE teachers.

**Table 9. Coordinator responsibilities held by survey respondents**

| Responsibility  | N   | Percent |
|---|-----|---------|
| Passing along information to local SRE teachers                               | 598 | 95%     |
| Ongoing support for SRE teachers  | 581 | 94%     |
| Liaison with local schools  | 589 | 91%     |
| Recruitment of SRE teachers   | 581 | 89%     |
| Coordination of Working with Children Check or other child protection process | 579 | 82%     |
| Provide curriculum materials to SRE teachers                                  | 591 | 81%     |
| Coordination of induction for new SRE teachers                                | 565 | 77%     |
| Coordinate complaints processes for SRE teachers and/or schools               | 605 | 73%     |
| Coordination of training for new SRE teachers                                 | 597 | 72%     |
| Report to management of provider organisation                                 | 574 | 71%     |
| Authorisation of new SRE teachers   | 581 | 61%     |
| Liaison with a local SRE Board or Committee                                   | 577 | 57%     |
| Authorisation of curriculum materials   | 597 | 38%     |

Source: Survey of Provider SRE Coordinators.

## 2.3 School participation in SRE

State wide data are not collected on the number of schools with SRE classes operating in any year. An important source of evidence for the Review is the survey of all NSW Government school principals where questions were asked about school participation in SRE in 2015, patterns of organisation and level of student participation. Responses were received from almost half (46%) of principals surveyed. The pattern of responses from different types of schools is comparable to the overall proportion of schools (Table 10) giving confidence that the results are broadly representative and can be generalised.

**Table 10. Proportion of responses to Survey of Principals by type of school**

| School type                   | Distributed |             | Responses   |             | Response rate |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
|                               | Number      | Percent     | Number      | Percent     | Percent       |
| Primary school                | 1577        | 72%         | 737         | 73%         | 47%           |
| Secondary school              | 400         | 18%         | 201         | 20%         | 50%           |
| Central school                | 65          | 3%          | 25          | 2%          | 38%           |
| Schools for Specific Purposes | 136         | 6%          | 40          | 4%          | 29%           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                  | <b>2178</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>1003</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>46%</b>    |

Source: Survey of Principals

The results from the survey of principals show that in 2015 SRE classes were held in 87% of schools that responded, with 92% of primary schools holding SRE, and 81% of secondary schools.

**Table 11. Proportion of schools with SRE in 2015, based on Survey of Principals**

|                  | Running SRE | Not running SRE | Total      | Percent    | No data   |
|------------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Primary          | 670         | 56              | 726        | 92%        | 11        |
| Secondary        | 160         | 37              | 197        | 81%        | 4         |
| Central          | 19          | 6               | 25         | 76%        |           |
| Specific Purpose | 6           | 32              | 38         | 16%        | 2         |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>855</b>  | <b>131</b>      | <b>986</b> | <b>87%</b> | <b>17</b> |

Source: Survey of Principals.

A lower proportion of surveyed small primary schools (fewer than 150 students; 79%) held SRE in 2015, compared with larger primary schools where almost all (98%) held SRE. This appears to be because of the higher proportion of small primary schools operating in rural and remote locations (23% of primary schools are small schools in rural or remote areas). While 92% of small metropolitan schools provide SRE, only 75% of small provincial schools are providing it, and even fewer in remote areas.



**Table 12. Proportion of primary schools holding SRE, by size**

| Size           | Holding SRE | Not holding SRE | Total      | Percent    | No data   |
|----------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Fewer than 150 | 187         | 49              | 236        | 79%        | 4         |
| 150 to 450     | 319         | 5               | 324        | 98%        | 4         |
| 450 and above  | 164         | 1               | 165        | 99%        | 4         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>670</b>  | <b>55</b>       | <b>725</b> | <b>92%</b> | <b>12</b> |

Source: Survey of Principals.

Across all schools who responded to the survey, where SRE is not being held, the main reasons are that there is no demand (58%), or no supply of SRE teachers (23%). There is also a high proportion of Schools for Specific Purposes that do not hold SRE.<sup>7</sup> While providers concede that there are supply deficiencies in some areas, some question claims of no demand, particularly in secondary schools (Section 2.4).

### ***Patterns of organisation***

Half (50%) of schools who responded to the survey offer SRE to Year groups, while just over a third (36%) offer it to Stage groups<sup>8</sup>. Just over a quarter (26%) of schools have SRE classes for mixed age groups. A small proportion of schools (4%) deliver SRE to class groups. Mixed age groups can vary in composition, including K-2 or Years 3-6 in primary schools, and some include whole school groups.

---

<sup>7</sup> These include schools for students with intellectual disabilities, students with challenging behaviours and limited communication skills, Environmental Education Centres without student enrolments, hospital schools, Juvenile Justice Centre, distance education schools and schools with short term enrolments only.

<sup>8</sup> Early Stage 1 (Kindergarten); Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2); Stage 2 (Years 3 and 4); Stage 3 (Years 5 and 6); Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8); Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10)

**Table 13. Student groupings for SRE delivery, by type of school**

| School type      | N          | Class     | Year       | Stage      | Mixed age  |
|------------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Primary          | 512        | 4%        | 45%        | 42%        | 29%        |
| Secondary        | 139        | 4%        | 75%        | 12%        | 15%        |
| Central          | 16         | 0%        | 38%        | 56%        | 31%        |
| Specific Purpose | 7          | 0%        | 14%        | 14%        | 0%         |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>674</b> | <b>4%</b> | <b>50%</b> | <b>36%</b> | <b>26%</b> |

Source: Survey of Principals. Note: Mixed age groups may include K-2 or Years 3-6 and some whole school groups.

Across all schools who responded to the survey, most (85%) hold SRE during weekly classes. Just over 10% hold fortnightly classes of SRE. Just under one-fifth of secondary schools hold SRE one to three times per term or semester, often in seminar format. Some central schools also follow this format for their secondary students (Table 14). A small number of secondary schools hold SRE classes for just one or two terms per year for some Year groups.

**Table 14. Frequency of SRE delivery in schools by type of school**

|                  | N          | Weekly     | Fortnightly | Monthly   | Occasional |
|------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Primary          | 511        | 95%        | 4%          | <1%       | 1%         |
| Secondary        | 139        | 52%        | 35%         | 2%        | 17%        |
| Central          | 15         | 73%        | 27%         | 7%        | 13%        |
| Specific Purpose | 6          | 83%        | 17%         | 0%        | 0%         |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>671</b> | <b>85%</b> | <b>11%</b>  | <b>1%</b> | <b>4%</b>  |

Source: Survey of Principals. Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%

Case studies illustrated how schools make local decisions about how best to facilitate SRE in their context. For example, principals often make pragmatic decisions about timetables, logistics and resources to support the core business of schools. Many schools do not commence SRE until part way into the school year to give them sufficient time to sort out logistical issues. Providers sometimes see this as a school not supporting SRE. Schools commented that organising SRE is often a huge logistical job for a relatively small amount of time.

Principals have a legislative responsibility to ensure all students are safe at school, and SRE providers conduct themselves properly when on school grounds and in lessons. Some schools:

- hold induction sessions for SRE teachers, that cover departmental and school policies, for example, school welfare and discipline policies and the Code of Conduct
- provide SRE teachers with an information package at the start of the year with information about the school, school map, policies/ procedures, SRE class rolls, stickers or awards
- ask to sight WWCC clearance numbers for each SRE teacher.

The majority of schools have good working relationships with most SRE providers at the school; 64% principals agreed and 32% mostly agreed with this statement. Just 15% of 617 provider SRE coordinators agreed that limited assistance from schools is one of their main challenges.

Some principals see SRE as an integral part of the school week and school community, while others regard it as an 'add on' that is competing for valuable student learning time. Many providers and principals commented about having respectful relationships that recognise the interests of both parties and help facilitate the successful delivery of SRE. However, there is evidence that the sometimes different world views of providers and principals and different understandings about the role and objectives of SRE in schools can impact on the strength of relationships.

Principals described a variety of ways they support SRE teachers and make them welcome within the school, however the amount of support given varies a lot. Some schools provide pigeonholes where SRE teachers can store materials for classes; some assist with photocopying; some provide a roll of students to be checked off each week, and have staff on hand to direct teachers to rooms and troubleshoot issues with technology and attendance. Some schools show support for SRE by having thank you ceremonies at the end of term and holding multi-faith ceremonies as a way to celebrate the diversity of multicultural communities.

*In the complex world of schools and what is expected from them SRE is sometimes relegated to the lower rungs of priorities. That said we find the staff at schools largely cooperative and appreciative. As in all systems involving multiple people who deliver lessons there is a variation in quality and style. —Provider SRE coordinator*

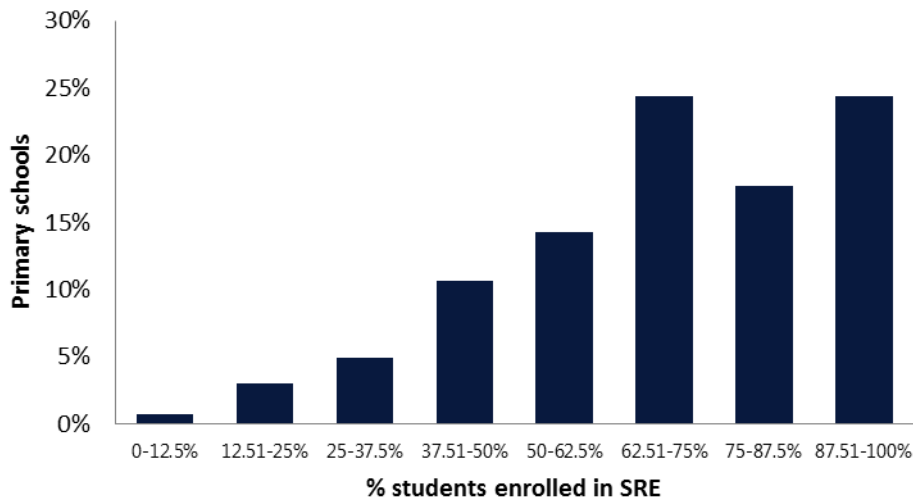
## 2.4 Student participation in SRE

A sample of schools (n=442) that provided SRE participation numbers for their school showed overall student participation in primary schools of 71%, and overall student participation in secondary schools of 30%. Some caution should be used with these figures, particularly for secondary schools, as the sample size was small (n=36, or nine percent of

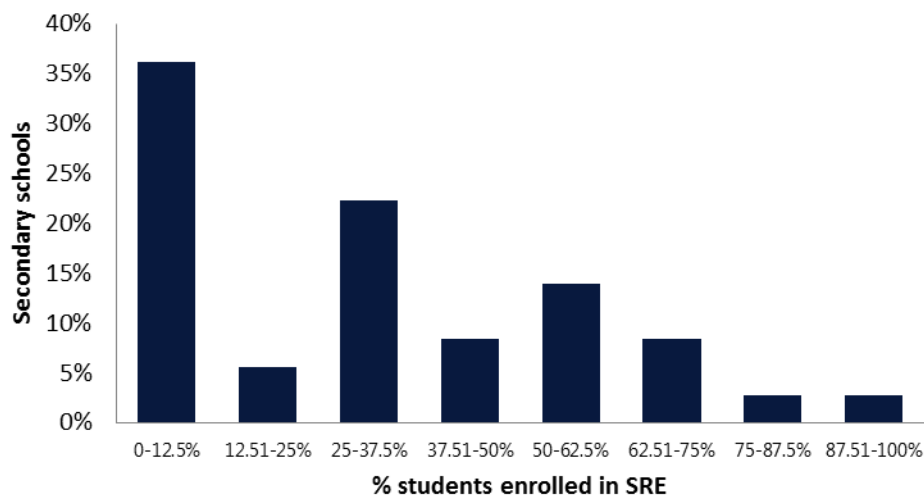
secondary schools). Nevertheless, the evidence from case study interviews also supports the finding of overall lower participation rates of students in secondary schools. This influences how SRE is provided in secondary schools and how providers organise themselves. It can also create challenges for some secondary schools to support SRE participation with the scope of the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015).

There is an inverse pattern of student participation for primary and secondary schools (see Figure 8 and Figure 9). Primary schools tend to have a high proportion of students participating in SRE, with one-quarter of schools having 87% or more of students participating. The Review’s sample of schools showed only three percent of secondary schools with this high student participation rate, while more than one-third of secondary schools (36%) had fewer than 12% of students participating in SRE.

**Figure 8. Primary schools: proportion of students enrolled in SRE**



Source: Survey of Principals, n=406.

**Figure 9. Secondary schools: proportion of students enrolled in SRE**

Source: Survey of Principals, n=36.

The views of principals based on their experience of running SRE in their schools provide a valuable contribution to the Review. Principals are responsible for the education and wellbeing of the students at their school. They are responsible for understanding and applying Department policy in their local context. And they are accountable to their community, parents, students, teachers and the Department.

Principals' qualitative comments on overall feedback on SRE at their school showed a generally more positive response from primary schools (45% positive, 20% mixed and 23% negative comments) than from secondary schools (38% positive, eight percent mixed and 36% negative). This overview aligns with the Reviewer's impression formed through talking with schools during case studies.

Almost half of principals (48%) have observed a decrease in SRE enrolment over the past four years, with a higher proportion of primary schools (including SSPs) (53%) compared with secondary and central schools (38%) seeing this trend. The perceived decrease is across schools of all sizes and locations.

Primary principals who commented on the decrease in SRE participation at their school (n=119) observed more parents not wanting their children to participate or not seeing SRE as relevant (n=24), more parents listing 'no religion' on school enrolment forms (n=15), students asking their parents to withdraw them (n=15), and the school enrolment form used for 2015 resulting in lower SRE participation in Kindergarten (n=8). Several noted the introduction of SEE classes (n=35). Some commented on changing school demographics, with SRE not currently available in the students' religion (n=5), less availability of SRE teachers (n=5) or an overall decrease in school size (n=4).

*Many parents do not provide a religion on their enrolment form until they are told that students with no religion provided will attend ecumenical scripture. Then, they change the enrolment to 'No religion'. —Primary principal*

*Parents are increasingly advising me that they are not interested in religious education in the public sector. —Primary principal*

*There was a large decrease in SRE in kindergarten this year, this may be due to the new enrolment forms where scripture options are clearer. —Primary principal*

The main reason given by secondary principals who commented on decreasing enrolment in SRE was that more families have no religion, or do not want their children to attend SRE because of the messages given to their children. Some simply note that more families and students are opting out than in the past. Just two principals linked the decrease to the different enrolment form used for 2015, while one noted a 'massive' decrease in 2015 without offering an explanation.

*The parents I have surveyed are of the opinion that they send their children to school to be educated. Religion is a family matter that is covered outside the school. —Secondary principal*

A small proportion of principals (8%) have seen an increase in SRE over this time period, with the remainder (44%) saying that enrolment has been stable. The perceived increase is mainly in medium to large metropolitan primary schools, and small provincial schools, both primary and secondary. The most commonly given reason for the increase in primary schools, mentioned by one third of the schools, is increased size of the school. In secondary schools the main reason is the introduction of SRE to the school in the past couple of years.

**Table 15. Indicative SRE student numbers from providers, 2015**

|               | N         | Students       | Percent     |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|-------------|
| Christian     | 23        | 102,810        | 69%         |
| Non-Christian | 10        | 45,933         | 31%         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>33</b> | <b>148,743</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Source: Survey of Providers.

Christian providers mostly report that SRE numbers are declining, while non-Christian providers mostly report seeing an increase in student numbers over recent years.

**Table 16. Trends in SRE attendance by main faith groups**

|                 | N  | Change   | 2015     | 2014   | 2013   | 2012   | 2011   | 2010   |
|-----------------|----|----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Christian       |    |          |          |        |        |        |        |        |
| ▪ Catholic      | 9  | Stable   | - 78,484 | 81,393 | 78,478 | 81,712 | 75,313 |        |
| ▪ Presbyterian* | >1 | Stable   | 29,939   | 32,875 | 29,265 | 29,265 | 23,945 | 22,995 |
| Baha'i          |    |          |          |        |        |        |        |        |
|                 | 1  | Decrease | 735      | 735    | 950    | 1,000  | 1,275  | 1,300  |
| Jewish          |    |          |          |        |        |        |        |        |
|                 | 1  | Increase | 1,870    | 1,800  | 1,738  | 1,700  | 1,600  | 1,500  |
| Islamic         |    |          |          |        |        |        |        |        |
|                 | 2  | Increase | 24,000   | 21,696 | 20,743 |        | 18,403 |        |
| Hindu           |    |          |          |        |        |        |        |        |
|                 | 2  | Increase | 16,200   | 13,100 |        |        |        |        |
| Buddhist        |    |          |          |        |        |        |        |        |
|                 | 3  | Increase | 2,127    | 1,500  |        |        |        |        |
| Vedic           |    |          |          |        |        |        |        |        |
|                 | 1  | Increase | 1,000    | 800    | 500    |        |        |        |

Source: Survey of Providers. Note: Presbyterian SRE is offered as part of combined Christian classes.

Generate Ministries, a partnership between Presbyterian Youth (NSW), Scripture Union (NSW), the Baptist Union of NSW and Anglican Youthworks, that supports combined churches secondary school SRE Boards and employs their SRE teachers, has seen a growth in secondary school participation in SRE since beginning their work in 2008. In 2015, secondary school SRE teachers employed through Generate Ministries have taught over 39,000 secondary students through classes (n=1,418) and seminars (n=207).

*We have found that where we go in with a structure (including teacher training), programme and a plan, and advertise that - demand increases. Generate is planning to double the number of schools in 3 years, going from 39,000 students to 75,000 students. —*  
Generate Ministries

## 2.5 Conclusions

SRE has a substantial presence in NSW Government schools, with responses from the survey of principals indicating that approximately 90% of primary schools and 80% of secondary schools held SRE in 2015.

SRE in NSW is very diverse, with classes being provided by over 100 approved providers from 15 faith groups. There is also diversity within faith groups, particularly amongst Christian providers, who still dominate SRE provision. An important feature of SRE delivery is the presence of a very large, mainly volunteer workforce visiting schools regularly and frequently and whose conduct must be managed by providers and schools.

In terms of student participation, evidence from a sample of schools indicates that overall, a smaller proportion of students within secondary schools participate in SRE compared with the level of participation of primary students. This finding is supported by evidence from case study interviews.

The participation rate of students within a school influences, and is influenced by, the SRE delivery at the school, including its availability, pattern of organisation and quality. The relatively low participation of secondary school students in SRE brings challenges for some secondary schools in supporting SRE delivery within the scope of the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015).



## 3. Approval, authorisation and registration

This chapter responds to Term of Reference 2—Department of Education implementation procedures for SRE, specifically approval of providers and authorisation of teachers and curriculum; and Term of Reference 5—Registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees. The chapter makes conclusions about what changes might be needed to the current approval and authorisation processes and procedures to better support the successful delivery of SRE in NSW Government schools; and about the need for registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees.

### 3.1 Religious education implementation procedures and guidelines

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*, last updated in July 2015, outline how SRE should be delivered and the roles and responsibilities of schools and providers. The procedures are aligned with the Department's Religious Education Policy and the *Education Act* (1990)<sup>9</sup>. The principles that shape the procedures are availability, universality and resourcing. The *Education Act* (1990) requires that every government school allows time for religious education, and for children of any religious persuasion<sup>10</sup>, and that the provision of SRE is not government funded.

Following these principles, the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) set out what is essentially a form of self-regulation for the delivery of SRE in government schools. Self-regulation in public policy always involves rights and responsibilities. For SRE, the rights relate to the ability of providers to access schools, and determine teachers and curriculum. The responsibilities are to fit within the Department's overall commitment to the education and welfare of children, and the management of schools. A closely related responsibility under self-regulation is transparency to parents, the Department, school communities and the wider public, through publication of important information and the provision of regular monitoring. These rights and responsibilities are considered in detail in the following sections.

All the Department's policies and procedures are expected to be well drafted, disseminated, understood and implemented by intended users, and monitored by senior managers. The

---

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/spec\\_religious/PD20020074.shtml](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/spec_religious/PD20020074.shtml), date 01/06/2013.

<sup>10</sup> Section 32 of the Education Act 1990.

following sections consider how these expectations are met by the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015).

It is also critical to recognise that the implementation procedures do not stand alone—the Department and schools understand that other departmental policies apply to the provision of SRE, and the implementation procedures specifically state that they should be read in conjunction with all Department policies and legislation for example, Workplace Health and Safety and child protection (Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People Policy).

Three aspects of the procedures are discussed in detail in this chapter, together with guidelines developed by providers, for:

- the Department to approve providers
- providers to authorise and supply SRE teachers
- providers to authorise and document curriculum.

The Review was made aware of two sets of SRE guidelines produced by faith groups, ICCOREIS and CCRESS (Table 17). These largely reflect departmental procedures and policies. The ICCOREIS handbook has more detail than the Department's *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) and that suggests more expansive roles for SRE volunteers than is anticipated by the Department's procedures. CCRESS has produced a code of conduct for SRE teachers to guide appropriate behaviour when an SRE teacher is at a school, which has similarities to the Department's Code of Conduct.

**Table 17. Guidelines for SRE providers produced by provider organisations**

| Organisation | Brief description   |
|--------------|---|
| ICCOREIS     | SRE Handbook. Designed to provide an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all concerned with Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW government schools.  |
| CCRESS       | Complaints template and code of conduct for teachers' information, includes: respect, behavioural expectations, duty of care, volunteer rights and responsibilities, behaviour management rules and tips, guidelines on appropriate student and teacher relationships (being alone, outside of school hours), appropriate use of technology (films and social media), drugs, managing conflicts of interest and accepting gifts, retirement and leaving, and copyright. The resources used for SRE are the responsibility of the local parish—the parish should provide an SRE coordinator. |

### 3.1.1 Resources available to support implementation and monitor compliance

The Department supports SRE at the system level, and at the local level. At the system level, SRE delivery is supported by:

- The Consultative Committee for Special Religious Education, chaired by the Department of Education Executive Director, Learning and Leadership. Committee membership includes representatives of all the main providers and meets four times a year. The Committee provides advice to the Department on the policy and implementation of SRE, including new developments and approaches. The Department can ask the Committee for advice about applications from potential new providers. The Department provides executive support to the Committee through the Director, Early Learning and Primary Education.
- Special Religious Education and Ethics Officer who has the following responsibilities:
  - responding to principals' questions about SRE or SEE
  - responding to providers' questions about SRE or SEE
  - monitoring the receipt of provider assurances that volunteer teachers have a current WWCC or similar (according to what is required).
- Directors, Public Schools NSW, who are responsible for monitoring the implementation of SRE at a local level, and resolving implementation issues between the school, its community and providers. They provide advice to principals about SRE implementation; and with principals, have a role in monitoring compliance of providers to the Department's SRE procedures and its broader policies.
- Additional resources are dedicated to providing advice to schools and providers to assist them to understand the Department's *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and related policies, which in recent years has included:
  - workshops with Directors, Public Schools
  - fact sheets for principals and updated procedures
  - meeting with principal groups
  - advice for providers about professional learning needs of children, and
  - advice to principals.

Amongst providers, resources to support SRE delivery vary considerably. The main approaches are described below, noting that the Review did not systematically collect quantitative information about funding for, and the amount of human resources allocated by providers to SRE. Some providers have centralised and funded functions that support local SRE provision, which mirror how the religious persuasion is governed and organised. For example, the larger Christian churches (Anglican and Catholic) are organised by geographical areas as dioceses led by Bishops and then into smaller community-based units (parishes).

- For Catholic SRE, each diocese is an approved provider that coordinates training, authorisation processes and curriculum, and support is provided through employed staff members who work in Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CDD) offices. These offices are in turn supported by the Catholic Conference of Religious Educators in State Schools (CCRESS).
- Anglican providers are supported by Youthworks, an organisation with a broader remit than SRE of supporting youth ministry, but again with employed staff members

dedicated to supporting SRE. A team of Youthworks Ministry Advisors gives support to individual SRE teachers.

- Other providers have very limited or no funded centralised support for SRE delivery and rely on volunteers to coordinate and facilitate it, including teacher authorisation, training and curriculum development (for example, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, Islamic Council of NSW, Baha'i, Hindu, and some independent Christian churches).
- Christian providers with limited resources can tap into training organised by other providers, for example, Baptist GodSpace, and Anglican Youthworks, and source SRE curriculum from Christian publishers. The Buddhist Council of NSW recommends Buddhist providers use a curriculum developed in Victoria.

### **3.1.2 Currency and appropriateness of *Religious Education Implementation Procedures***

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) acknowledge the need to implement SRE in a flexible way based on consultation and cooperation. The current procedures reflect historical practices and have been adapted over time in response to requests for clarification from providers, schools and parents, and public discussions. According to the Department, the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) have not been fully reviewed—through a widespread consultation process involving all stakeholders, including parents—for some time. The Review found that the current procedures do not directly reference or fully take account of a number of policy areas and current issues, as described below.

#### ***Policies***

- Current departmental policies such as the Code of Conduct, Work Health and Safety Policy, and Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People Policy.
- The *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act* (2012) requires all volunteer and paid workers to obtain a Working with Children Check (WWCC) clearance number and have it verified by the approved religious persuasion that authorises them. There is some uncertainty amongst principals about whether they have a legal right to ask to sight these checks and verify them. Even so, many principals do so.
- The SRE annual assurance form, which every approved religious provider must submit annually to the Department does not reflect new requirements for providers as set out in the procedures, which now cover WWCC, training and curriculum requirements and evidence of these on provider websites.

#### ***School contexts***

- Patterns of student participation in SRE and student choice. Student participation varies markedly between secondary schools and primary schools (discussed in section 2.4). The age and maturity of students is a factor in decision-making about participating in SRE.

Secondary school students often want to make their own choice about participating in SRE, notwithstanding the information provided by parents on enrolment. The Reviewers found a small number of secondary schools allowed this practice, which is not in line with the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures (2015)*.

- The different operating contexts of secondary schools and primary schools. For example, in how periods are timetabled and the allocation of students to classes. One area not explicitly covered in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures (2015)* is whether or not SRE should be offered to students in Years 11 and 12.
- The marked differences in operating context for schools in different locations—regional, remote and metropolitan areas.

### **Governance and SRE delivery**

- The role of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees in facilitating the delivery of SRE and the interrelated role of third parties, such as Generate Ministries.
- The commercialisation of Christian SRE curriculum development, teaching resources and the training of SRE teachers. The Review has evidence of instances where unauthorised texts have been purchased from commercial publishers based in Australia and internationally and used as part of SRE lessons. Using unauthorised texts in SRE is of great concern to the Department and members of the community. Providers should make every effort to ensure that unauthorised texts are not used.

### **SRE teachers' roles in schools**

- The notion of SRE teachers as volunteers and the boundaries of their role can be a grey area for providers and schools. SRE teachers can and do take on other volunteer roles within schools. The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures (2015)* reference volunteer activity related to voluntary student religious activities and prayer groups, noting these are not part of SRE. However, support organisations such as Youthworks and Generate Ministries encourage SRE teachers to get involved in other volunteer roles at the school such as supporting school camps. Many of the contributions from Christian churches to the Review were explicit about seeking to increase the number of students committing to the Christian faith by increasing the reach of SRE within schools. Other stakeholders take the view that SRE teachers' involvement in broader school activities could be interpreted as encouraging proselytising. The Department is currently reviewing its policies around volunteers in schools and the new policy will be applicable to SRE volunteers.
- National School Chaplaincy Program chaplains. According to Generate Ministries, the majority of school chaplains in NSW (more than 140 individuals) are managed by them. Generate Ministries is also a major third party in SRE, supporting 110 secondary school SRE Boards and employing 110 SRE teachers who work in 300 secondary schools. School chaplains are sometimes given the responsibility by schools to organise SRE delivery. The extent that School Chaplains also give SRE lessons is unclear. Generate Ministries indicated that there are school chaplains managed by them who hold both a chaplaincy

and an SRE teacher role. They stated only one of these individuals is both a school chaplain and SRE teacher in the same school—a regional/ rural school where sourcing volunteers for this role is difficult.

### **3.1.3 The effectiveness of the Department’s communication with providers about the implementation procedures**

As mentioned above, the Department’s Consultative Committee for Special Religious Education has representatives of all the main providers, and provides advice on the implementation procedures and the approval of providers. In addition, the Special Religious Education and Ethics Officer answers enquiries from both providers and principals.

The quarterly meetings of the Consultative Committee for Special Religious Education are generally well attended by the provider representatives and departmental officials. Nevertheless, some providers/ representatives expressed dissatisfaction with the level and nature of communication between themselves and the Department, saying that there is little regular communication; and it generally occurs where problems arise. Specifically, providers were concerned about changes being made to the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) and enrolment forms with minimal opportunities to have any input through the Consultative Committee or other consultation processes, and in some cases not being advised about changes that had been made. Other examples of communications around approval and authorisation are discussed in the following sections. At a practical level, some members of the Consultative Committee felt that the Consultative Committee process would be improved if agendas were received earlier to allow them to prepare ahead.

Broader communication by the Department beyond the Consultative Committee was also raised as an issue. ICCOREIS pointed out the following.

*Once a group/church becomes an approved provider, they are pretty much on their own. With frequent restructures in the DoE, independent and small providers are unlikely to be adequately supported so that SRE standards are maintained. —ICCOREIS submission*

### **3.1.4 Conclusions: overview of the implementation procedures**

According to the Department, the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* have not been fully reviewed for some time and much has changed in regards policy, schools’ operating context, participation in SRE and in the governance of SRE. In recent years, new departmental policies have been developed and issues regarding the role of volunteers in schools and the use of unauthorised texts in SRE have emerged. Combined arrangements for delivering SRE are also more common. Large providers have adapted to pressures to improve teacher quality and training, and to problems in securing sufficient volunteers. New structures supporting SRE have emerged or been strengthened. The *Religious Education Implementation*

*Procedures* needs to properly address these changes and other issues arising in the Review. In these circumstances, a full review of the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* is required.

## 3.2 Approval of SRE providers by the Department of Education

This section discusses the implementation of processes to approve providers, which is the responsibility of the Department.

### 3.2.1 What is intended or required

Religious persuasions interested in becoming SRE providers are required to apply to the Department for approved provider status. The process is for the provider to contact the Special Religious Education and Ethics Officer, who then emails back the approval criteria (Box 3.1), together with the application form for completion and submission. There are currently no guidelines about the approval process for providers on the Department's website and the application form is not available on the website.

Once the application is received, the Department checks that the provider meets the criteria for approval. Where information is missing or unclear, the Department seeks additional information. The Department may also seek further advice where necessary from the Consultative Committee for Special Religious Education and other parties. Following the process, a recommendation is made to the Minister for Education who makes the final decision about the approval.

#### Box 3.1: Provider approval criteria

The applicant must

- be a religious persuasion
- have identifiable leaders and appropriate organisational and governance structures
- meet all quality and administrative requirements
- have an age appropriate curriculum
- ensure all volunteers have Working With Children Checks
- be a genuine organisation
- be an independent body.

### 3.2.2 What occurs in practice

The Review received limited feedback on the approval process or criteria from providers and relied on submissions from peak bodies, SRE Boards and the Department for evidence about the process and its currency and appropriateness. Only one provider involved in the case studies had recent experience of the approval process.

The approval process appears to operate as described but is lengthy. In practice, it takes some time for the Department to gather all the necessary information and process an application and verify supporting documentation. Decisions about provider applications can be delayed where there is insufficient information about the provider in the application and supporting material. For example, the Department cited applications from small Hindu

groups for which it was hard to verify information about governance and leadership, and whether they are an independent body.

According to ICCOREIS, the role of the Consultative Committee for Special Religious Education in the approval process changed somewhat during 2015. ICCOREIS perception is that less information than in the past is being made available to the Committee—just the name and location of new providers' applications—which in their view limits the quality of advice the Committee can give. The Department has clarified to the Reviewers that the level of information provided previously could have breached privacy laws and was not required as part of the feedback process. The Consultative Committee for Special Religious Education does not decide on applications rather the members provide valuable feedback about any knowledge they have about a particular applicant, and this advice is used in the assessment made by the Department.

The few SRE Board members who had experience with the approval process variously described it as tough and rigorous, but also somewhat unclear. A Board member who had personally liaised with the Department to get approval for several new providers in the past, stated, 'the process is not clear, apart from providing information via a letter in response to some questions which form a criteria.' The NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations and the Greens political party commented on the lack of publicly available guidelines, and that decisions about approvals and the rationale for these are not available in the public domain. These groups are calling for a more open and transparent public process, and a three-year approval period. The *Gordon Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*, whose application to be an SRE provider was not approved, claimed their organisation had not received any formal feedback about the reasons for rejecting their application. According to the Department, this applicant was advised that they represented a parody of religion and not a religious persuasion and therefore, the application failed.

Combined SRE delivery arrangements appear to introduce a very small risk that SRE teachers may be drawn from churches where that church is not an approved provider. At least one church represented on the SRE Boards operating in two of the three case study sites did not appear on the list of approved providers—these were all independent Christian churches. It is possible that small churches that are part of SRE Boards and Associations may not actually provide any SRE teachers from their congregation but are part of a local Board or Association because they do non-SRE related activities together, like fundraising.

### 3.2.3 Conclusions

The Review received only a small number of submissions about the approval process from those who had experienced the process as applicants. Just one provider has been refused approval in recent years; a group that is not a religious persuasion. Conversely, no providers have lost their approval even though the Department has dealt with instances of non-compliance. From the Department's and providers' perspectives (and the Reviewers), the



seven criteria used for making decisions about approval are appropriate. In the absence of publicly available information about the rationale for approving individual providers, it is difficult to make an objective assessment about how well the criteria for decision-making are being applied. However, one of the criteria is to have an age appropriate curriculum. The Review's independent review of SRE curriculum indicates that this element is often a weakness, which suggests that the Department's assessment relies on assurances from the providers who in turn, often rely on publishers of curriculum.

Changes are needed to the approval process to make the process more transparent and to better communicate to providers (and the public) what information is used as a basis for decision-making. A more transparent approval process will assure providers and the wider community about the rigour of the process and decisions made. Transparency could be achieved through the publication of the application forms, criteria for approval and the reasons for decisions to approve or not approve a religious persuasion as a SRE provider.

Regarding how non-compliance is dealt with, the current approach is to ask providers to address areas of non-compliance, where these come to the attention of the Department. This approach has been fairly effective in addressing serious instances of non-compliance raised by schools or the community regarding the use of non-approved curriculum materials. However, neither providers nor the Department monitors compliance in any systematic way, and as such, non-compliant practices and behaviours can and have occurred. In a self-regulated system the monitoring of performance is the responsibility of providers, and monitoring systems should be developed or strengthened and non-compliance with implementation procedures addressed promptly. Regarding compliance with the criteria for approval and with reporting obligations, the Department should make publicly available the circumstances under which a provider could lose their approval should they fail to address areas of non-compliance.

### **3.3 Authorisation of volunteer teachers**

This section discusses the process for authorisation of SRE teachers, which is the responsibility of providers.

#### **3.3.1 What is intended and required**

The *Education Act* (1990) says

*(2) The religious education to be given to children of any religious persuasion is to be given by a member of the clergy or other religious teacher of that persuasion authorised by the religious body to which the member of the clergy or other religious teacher belongs.*

The responsibilities of providers for the supply of authorised teachers, and the detailed requirements, as set out in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015), are to:

- provide sufficient SRE teachers, who have been recruited, trained and authorised
- ensure that the school is informed of the names and contact details of its local representatives and authorised teachers
- ensure that all SRE teachers have a name badge that includes the name of the authorising approved provider, and is worn at all times when on a school site
- inform the principal when there are insufficient authorised teachers available. *Child protection is a key element of authorisation, and approved providers are required to:*
  - not authorise any person as an SRE teacher who has not signed a prohibited employment declaration or who has a criminal record for violence, sexual assault or the provision of prohibited drugs
  - ensure any minister, priest, rabbi, mufti, other religious leader or spiritual official of a religion, paid employee or volunteer providing SRE obtains a WWCC
  - provide annually to the Department, a written assurance of procedures in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012.

**Box 3.2: ICCOREIS Guidelines for the authorisation process**

ICCOREIS members, 'depending on their size, generally follow a process of authorisation requiring an application to a central unit/person that includes documentation of basic teacher and child protection training; a Working with Children Check number for independent verification; and a statutory declaration and endorsement by leadership of a local church. In some cases, the application is then returned to the local representatives who know the applicant and it is they who finally authorise the SRE teacher. Generally authorisation is for a period of 3 years. It is expected that the teacher does 2 hours of continuing professional development each year. At the end of 3 years, the teacher is expected to apply for renewal of authorisation and progressively our members are developing further modules appropriate to renewal. In November 2012 our members agreed to a training standard we call Basic SRE Training.'

Apart from specifying the Working with Children Check and a criminal check, the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* do not prescribe what authorisation should entail or whether basic training should be complete before an SRE teacher is authorised. This is because, under the Act, this is the responsibility of approved providers.

ICCOREIS provides members with guidelines about authorisation processes (Box 3.2), which were commented on and appreciated by a few SRE Boards who responded to the Review.

### 3.3.2 What occurs in practice

The evidence indicates that for the most part, SRE teachers are being authorised. In 2014, there were more than 11,113 SRE teachers (Table 8). Ninety-nine percent of SRE teachers who completed a survey for the Review said they had been formally authorised by their provider

organisation to teach SRE, and 86% had attended training in curriculum materials and in methods for teaching these. Responses to the survey of providers indicate that SRE teachers receive on average two hours training on an overview of the curriculum and an average of 2.3 hours in the use of curriculum materials.

The small numbers of SRE teachers who responded to the survey and reported they are not authorised (13) or did not know if they were (24), were almost all Christian SRE teachers. They lived in both country and metropolitan locations. No explanation was given about why these SRE teachers had not been authorised. The Review had some evidence that some small religious persuasions and schools are not always aware that their members must be authorised by an approved provider. Case studies revealed two examples of primary schools inviting community members into the school to teach SRE at the request of parents, who were not formally linked to approved providers (Islamic and Buddhist). In one case, the unauthorised SRE teacher only discovered they needed to be authorised by an approved provider when they offered their services to another school.

SRE teachers represent the provider in the community and as such, providers take authorisation seriously. Faith groups have a broad agreement about what a quality authorisation process should entail, although some elements vary. Authorisation of SRE teachers generally occurs after completion of mandatory minimum or basic training. All providers cover training in child protection and classroom management, and most include the curriculum in their basic training. Some providers require WWCC to be completed before basic training can be completed. Paid SRE teachers are also required to have a professional qualification, with teaching qualifications preferred.

Some volunteer SRE teachers are not expected to complete mandatory training. These are those SRE teachers who have many years of experience giving SRE lessons and who started when basic training was not available. A small number of SRE teachers in the case studies were authorised but had not yet completed basic training. All had WWCC done. These SRE teachers were located in rural areas, where distance and limited resources make it difficult to recruit, train and retain volunteers for SRE. When recruitment efforts are ongoing completing authorisation processes in time to fill gaps can be challenging for rural providers.

Two aspects of authorisation that differ between providers is the period of authorisation (one year or three years); and how authorisation is recognised and made known to principals. SRE teachers may receive a specific authorisation certificate or a name badge with an authorisation number.

A key element of authorisation is to check the suitability of the person to work with children. The Department's 2014 memo to principals set out transitional arrangements for SRE and SEE teachers, with new volunteers not required to obtain the WWCC until 31 March 2015. Evidence from the case studies indicates providers are requiring WWCC as part of authorisation of SRE teachers. The 99% of SRE teachers responding to the Survey of SRE Teachers who indicated they are formally authorised, would have completed a WWCC as part

of that process. In addition, feedback from principals in case studies and responses to the Principal Survey indicate that many but not all schools ask for proof of a WWCC.

**Table 18. Whether SRE teacher is formally authorised to teach SRE**

|                   | Number       | Percent     |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Yes               | 2,807        | 99%         |
| <i>Don't know</i> | 24           | 1%          |
| No                | 13           | 0.5%        |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>2,844</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>No data</i>    | 191          |             |

Source: Survey of SRE Teachers.

Being known to the local minister/ clergy/ imam was highlighted as being a key element of authorisation by providers who responded to the Review. The larger, better resourced providers have well-structured processes that include due diligence steps to ensure the person is known to the faith community but also an independent verification process of the person's suitability to work with children. Recruiting sufficient volunteers can be a challenge, which means that SRE teachers may sometimes be drawn from outside the local faith community. For example, one Islamic provider advertises for SRE volunteers through universities. In one case study, an SRE teacher was recruited through a Buddhist group in another area because the local Buddhist provider had faced problems recruiting volunteers.

ICCOREIS raised an issue about a potential conflict of interest when for example, an independent church authorises their own members and also verify their WWCC clearance numbers. ICCOREIS indicated that their members' experiences are that the process of application and authorisation requires significant time and expertise, and a structure that separates the verifier and the applicant. Some small religious persuasions are autonomous and do not have a higher level of organisation to support separated authorisation processes, for example, Hindu groups work autonomously, as do some Buddhist and independent Christian churches.

Providers do not generally authorise members of other religious persuasions. The exception is where combined arrangements for SRE provision are in place and these have a governance structure—SRE Board, Association or Committee—overseeing SRE. One provider who is part of the combined arrangement authorises an SRE teacher, and that authorisation is recognised by other providers who are part of the Board, Association or Committee. CCRESS and other Christian groups who made submissions to the Review stressed the importance of SRE providers having authority over the content of their curriculum and authorisation of their own volunteers. However, CCRESS also indicated the requirement in the *Special Religious*

*Education Procedures* (2015), which says providers should not authorise a person who has a criminal conviction for one or more of the stated offences, should be maintained. CRESS also stated that, 'Providers should be required to have this wording included in their engagement form which SRE teachers/ assistants are required to complete as part of the authorisation procedures.'

The consultation surfaced some inconsistencies in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) and Department and WWCC requirements.

- The annual assurance form, which every approved religious provider must provide annually to the Department, does not fully reflect the procedures, which now cover WWCC, training and curriculum requirements and having evidence of these on websites.
- The current implementation procedures do not fully reflect the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act* (2012), which requires all volunteer and paid workers to obtain a Working with Children Check clearance number and have it verified by the approved religious persuasion that authorises them.

### 3.3.3 Conclusions

Authorisation of SRE teachers is an important process that is rightly the responsibility of providers. They know the volunteers, and must be confident that the SRE teacher will be a good representative in the school, faithfully teach their curriculum and cope with the task of instructing students in SRE. The Department and the school community must also be able to trust that the process works to confirm these volunteers are suitable to work with children and that they are trustworthy and sufficiently skilled.

The Department currently provides only minimal guidance about what authorisation should entail and providers or groups of providers have developed their own processes. As a result, providers differ in some aspects about how authorisation is done, and there are inconsistencies with broader Department policies and guidelines. Christian providers, through ICCOREIS, have developed an agreed authorisation process, which their members implement. To increase the confidence of the school and make more transparent what authorisation involves, it would be helpful if current providers and the Department agree on a standard approach to authorisation of SRE teachers. Once agreed, the standards could be recognised in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* by the Department and be available to new providers. The standard authorisation processes must balance due diligence with what is reasonable for all providers to achieve.

## 3.4 Authorisation of SRE curriculum

This section examines the processes for authorisation of SRE curriculum materials; the quality of the curriculum used is explored in chapter 5.

### 3.4.1 What is required or intended

The *Education Act* (1990) says

*(3) The religious education to be given is in every case to be the religious education authorised by the religious body to which the member of the clergy or other religious teacher belongs.*

The Department's Religious Education Policy states that curriculum for SRE is developed and implemented by approved providers. The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) indicate that providers are responsible for:

- authorising the materials and pedagogy used by SRE teachers
- providing an annual assurance to the Department that authorised teachers are only using materials and pedagogy authorised by the provider
- communicating the curricula by making lesson content accessible on a website or at least providing a program outline and curriculum scope and sequence documents
- providing information about the content of lessons when requested by parents/ caregivers/ principals.

This element of SRE is self-regulated. As reflected in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015), the essence of self-regulation is transparency and public communication.

### 3.4.2 What occurs in practice

#### ***Developing and selecting curricula***

There are considerable differences in the human and financial resources available across providers to develop SRE curriculum material. The better resourced providers are Catholic and Anglican dioceses, the Baptist Union of NSW and the Board of Jewish Education. Many providers rely on groups within their broader faith group to develop curriculum and teacher and student resource materials. Just under half of all providers purchase curriculum materials from Christian publishers and 27% of providers purchase their SRE curriculum from Christian Education Publications (CEP). Nineteen percent of providers purchase SRE curriculum materials from GodSpace, which is affiliated with the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW and ACT. A further 31% of providers use a common curriculum developed by a provider from the same faith group, for example, Catholic dioceses may use one of three curricula that are 'developed by educational experts approved by the Church and are publicly accessible'<sup>11</sup>. Three providers develop their own SRE curriculum, which is also used by other providers; Catholic Dioceses of Broken Bay, Catholic Dioceses of Sydney and the Baptist Union of NSW. Twelve providers who develop and use their own curriculum are the Baha'I in Australia, Christian Life Church Kyogle, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, Islamic Charity Projects Association, Islamic Council of NSW, Hwa Tsang Monastery Inc., JET Australia Foundation Ltd., NSW Board of Jewish Education, NSW Christadelphian Committee, Losang Dragpa Kadampa Buddhist Centre, The Saiva Manram Inc, Vishva Hindu Parishad of Australia.

#### Box 3.3: Example: the development of the GodSpace curriculum

The GodSpace curriculum was developed in consultation with 'educationists and theologians from different denominations to develop a balanced curriculum that is age appropriate, uses both traditional methods and multi-media, encourages activities across the multi-intelligences (smarts), uses correct pedagogy, focuses on the matters that unite Christians and encourages our teachers to strive for, and continually develop, good practice approaches and provides ongoing support through weekly online teaching tips.'

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia described an incremental development process, reliant on volunteers donating their professional expertise. Providers indicated that religious authorities within provider organisations generally check curriculum materials that are produced by staff or volunteers. A common view amongst providers is that curricula developed by religious publishers or through a group dedicated to support SRE are more professional and of a higher educational standard than would otherwise be possible if developed in-house by a single provider.

<sup>11</sup> CCRESS submission.

In combined arrangements for SRE delivery, the curriculum is cross-authorised. Providers meet and discuss the available curriculum and decide which one(s) they will use. Key considerations are the match of the curriculum with the providers' tenets of faith, and for many SRE Boards and churches who made a submission to the Review, being orthodox in the teachings. One SRE Board commented that, 'Where SRE delivery is under a combined arrangement, authorisation of curriculum by the involved approved providers separately is almost impossible. The church representatives are affiliated with 13 approved providers. For combined arrangements, particularly for high school, a simple cross-authorisation for curriculum needs to be agreed among the approved providers and the Department.'

### ***Communicating about the SRE curriculum being used***

Once curriculum are developed or chosen (authorised), the implementation procedures require that the scope and sequence should be made publicly available through a website. The Review's evidence indicates that this is not happening consistently. Just over one-third (39%) of providers had SRE curriculum information accessible on a website, their own or associated faith group, at the start of the Review (December 2014). It was unclear to the Reviewers how a parent/ caregiver might find out which are the relevant curriculum scope and sequence documents where SRE is being delivered by combined Christian arrangements.

Some parents who made a contribution to the Review commented on the lack of detail available about some curricula, even when these are made available online, and many want more information about the curriculum and lesson topics covered.

### ***Assurance of authorised materials and pedagogy***

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) require providers to provide annual assurance to the Department that SRE teachers are only using materials and pedagogy authorised by the provider. The authorisation processes do not appear to always provide sufficient assurance that age appropriate curriculum materials are used, or that the materials concur with the Department's Code of Conduct. Chapter 5 provides an independent assessment by an education expert of the quality of the curricula.

This section considers differences in perspectives between faith groups and other groups (the Department, some organisations and some parents) about the appropriateness of the content of some curriculum materials. Although the level of complaints about SRE is fairly low, where complaints are made these are most often about the content of lessons. In 2015, a small number of examples of approved curriculum materials were identified by the Department as being age inappropriate and/ or insensitive to children's welfare. One was purchased from a large Christian publisher. Examples of text in the SRE teacher workbook that the Department considered insensitive are: negative passages about abortion, passages saying having cancer is a consequence of sin and a gift from God and that people should die



for their faith, if necessary. The text also contained messages about sex education, which is not appropriate or the role of SRE. Some members of the community who responded to the Review interpreted passages in other curricula as proselytising. Although these particular examples may represent the world view of the faith group, some passages seem to be insensitive to the psychological welfare of students (for example, those associating cancer with sin, or discussing diverse sexuality) and broader community norms.

Many submissions from church groups and SRE Boards objected in very broad terms to interference by the Department in curricula. Several mentioned the banning of curriculum materials by the Department in 2015 as an example of interference.

**Table 19. Where providers source authorised curriculum materials**

| Source  | Number    | Percent     |
|---|-----------|-------------|
| Purchased from Christian publisher                  | 36        | 49%         |
| - <i>Christian Education Publications (CEP)</i>     | 19        | 26%         |
| - <i>GodSpace</i>                                   | 14        | 19%         |
| - <i>Access ministries</i>                          | 2         | 3%          |
| - <i>Good Soil</i>                                  | 1         | 1%          |
| Shared by provider of the same religious persuasion | 22        | 30%         |
| Developed in-house                                  | 15        | 21%         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>73</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>No data</i>                                      | 10        |             |

Source: Survey of SRE Teachers.

### **Use of authorised curricula**

Providers direct SRE teachers to use specific approved curriculum materials and are making these available. The case studies and other evidence indicate that SRE teachers are mainly using approved materials and generally follow the curriculum closely.

The Reviewers are also aware of a few instances in 2015 where SRE teachers were found to be using non-authorised teaching and learning materials, either sourced from religious publishers or developed by the individual SRE teacher. One of the religious publishers also sold non-authorised SRE materials. In each case, the provider, once alerted by the Department, removed the materials and/or the offending SRE teacher lost their authorisation.

SRE teachers sometimes stray into using non-authorised teaching and learning materials when they source video clips from the internet or through religious publishers. Some providers have strict instructions that additional materials, e.g. YouTube clips, must be

authorised by them before use in lessons, but others do not. In the case studies, the Reviewers encountered different understandings amongst SRE teachers between and within provider organisations about whether or not it is permissible to source videos and other materials that are not part of the formally authorised curriculum/ teaching and learning materials.

SRE teachers who were part of the case studies occasionally tailored materials or lessons, especially for older students who participate in seminar-style sessions. These SRE teachers did not see this as deviating from the curriculum; a view also expressed by SRE Boards. SRE Boards indicated they expect employed SRE teachers in secondary schools to exercise professional judgment in presenting the curriculum, especially in seminar-style lessons.

### **3.4.3 Conclusions**

Authorisation of curriculum materials is currently the sole responsibility of providers. The evidence to this Review suggests the Department should also have a role in authorisation of the SRE curriculum, given the cases of inappropriate authorised materials that have come to light during the Review, and the huge disparity of resourcing for curriculum development. This role could include providing guidance/ frameworks/ advice for providers about curriculum scope and sequence and about what kinds of content are age appropriate, and how sensitive issues should be addressed during lessons. Having the Department provide educational expertise to providers could also help balance the disparity in resources available for curriculum development between providers.

With more commercial production of curriculum materials and more concentration amongst fewer developers, there are strategic opportunities for greater input from the Department during the development/ revision of curriculum. Commercialisation of curricula development is both a strength and weakness for Christian SRE. The strengths are where developers have good consultation processes in place and have experts in both religion and education available, resulting in a high standard curriculum. The risk is if poor decisions about content are made, and insufficient consultation occurs, and these resources are authorised, then inappropriate resources may be taken up by many providers because of the trust they place in the developers.

A related finding is the poor compliance across providers with making available to the public the curriculum scope and sequence and other resources used by them in SRE. Given that authorisation of SRE curriculum is self-regulated, it is important that sufficient information about SRE curriculum and teaching materials is available for parents and schools so they can decide themselves if the values and teaching espoused by providers match their own values.

## 3.5 Registration of Boards, Associations and Committees

A Term of Reference for the Review is to examine whether there is a need for registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees.

SRE Boards, Associations and Committees (SRE Boards) are usually formed to provide governance for combined SRE delivery arrangements (Box 3.4). Combined delivery arrangements allow providers to pool scarce local resources and so improve their capacity to meet parent requests for SRE at a school or cluster of schools. The stated common functions and roles of SRE Boards include managing resources and organising key SRE functions such as liaison with schools, training, promotion, recruitment, employment and support of local SRE teachers. Some SRE Boards, Associations and Committees have broader functions encompassing securing funding and prayer support from local churches and developing a culture of personal and corporate prayer among supporters.

### Box 3.4: Features of combined SRE delivery arrangements

All SRE teachers are authorised by an approved provider; cross-authorised by local representatives of providers in the arrangement and the curriculum is jointly authorised by all local representatives of providers in the arrangement. In addition, joint training of volunteers may be organised, volunteers can be drawn from each of the providers, and funds can be pooled to employ an SRE teacher to offer SRE in secondary schools.

### 3.5.1 What is required or intended

The Department *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) do not reference the role of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees in SRE provision. The Department has no direct links with or oversight of these governance structures. The procedures allow for combined arrangements for SRE across religious persuasions (Box 3.4). The procedures do not reference the role of peak groups, such as ICCOREIS, in providing guidance to providers about combined SRE arrangements, or third party organisations that are now fulfilling the human resource functions of many SRE Boards.

#### ***Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (NSW) Inc. (ICCOREIS)***

ICCOREIS has published *SRE Employment Board Guidelines* (2010), which provide advice about how to establish and maintain an SRE Board, Association or Committee, including meeting legal requirements, employing SRE teachers, how to manage relationships amongst the churches and with schools and more broadly, about SRE delivery. These guidelines suggest Boards be established as incorporated bodies to satisfy the requirements of legislation, including the development of a constitution and setting up funding mechanisms to receive donations and make payments.

## **Generate Ministries**

Generate Ministries is a joint ministry of Presbyterian Youth (NSW), Scripture Union (NSW), the Baptist Union of NSW and Anglican Youthworks. Generate Ministries employs SRE teachers on behalf of secondary school SRE Boards (registered with them), and assists with compliance and professional development, for example, delivering training, and assisting with administrative matters such as payroll. Generate Ministries is also involved in fundraising activities for SRE and provides advice about fundraising to SRE Boards. All secondary school SRE Boards supported by Generate Ministries are registered with them. No details were provided about the nature of this registration process. Generate Ministries is not currently involved in primary school SRE.

### **3.5.2 The operation of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees in 2015**

SRE Boards, Associations and Committees are providing governance for combined SRE arrangements. In 2015, they commonly outsource their human resource functions to a third party (for example, Generate Ministries) because 'employment requirements have become more demanding and complex and SRE Boards have recognised the limitations of their membership in this area.' (ICCOREIS)<sup>12</sup> Generate Ministers argued they offer SRE Boards the opportunity to professionalise the recruitment, training and networking of SRE teachers.

The Review was unable to ascertain accurately how many SRE Boards, Associations and Committees operate in NSW because no organisation collects such information systematically. Twenty SRE Boards, Associations and Committees—all involving Christian religious persuasions—provided commentary to the Review, via the online contribution portal but these are clearly not all of those operating. Generate Ministries supports 110 SRE Boards and stated that the majority of these Boards existed before Generate Ministries was established (some for decades). Generate Ministries estimates there are a further 60 independent SRE Boards not registered with them. In 2010, ICCOREIS<sup>13</sup> estimated that there were more than 80 SRE Boards, Associations or Committees established by combined church action in various parts of the state. It is likely that some of these Boards are now registered with Generate Ministries.

A few respondents to the Review identified the leadership and governance provided by SRE Boards as an important factor in the quality of local SRE delivery, with effective Boards ensuring that the delivery of, and oversight of SRE operates smoothly for schools, and SRE teachers are well supported. In line with this, one school-based peak group said there was

---

<sup>12</sup> ICCOREIS submission.

<sup>13</sup> ICCOREIS SRE Employment Board Guidelines (2010).

anecdotal evidence that poor governance at the SRE Board level can mean less well organised SRE at the school level.

The Department believes the role of Boards, Associations and Committees and the third party groups doing their human resource functions may not always be known or clear to parents. Other stakeholders point out that these organising groups are not directly accountable to the Department or schools. Principals in case study schools where combined arrangements were in place, indicated that although they are aware that a local SRE Board, Association or Committee exists, they did not know much about the composition of the organisation. Generate Ministries' stated aim is to grow SRE in NSW, and some in the community are uncomfortable with this approach, seeing it as bordering on proselytising. A few principals indicated in survey responses that they felt unduly pressured by a particular provider to give paid SRE teachers (employed by Boards, Associations and Committees) the right to organise SRE delivery in the school. In one of those schools, less than 40% of the school population were from Christian religious backgrounds and the principal felt having a Christian provider organisation SRE would not be appropriate. Conversely, many secondary principals appreciated having such a person in the school and taking on the coordination of SRE.

Where these groups are formal associations, they are subject to regulation and registration by NSW Fair Trading. The Review also found some evidence that members of SRE Boards, Associations or Committees are not always approved providers, as expected (Section 3.2.2). Generate Ministries indicated that all members of Boards supported by them are approved providers.

### **3.5.3 Support for registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees**

Only a relatively small number of contributors to the Review expressed a view about why registration might be needed, or the implications of introducing registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees involved in delivering combined arrangements for SRE locally.

#### ***SRE Boards, Associations and Committees and their member churches***

SRE Boards and Christian ministers that responded to the Review commonly favoured some sort of registration, but the meaning they attach to registration varied. SRE Boards frequently noted they are registered with NSW Fair Trading, that they are incorporated companies, and that they provide annual reports to their churches, which they regard as sufficient for accountability purposes. Some SRE Boards made it clear that they took their registration with Generate Ministries to constitute appropriate registration. A few ministers commented that being registered by the Department would assist Boards to become more accountable because the process would help strengthen governance structures. Others ministers/ church representatives opposed the establishment of a registration system beyond the existing formal and legal ties between SRE Boards and providers, on the grounds that registration

would impose unnecessary bureaucracy, particularly where the group is an incorporated association already and subject to regulation by NSW Fair Trading.

### ***Peak religious groups***

Peak religious bodies expressed both pro- and anti-registration views. The Catholic Conference of Religious Educators in State Schools (CCRESS) supports the idea of a registration list but makes the point that SRE Boards, Associations and Committees should not be given provider status because the entities are not religious persuasions themselves. ICCOREIS members see no need for registration of groups who organise the local provision of SRE. ICCOREIS's submission noted that a NSW Fair Trading registered Association, as opposed to a Committee or Board, is an approved legal body and a regulated means for people in NSW to achieve aims or objectives their members agree upon.

### ***Other stakeholder groups***

The Greens political party pointed to the significant role SRE Boards and Associations have in marketing SRE to schools and 'pressuring schools to provide enhanced access' for scripture. They further indicated that these organisations should be required to register and operate within guidelines that prescribe limits on their influence over school decision-making, and their activities should be made publicly accountable. A small number of secondary principals reported feeling pressured to take on a model where a paid SRE teacher (employed by an SRE Board) takes on responsibility for organising SRE lessons and also gives the majority of lessons. They felt this model would exclude other SRE providers.

The NSW Secondary Principals' Council's preference is not to have registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees pointing out that Boards do not deliver SRE, and preferring to see less 'red tape'.

The NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations supports the registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees, 'if this would support the Department to maintain regulation and control over the quality and delivery of SRE programs in public schools. The process of registration and ongoing regulation would need to be clearly articulated'.

## **3.5.4 Conclusions**

The Reviewers consider there is a need for a government response to acknowledge the important role and influence that SRE Boards, Associations and Committees and other third party organisations have in the delivery of combined SRE arrangements. However, it is not certain that establishing a registration scheme is the most commensurate response in this complex environment.

An SRE Board, Association or Committee that operates successfully benefits schools because these governance structures are capable of bringing sufficient resources together to meet schools' and parents' demands for well organised SRE lessons. However, the activities and composition of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees are not always transparent to the school community. All SRE Boards associated with Generate Ministries provide details about the approved providers involved in combined arrangements. Other local SRE Boards, Associations and Committees are not as transparent. Where combined SRE arrangements are in place, it is not easy for parents to identify the curriculum being used or find out which provider has authorised a teacher or know about the role of the paid SRE teacher in organising SRE. Registration is one mechanism for making the role and composition of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees publicly known. But other approaches, for example, publishing details on school websites annually about combined SRE arrangements including the names of providers, paid SRE teachers and any third parties involved, would use fewer departmental resources and place less administrative burden on providers and give more transparency.

Some argue that regulation of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees could be a mechanism for improving the quality of SRE delivery. But the Department's *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) already provide this mechanism—albeit these procedures need strengthening and closer monitoring—and these procedures apply to all providers. Regulating SRE Boards, Associations and Committees would likely have the effect of providing more weight to combined arrangements and perhaps send a signal that this is a preferred arrangement. Regulation would have no impact on providers that are not part of combined arrangements. Combined arrangements have already 'professionalised' the delivery of SRE in secondary schools because of minimum qualifications being required for paid SRE teachers and the professional learning support available, so it is difficult to see what additional value a government registration scheme would bring in improving the quality of SRE in secondary schools.

Evidence from the Review's evidence indicates that having a paid SRE teacher in a school can 'squeeze out' other SRE providers because schools find it convenient to have that person organise SRE lessons and SRE lessons may be timetabled around their commitments. Providers not involved in combined SRE arrangements should not be disadvantaged and schools should be alerted to this possibility should they have a paid SRE in the school. To ensure that the school principals are well-informed about the role SRE, Boards, Associations and Committees and third party organisations, the Department should draft advice as part of the Review of the *Special Religious Education Implementation Procedures*. This advice should cover how and on what basis a paid SRE teacher is involved in organising SRE and explicitly limit their role broader school activities because they are not under the management of the school principal.

## 4. Implementation processes: enrolment practices and complaints

This chapter looks at implementation processes for SRE in schools, specifically, the processes for allocating students to SRE and complaints procedures. It responds to Term of Reference 2—Department of Education implementation procedures for SRE: parent/ caregiver choice through the enrolment process and opting out; Term of Reference 8— The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice or opting out; and Term of Reference 3—Development of complaints procedures and protocols. It makes conclusions about what might be needed in these areas.

### 4.1 Parent/ Caregiver choice through the enrolment process and opting out

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* set out the obligations of schools to facilitate parents' choices about their child's participation in SRE. Information about how to exercise choice should be provided through school enrolment information, the school website and the school newsletter. The procedures use the term 'opt-out' to refer to the need for parents to specifically request that their child no longer be enrolled in SRE. If they do not make this request then their child will continue to be enrolled in SRE from year to year.

#### 4.1.1 What is required or intended

The Education Act 1990 says that:

*No child at a government school is to be required to receive any general religious education or special religious education if the parent of the child objects to the child's receiving that education.*

The July 2015 *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* outlines parents' rights.

- *Parents have the right to have their child receive instruction in their religious persuasion, where authorised teachers of that persuasion are available.*
- *Parents may nominate an alternative religious persuasion.*
- *Parents have the right to choose not to have their children attend SRE.*
- *Parents have the right to know how SRE will be organised each year and which religious organisations will deliver SRE to their child.*
- *Parents of students who do not attend SRE may be offered alternative activities including SEE where available, only after a request by parents/ caregivers to withdraw their child/ren has been communicated to the school.*



At enrolment, parents/ caregivers are to be advised:

- of special religious education options at the school, including the religious persuasions providing special religious education and arrangements made for students whose parents/ caregivers indicate that they are not to attend special religious education.
- that they may nominate an alternative persuasion, where special religious education is not offered for students of a particular religious persuasion, or for other reasons.
- where a religious persuasion was nominated on enrolment, the student is enrolled in a special religious education class of the religious persuasion identified on the student's enrolment record.
- where a religious persuasion was not nominated on enrolment or the nominated religious persuasion is not available as a special religious education program at the school, parents/ caregivers are asked to complete a special religious education preference form which outlines all special religious education options available at the school. Parents/ caregivers have the right to choose any of the special religious education options available or to choose non-special religious education.
- a parent/ caregiver may at any time notify the school in writing<sup>14</sup> that they do not wish their child to attend special religious education.
- Students are to continue in the same arrangement as the previous year, unless a parent/ caregiver has requested a change.

The Department also provides fact sheets and letter templates for principals to use and periodically provides more detailed advice via memorandums and SchoolBiz. In 2014–2015, the Department updated advice on policy and implementation procedures several times and made changes to the school enrolment forms twice (Table 20).

**Table 20. Chronology of school enrolment form release and associated actions**

| Date             | Document   | Audience           |
|------------------|--|--------------------|
| 2 October 2015   | Enrolment Form: 2015 enrolment form release  | Public             |
| 29 July 2015     | Latest web update to the Religious Education Policy  | Public             |
| 29 July 2015     | Update to Religious Education Implementation Procedures                                    | Public             |
| 24 April 2015    | Implementing SRE & SEE in NSW government schools (link to fact sheet with flowchart)       | SchoolBiz Intranet |
| 4 February 2015  | Most recent web update to the <i>Special Education in Ethics implementation procedures</i> | Public             |
| 11 February 2015 | Most recent web update to the Special Education in Ethics policy                           | Public             |

<sup>14</sup> The Department advises that this was a recommendation accepted from the *Rawlinson Report* (1981)

| Date             | Document   | Audience                       |
|------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 16 December 2014 | Deputy Secretary memorandum: Memorandum to schools regarding SRE policy and implementation procedures  | Principals                     |
| 20 June 2014     | Enrolment form: 2014 enrolment form release  | SchoolBiz and form on internet |
| 2012             | Additional pages added to the enrolment form for health (2 page health addendum only)  | Form public                    |
| 4 December 2012  | Government response to the Education Final Report on Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011                                       | Public                         |
| 30 May 2012      | Final Report of General Purpose Standing Committee No 2, Education Amendment, (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011                                  | Public                         |
| 7 December 2010  | Section 33A added to Education Act   | Public                         |
| 4 August 2009    | Enrolment Form: 'Purple' enrolment form released to schools (Religion question page 8. Scripture class field in office use only section page 12. | Public                         |

Source: Department of Education

\* Changes in 2015 to GRE/SRE and SEE policy and as indicated by publication dates on the policies site.

The SRE section of the June 2014 and October 2015 school enrolment forms are shown in Figure 10 and Figure 11.

**Figure 10. Enrolment form released on 20 June 2014**

**SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

*Special Religious Education (SRE) may be provided by approved religious groups in some schools.*

**Do you wish the student to attend Special Religious Education classes?**  Yes  No

*If yes, please nominate the Special Religious Education class that you would like the student to attend. The school will be able to give you a list of classes that are provided.*

*Answering the next question is optional. This information may be used to plan for Special Religious Education classes.*

**What is the student's religion?** *If none, please write 'no religion.'*

**SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ETHICS**

*Special Education in Ethics is an option in some schools for students not attending Special Religious Education classes.*

*Special Education in Ethics is a program in ethical decision making, action and reflection within a secular framework, based on a branch of philosophy.*

**Do you wish the student to attend Special Education in Ethics classes, if available at the school?**  Yes  No

**Figure 11. Enrolment form released on 20 October 2015**

**SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

*In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion.*

*Completion of the following is optional. This information is used to plan for Special Religious Education (SRE) at individual schools. SRE is taught by approved SRE providers.*

**Please identify the student's religion if you want the student to participate in SRE.**

*Information about the organisation of SRE at individual schools, and details of alternative activities, will be provided by your school.*

*Special Education in Ethics (SEE) is an alternative activity offered at some primary schools for students who do not participate in SRE. Please contact your school if you would like further information about SEE or other alternative activities.*

## 4.1.2 What occurs in practice

### ***Parents' choices about SRE***

Schools are largely respecting parents' right to have their child attend SRE, as shown by the school and student participation rates (see section 2.3 and 2.4):

- The results from the survey of principals show that in 2015 SRE classes were held in 87% of schools that responded, with 92% of primary schools holding SRE, and 81% of secondary schools.
- The participation rate of students in SRE varies greatly between primary and secondary schools—a sample of schools from the survey of principals showed 71% of primary school students and 30% of secondary school students participate in SRE. The sample of secondary schools was small (9% of secondary schools) and the results should be treated cautiously; however the finding is consistent with evidence from interviews.

The majority of parents (77%) who responded to the Review's parent/ caregiver online contribution portal agree (63%) or mostly agree (14%) that they have been able to exercise their right to nominate an alternative religious persuasion for their child to attend where SRE cannot be offered for students of a particular religious persuasion, or for other reasons. However, a substantial minority disagreed (19%) or mostly disagree with this statement.

If parents nominate a religion that is not provided, then it seems schools take different approaches in the extent to which they will follow up and try to find a provider to meet this need: generally, schools will not progress their enquiries with providers if there are only a couple of students concerned. It is common for schools to put the onus back on the parents to identify a provider who may be able to supply SRE teachers.

Evidence was received through surveys and case studies of the practice in some metropolitan schools for parents to change the choice of SRE religious persuasion from the one given at enrolment so that their children can experience SRE classes with different faith groups. This creates additional workload for schools, and in response, one case study school has

implemented a policy restricting SRE preference change to once a semester and another is considering taking a similar stance.

*We have issues with parents chopping and changing religions during the term, or trying a 'Taste Test' of different faiths. This causes a huge workload for the office staff and is unfair to the volunteer teachers who have a changing enrolment in their classes.—Primary principal*

The majority of parents (92%) who contributed to the online contribution portal agreed (81%) or mostly agreed (11%) that they had been able to exercise their right to withdraw their child from SRE.

These results indicate that, on the whole, schools are providing SRE for students and allowing parents to choose alternatives to these classes. At the same time, during 2015 there have been many concerns raised about SRE participation guidelines, practices and the information that is provided to parents.

### **School processes for placing students into SRE and opting out**

Around one-third of provider SRE coordinators indicated they always or often have concerns about the opt-out process for SRE and about a lack of information for parents about SRE. A lower proportion of principals shared these concerns (Table 21).

**Table 21. Extent provider SRE coordinators and principals are concerned about enrolment and opting out processes**

| Response category                     | Lack of information about SRE for the school |                   | Lack of information about SRE for parents |                   | Opt-out process for SRE           |                   |
|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------|---|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
|                                       | Provider SRE coordinators (n=491)            | Principal (n=642) | Provider SRE coordinators (n=521)         | Principal (n=634) | Provider SRE coordinators (n=503) | Principal (n=632) |
| Always                                | 3%   | 5%                | 10%                                       | 8%                | 14%                               | 14%               |
| Often                                 | 10%  | 11%               | 25%                                       | 16%               | 19%                               | 13%               |
| Sometimes                             | 39%  | 38%               | 46%                                       | 42%               | 38%                               | 27%               |
| Never                                 | 48%  | 46%               | 19%                                       | 34%               | 28%                               | 47%               |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>100%</b>                                  | <b>100%</b>       | <b>100%</b>                               | <b>100%</b>       | <b>100%</b>                       | <b>100%</b>       |
| <i>Don't know/<br/>not applicable</i> | <i>81</i>                                    | <i>10</i>         | <i>71</i>                                 | <i>20</i>         | <i>76</i>                         | <i>17</i>         |
| <i>No data</i>                        | <i>45</i>                                    | <i>203</i>        | <i>25</i>                                 | <i>201</i>        | <i>38</i>                         | <i>206</i>        |

Sources: Survey of Provider SRE Coordinators and Survey of Principals. Note that 855 of 1,003 principals who responded had SRE classes in 2015. Only those with SRE were asked these questions.

The evidence from case studies showed a lot of variation in the application of school enrolment procedures for allocation into SRE (and SEE), which stems from some uncertainty and confusion amongst schools about these procedures. This is partly a result of the changes made to the school enrolment form in June 2014, and partly because the policy content is somewhat ambiguous in places.

In this period, the procedures were not well aligned with changes to the school enrolment form made in June 2014, which caused confusion for some schools. Commenting on the difficulty of staying informed about changes to departmental policies or procedures, the NSW Primary Principals' Association pointed out that busy school principals are required to make judgment calls about the delivery of SRE and SEE without awareness of the nuances at play, and sometimes upset community groups for whom SRE is a sole focus.

Fewer than half of the case study schools had a good understanding of the changes to the enrolment form and how these relate to SRE procedures. As a result, a majority were not fully compliant with the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures (2015)*. For example, many of the case study schools appeared to be unaware of the SRE preference form that is intended to be used to confirm parents' choices about SRE should this not be clear from the school enrolment form. Examples of different practices used by schools when no religion was nominated on the enrolment form, include:

- informally check SRE preferences with parents (this is also done when 'Christian' is nominated but there are more than one Christian provider)
- place students into the Protestant SRE and then write to parents to confirm this is acceptable
- place the students into non-scripture
- place students in the same SRE as their sibling/s.

Note that there is a different approach outlined in the Implementing SRE and SEE in NSW Government schools flowchart (SchoolBiz, 24 April 2015) for those who write 'no religion' in the space for religion, and for those who leave this space blank.

Changes made to the enrolment form in June 2014 raised a number of concerns that were shared with the Review:

- the lack of consultation with providers about the proposed changes
- the adequacy of information for schools
- lack of transparency in the information for parents about
  - the availability of SRE and SEE at their school
  - the processes for being placed into SRE and SEE
  - the choices available to parents for their children to participate in SRE or not
- that forms do not always make it clear that the default is for students to attend SRE; some SRE Boards want this stated on school enrolment forms
- there is no statement on the enrolment form about parents' rights to choose to withdraw their child from SRE, or an option to choose non-SRE

- the forms do not explicitly state that the information will be used to form SRE classes (wording used is for future planning)
- there is no statement about what occurs if the information about preferred religious persuasion or the student's religion is left blank
- the suitability of the language for parents with English as a second language.

The case study schools used the full gamut of suggested approaches to inform parents about SRE options, as listed in the implementation procedures, although the Reviewers don't know how extensive or how effective these approaches are. The Reviewers also heard of other approaches, including having SRE providers speak at orientation days or handing out their own information about SRE at the school. Many comments in the Survey of Providers and in case study interviews indicated that providers are unsure how much of the information they provide to schools is passed on to parents, and want the opportunity to do this themselves at orientation days or similar.

Some principals commented on the confusion that exists about what information can be given to parents and in what manner, illustrated by this example.

*There has been some confusion in the last 12 months about what we are allowed to tell parents openly about 'opt-out' options and in which manner we can tell them and when. Our preference is to be open and honest about all options that this school offers in a NON MARKETING manner rather than to rely on classroom grapevines to let parents know that choosing Ethics is open to all members of the community, from grade one onwards. —*  
Primary principal

The NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations says that 'Parents need to be provided with complete information regarding the content of SRE and SEE classes so that they can make an informed choice.'

### ***Stakeholders' views on opting out***

From a policy perspective in DoE the terms 'opt-in' and 'opt-out' are not used, although the term 'opt-out' is used in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*. Regardless of the terminology used, an opt-out process has been followed in NSW for student participation in SRE. The opt-out process is one where all students who have a religion entered on their school enrolment forms automatically participate in that religion's SRE classes (if they are available), unless parents write to the school to withdraw them. An opt-in process, where parents indicate their approval for their child/ren's participation in SRE before they can attend classes, could be expected to decrease the level of participation in SRE, through changing the default position.

While there was no intention to present an opt-in process for SRE in the school enrolment form introduced in June 2014, this was an unintended consequence of using the question 'Do you wish the student to attend Special Religious Education classes?' with tick boxes for 'Yes'

and 'No' (see Figure 10). In 2015, there was a mix of practices for newly enrolled students, depending on which enrolment form was used by schools and/ or how it was applied. Some schools using the new form did experience a decrease in the usual number of Kindergarten or Year 8 students entering SRE.

*For the first time in 2015 when parents can tick SRE on the enrolment form we have noticed a huge lack of support for SRE. There are only 12/152 students ticking the SRE box.*  
—Secondary principal

The argument for using the opt-out process is that it facilitates widespread participation in SRE, which is easier for schools and providers to plan for, while still providing parents with the choice for their children to not participate. Parents need to be informed and proactive to exercise this choice.

CCRESS and ICCOREIS, representing Christian SRE providers, support the opt-out process. Both groups argue to maintain the process that establishes an SRE choice before offering alternative activities that may include SEE at some primary schools. They support the right of parents to choose whether or not their child attends SRE, but only through the process of actively withdrawing them from SRE classes by writing to the school.

The argument for using an opt-in process is usually made in terms of transparency and informed parent choice. The NSW Greens argue that 'many parents are not being told of the option of withdrawing their child from SRE' and that school newsletters can 'create the impression that SRE is mandatory and in some cases a core part of the curriculum.' They point out that 'the SRE participation letter gives scripture providers a second chance to recruit. It is unnecessary and biased and imposes an inappropriate workload on school administrators.'

In exploring stakeholder views about these practices, the Reviewers were uncertain whether the terms 'opt-out' and 'opt-in' as they apply to SRE, and the implications of each approach, are generally well understood. The Review surveys (with the exception of the Survey of Providers) asked about the preference for opt-out or opt-in SRE participation, using two questions based on the status quo and its alternative to check for response bias (the tendency to respond in a certain way depending on how a question is asked). Survey results usually indicated a preference for either opt-in or opt-out. The one exception was primary principals, where there was no clear preference in their responses for either one of the two processes.

Secondary principals showed a clear preference for opt-in SRE enrolment (73%), as did principals from central schools (63%) and Schools for Specific Purposes (84%). Primary principals did not have a clear preference for opt-out (66%) or opt-in (65%) enrolment.

*SRE should be regarded as a variation to routine if it is to continue in public schools, i.e. use the opt-in process and conduct the delivery on a seminar basis. Only if the parent*

*specifically requests/ signs for inclusion in the SRE program should a student attend, just like a school excursion. —Secondary principal*

A majority of parents (69%) who contributed to the online contribution portal stated a preference for the current opt-out SRE enrolment. Behind this figure are the sharply divergent views of different groups of parents. Parents who have children enrolled in SEE (or would have if it was available) did not support the opt-out process (28%), while parents who did not have children enrolled in SEE strongly supported the opt-out process (93%).

SRE providers were in favour of opt-out enrolment (83%), and SRE coordinators and SRE teachers were highly in favour of the opt-out process (94% of each group).

SEE coordinators (11%) and SEE teachers (9%) do not favour opt-out, but prefer the opt-in process.

Some comments received from the online contribution portal for 'other interested parties' appear to support an opt-in process, but may in fact be arguing for improvement in the distribution of information to parents.

*Where a school offers both SRE and SEE, we believe it is important for the school to distribute to parents information on each provided by the relevant providers, so that parents and students can make an informed choice. Parents should then be requested to inform the school whether they wish their student(s) to be in SRE, SEE, or neither. It is important that schools distribute information provided by the relevant providers, to ensure that both SRE and SEE are fairly and equitably represented in the information given to parents. —SRE Board*

### **4.1.3 Conclusions**

There should be clear information for parents about SRE options, enrolment choices and processes, including alternative activities and SEE where this is offered.

The Reviewers suggest the current method of opt-out enrolment for primary schools be retained.

The Reviewers suggest the Department considers changing the SRE participation process to an opt-in one for secondary schools.



## 4.2 The need for annual confirmation by parents/ caregivers on SRE choice

The Review sought feedback on whether there is a need for annual confirmation by parents/ caregivers on SRE choice or opting out.

### 4.2.1 What is required or intended

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* state that:

*Students are to continue in the same arrangement as the previous year, unless a parent/ caregiver has requested a change.*

### 4.2.2 What occurs in practice and stakeholder views

Most of the evidence suggests that, in general, most schools follow the guidelines and continue the same SRE arrangements for their students as for the previous year. According to the Survey of Principals, two-thirds of schools (67%) report confirming SRE choice with parents at the beginning of every year, more often in secondary schools (73%) than in primary schools (66%). This response is puzzling, and the Reviewers think it may be referring to some students only, e.g. new students, or where there is some ambiguity of choice, rather than the whole school. Nevertheless, the Reviewers did hear of at least two schools through the case study interviews where an annual confirmation of SRE choice occurs, one through a general permission note with 15 items on it, and the other through an annual student information update form that includes SRE options and SEE.

An annual confirmation process could happen in different ways, as illustrated by the small number of examples where it is already happening (see above). There is the potential for it to act as an annual opt-in process. One SRE teacher reported that a secondary school in their area 'sent the new enrolment form to ALL families at the school rather than just to those in Year 7. This resulted in a drop off students enrolled in SRE from 600 to 60 at the start of 2015 and the SRE teacher who had been employed at the school 9 days/ fortnight for 3 years had to find other work.' This rather extreme example illustrates the potential disruption for SRE providers. It also illustrates why some believe that an opt-out process does not reflect the choice that parents would make if they were asked.

The introduction of an annual confirmation process is supported by:

- secondary principals, with 59% in favour of this approach (51% supported continued enrolment from the previous year)
- the NSW Primary Principals' Association
- the NSW Secondary Principals' Council
- the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations

- the Greens NSW
- SEE coordinators (68%) and SEE teachers (83%).

The process of SRE enrolment choice continuing from the previous year is supported by:

- a majority of primary principals (73%)
- the majority of parents (74%) who responded to the online contribution portal
- just over half of providers (57%)
- SRE coordinators (77%) and SRE teachers (84%).

CCRESS and ICCOREIS support enrolment choice continuing from the previous year. Reasons for not supporting an annual confirmation include:

- the implementation procedures require schools to communicate to parents each year the patterns of SRE and alternative activities
- parents have the opportunity to opt-out at any time
- changes to current procedures would cause unnecessary delays to the commencement of SRE and SEE classes each year
- that it represents a significant workload for school administration officers
- that it is not a process used for any school subject, but only regarding medical conditions. ICCOREIS members do not think that a person's religion should be implied to be in the same category as medical conditions.

Twelve of the 19 SRE Boards and Associations who made contributions to the online contribution portal were against introducing an annual confirmation of parent choice, arguing that the current system works well. Seven SRE Boards and Associations were in favour of introducing an annual confirmation, although two thought that this should happen at the Stage level rather than for each Year group. One suggested that this process be accompanied by a summary of the SRE material being taught and anticipated outcomes.

### 4.2.3 Conclusion

The different views about an annual confirmation process encompass two sets of issues. The first are competing views about encouraging or discouraging SRE in schools. The second are pragmatic concerns about administering the process of annual confirmation. While the two sets of issues will inexorably overlap for many stakeholders, the first are beyond the scope of this Review, while the second go to the core of implementation. For this reason, the Reviewers have concluded that the views of principals are the most significant.

Schools should continue the practice of continuing enrolment as for the previous year, without further confirmation. If principals wish to confirm annually as part of their school practice, that should be allowed.

## 4.3 Complaints procedures and protocols

The third Term of Reference for the Review is 'Development of complaints procedures and protocols.'

### 4.3.1 What is required or intended

#### ***Departmental***

All DoE officers, including teachers and principals, must follow the Department's *Complaints Handling Policy* and associated *Complaints Handling Guidelines* when a complaint about the implementation of SRE is made to them. The objective of this policy is that difficulties, grievances and complaints are resolved in a prompt, impartial and just manner. For less serious complaints, informal resolution is encouraged.

The 2015 *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* gives the following advice about complaints:

*Principals who have received complaints concerning alleged teaching inefficiency or inappropriate lesson content take appropriate steps and notify the representative of the approved provider that authorised the teacher.*

*If a principal receives allegations of improper behaviour or other complaints of a serious nature it is managed in accordance with the Department's policies and procedures. The principal must refer allegations of a child protection nature to the Department's Employee Performance and Conduct Directorate.*

#### ***SRE providers***

SRE providers, especially the larger well organised ones, have developed complaints procedures and have codes of conduct in place that reference the departmental guidelines and other relevant policies and legislation. For example:

- The CCRESS submission to the Review states that,

*CCRESS has established guidelines for Support, Mediation & Resolution of Complaints/ Disputes in SRE. They are designed to act as a template to be adapted to individual diocese's terminology and circumstances; to deal with issues arising within the SRE community and DoE, predominantly where the SRE community is making the complaint. These guidelines have been adapted from the initial work done for the Hunter Christian SRE Committee's Recommended Guidelines and its Joint Denominational framework. The guidelines are designed to deal with complaints that may arise and require intervention and/or mediation in order to achieve resolution. They offer consistency of approach and an*

*appropriate timeline in order to achieve an outcome. They have been developed in order to adopt a consistent, open and transparent process in the handling of issues arising in the delivery of Catholic SRE and Joint Denominational SRE.*

- The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle *SRE Code of Conduct*, June 2014 states that,  
*The breach in Code of Conduct may initially be identified by a student, parent/carer, classroom teacher, SRE Coordinator or school staff who would then refer the matter to the authorising person. The Parish Priest or Pastoral Coordinator must be notified of breaches of the Code. This authorising person will determine the course of action that needs to be taken in consultation with the Children's Ministries Team. All allegations against an SRE Teacher or assistant must be referred to the Diocesan Professional Conduct and Child Protection Unit (Zimmerman Services) as well as Parish authorities.*
- Generate Ministries' *Complaints and Grievances Policy* recommends where possible that complaints be dealt with early and at the local level. Where this is not possible and where the complaint involves an issue of professional misconduct, then a clear formal process is outlined that includes informing senior Generate staff members and the school principal.
- Presbyterian Church in NSW *SRE Policy* outlines a flow process for addressing complaints, starting from informal resolution at the local level to formal discussions between senior departmental and church officers.
- In its submission to the Review, ICCOREIS notes that it is '*not the appropriate organisation to receive complaints*', and that while it can advise its members, the ultimate authority remains with the individual members, i.e. the providers that authorise teachers.  
*In combined arrangements, it has been standard practice for many years for local providers to appoint an SRE Coordinator. Included in this role is the management of complaints. Most issues are solved locally by discussion between the SRE Coordinator and the school administration.*

### **4.3.2 What occurs in practice**

In practice, complaints are being frequently dealt with according to the departmental guidelines.

Complaints are first handled locally, and according to their perceived seriousness and nature. Complaints about SRE teachers are managed by the provider and principals and/or school SRE coordinators. For example, less serious issues that pertain to the organisation and conduct of SRE lessons such as minor student behavioural issues and SRE teachers not showing up for scheduled SRE lessons, are generally solved through a discussion between an individual SRE teacher and the school SRE coordinator. Case studies showed that the provider SRE coordinator may sometimes also be involved.

More serious issues about compliance with the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* or the Department's Code of Conduct may be first dealt with at the school level, but may also be escalated where local action has not been effective or where the issue is likely to impact on other schools.

## Principals

The Survey of Principals received 855 responses from schools that are offering SRE during 2015. Of these, 649 responded to the questions about complaints. More than half (58%) had received one or more complaints related to SRE during the past two years. The proportion was similar for primary and secondary schools.

Principals were asked about the source of complaints. Closed options were provided, and principals could also give other sources not on the list (Table 22). The main sources of complaints were from classroom teachers (43% of respondents), parents/ caregivers (41% of respondents), and secondary school students (35% of secondary school respondents). More secondary schools than primary schools received complaints from providers (10% cf. 1%), SRE teachers (12% cf. 5%) or other sources (7% cf. 1%).

**Table 22. Source of complaints about SRE to principals in the past two years**

|                             | All        |         | Primary    |         | Secondary  |         |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------|
|                             | N          | Percent | N          | Percent | N          | Percent |
| From parents/ caregivers    | 268        | 41%     | 206        | 42%     | 53         | 40%     |
| From teachers at the school | 278        | 43%     | 219        | 45%     | 51         | 38%     |
| From students               | 167        | 26%     | 27         | 5%      | 47         | 35%     |
| From providers              | 38         | 6%      | 5          | 1%      | 13         | 10%     |
| From SRE teachers           | 81         | 12%     | 24         | 5%      | 16         | 12%     |
| Other                       | 17         | 3%      | 7          | 1%      | 9          | 7%      |
| No complaints received      | 271        | 42%     | 202        | 41%     | 56         | 42%     |
| Complaints received         | 378        | 58%     | 289        | 59%     | 78         | 58%     |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>649</b> |         | <b>491</b> |         | <b>134</b> |         |
| <i>No data</i>              | <i>206</i> |         | <i>177</i> |         | <i>25</i>  |         |

Source: Survey of Principals, schools offering SRE in 2015. Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%. 'Other' includes, for primary schools: community members, staff other than teaching staff, university students studying to be teachers; for secondary schools: community members, professional lobbyists, teacher's aides.

Principals who had received complaints were asked to list the most common complaints. They could select up to three of the closed options provided, or add a response not on the list (Table 23). The most common complaints are the content of SRE lessons (58% of respondents who received complaints), the effect on the child of SRE (29% of respondents who received complaints), and the alternative activities for those not attending SRE or SEE (26% of respondents who received complaints). The extent of the first two complaints is similar for primary and secondary schools, but complaints about alternative activities are slightly higher for secondary schools than primary schools (31% cf. 25%).

Complaints about the opt-out process for SRE are more common for secondary schools than primary schools (38% cf. 13%), as is lack of information about SRE (15% cf. 6%). Complaints about class sizes are more common for primary schools than secondary schools (10% cf. 4%), as are other reasons (21% cf. 11%). Examples of other complaints include teacher quality, student behaviour and loss of teaching time. Case studies heard about SRE teachers sharing food without checking with the school about allergies; and SRE teachers using a language other than English (and the classroom teacher not being sure what is being taught).

**Table 23. Main reasons for complaints received by principals about SRE**

|  | All |         | Primary |         | Secondary |         |
|--|-----|---------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|
|  | N   | Percent | N       | Percent | N         | Percent |
| Content of SRE lessons   | 188 | 58%     | 144     | 58%     | 38        | 53%     |
| Effect on child of SRE   | 96  | 29%     | 73      | 30%     | 20        | 28%     |
| The alternative activities for students not attending SRE or SEE | 85  | 26%     | 62      | 25%     | 22        | 31%     |
| Opt-out process for SRE  | 60  | 18%     | 33      | 13%     | 27        | 38%     |
| Lack of particular faith group availability                      | 41  | 13%     | 32      | 13%     | 8         | 11%     |
| Class sizes for SRE  | 28  | 9%      | 24      | 10%     | 3         | 4%      |
| Lack of information about SRE                                    | 26  | 8%      | 14      | 6%      | 11        | 15%     |
| Child safety concerns  | 21  | 6%      | 14      | 6%      | 6         | 8%      |
| Technology issues  | 9   | 3%      | 8       | 3%      | 1         | 1%      |
| Other  | 61  | 19%     | 52      | 21%     | 8         | 11%     |
| Number of schools that received complaints                       | 326 |         | 247     |         | 72        |         |
| <i>No data</i>   | 52  |         | 42      |         | 6         |         |

Source: Survey of Principals, schools offering SRE in 2015. Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%.

Principals and their peak groups perceive the Department's complaints procedures as they relate to SRE delivery as working well. Most principals (87%) who responded to the survey report that the complaints procedures work well. A small number (n=26) said that procedures could be improved with clearer guidelines. No specific suggestions were received, although one commented that 'Complaints take time and have an emotional impact that we should not have to deal with.'

### **Parents/ caregivers**

The online contribution portal for parents and caregivers asked if parents know who to contact if they have a complaint; if they have made a complaint about SRE, SEE or alternative activities (asked separately), and their satisfaction that it was handled appropriately; and the broad nature of the complaint made, with closed options provided, and space for other options not on the list (Table 24).

Eighty-four percent of parents who responded to the online contribution portal said that they know who to contact if they have complaints about SRE or SEE. Those who did not were often unaware that the school should be the first place to make a complaint about SRE delivery. Some parents assume that SRE is not school business and that complaints about SRE must go to some unknown person working for a provider.

Ten percent (n=465) of parents who responded reported they had made a complaint concerning SRE: 4% were satisfied or mostly satisfied that the complaint was handled appropriately, while 6% were not satisfied.

Five percent of all parent respondents had made a complaint about the content of an SRE lesson, which is almost half of all those who reported making a complaint, and the most common reason given. This aligns with the evidence from the survey of principals. Four percent had made a complaint about the quality of SRE teaching (Table 24).

Examples of complaints about content or quality of lessons include: scare tactics and divisiveness; psychological safety for LGBTI students; pressure to attend; dogmatic approach; Santa Claus not being real; discourse scaring the students, e.g. themselves or their family going to hell.

Other issues raised include students attending SRE or non-SRE classes without parental consent; diversion from curriculum; new school work being conducted during SRE; time of day allocated to lessons; a payment being required; that SRE is offered at public schools.

**Table 24. The nature of complaints by parents in relation to SRE**

|   | N    | Percent |
|---|------|---------|
| Number of respondents                                     | 4775 |         |
| Parents who had made a complaint                          | 465  | 10%     |
| Content of SRE lessons                                    | 219  | 5%      |
| Quality of teaching for SRE                               | 175  | 4%      |
| Lack of information about SRE                             | 112  | 2%      |
| Enrolment processes for SRE                               | 101  | 2%      |
| Child safety concerns                                     | 64   | 1%      |
| Lack of availability of a particular religious persuasion | 46   | 1%      |
| Class sizes for SRE                                       | 15   | 0%      |
| Other (please specify)                                    | 143  | 3%      |

Source: Parent/ Caregiver online contribution portal. Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%.

Where parents had been involved in discussions to resolve a complaint and were happy with the outcome, they tended to describe principals as being approachable, helpful and their actions as timely and sometimes, discrete.

Parents appear to be less satisfied that their complaints about SRE are handled appropriately when they are dissatisfied with or have not been informed about the outcome.

Dissatisfaction was also related to the nature of the complaint, especially where it conflicts with SRE policy and *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*, which are beyond the scope of schools to change. These parents expressed frustration that schools could not make different choices.

In some cases, parents perceived that the principal's own views (either for or against SRE) were influencing the actions taken regarding their complaint.

### ***SRE providers***

It is often part of the role of providers' SRE coordinators to be the first point of contact within the organisation for complaints. The Survey of Provider SRE Coordinators showed that 73% of respondents had this responsibility as part of their role (Table 9). Their feedback on complaints processes was largely positive. Eighty-nine percent of provider SRE coordinators say there are clear processes for making complaints to schools, and 94% said that their



organisation has clear processes for handling complaints that are received from schools (Table 25).

**Table 25. Clarity of complaint processes: views of provider SRE coordinators**

|  | N   | Agree | Mostly agree | Mostly disagree | Disagree | Total | Not applicable | No data |
|--|-----|-------|--------------|-----------------|----------|-------|----------------|---------|
| There are clear processes for making complaints to schools                                 | 572 | 55%   | 34%          | 7%              | 4%       | 100%  | 13             | 32      |
| My provider organisation has clear processes for handling complaints received from schools | 541 | 66%   | 28%          | 5%              | 2%       | 100%  | 42             | 34      |

Source: Survey of Provider SRE Coordinators.

Amongst those who had handled complaints within the past two years, most were satisfied that these had been handled appropriately (83% for complaints made to schools; 88% for complaints received from schools) (Table 26).

**Table 26. Provider SRE coordinators' satisfaction with complaints**

|  | N   | Agree | Mostly agree | Mostly disagree | Disagree | Total | Not applicable | No data |
|--|-----|-------|--------------|-----------------|----------|-------|----------------|---------|
| I have made one or more complaints to schools within the past two years, and am satisfied that these were dealt with appropriately       | 244 | 45%   | 38%          | 8%              | 9%       | 100%  | 338            | 35      |
| I have received one or more complaints from schools within the past two years, and am satisfied that these were dealt with appropriately | 206 | 65%   | 23%          | 5%              | 7%       | 100%  | 376            | 35      |

Source: Survey of Provider SRE Coordinators.

SRE teachers who responded to the online contribution portal indicated they are well informed about how to make a complaint about the school's support for delivering SRE (78% agree, and 18% mostly agree with this statement). Many found their school/s to be generally supportive, so have never had to make a complaint. Others described a positive experience using the complaints process, saying schools were approachable when an issue was raised. School SRE coordinators were described as very accessible and helpful in resolving issues. A few SRE teachers noted that they would not feel comfortable dealing directly with their

school because schools do not always take kindly to any criticism of their procedures or teachers.

There is also some evidence that the procedures could be made clearer, particularly for parents, and SRE Boards and Associations that have a governance role in SRE.

- Eighty-three percent of provider SRE coordinators who responded to the survey said the complaints procedures work well; 12% that Department processes need improvement, and four percent that provider organisations' processes need improvement.
- SRE Boards or Associations and church groups gave limited feedback through the online contribution portal about the development of complaints procedures and protocols. In many cases, they were unsure about what complaints procedures exist. Those that were aware indicated they were generally satisfied with the complaints procedures in place.
- Some SRE Boards expressed concern that complaints processes may currently be used by opponents of SRE to increase any existing discontent with SRE. The solutions proposed by the concerned SRE Boards are to ensure that the Department acts fairly, and to enable local bodies to deal summarily with complaints which they hold to have been made in bad faith (implicitly with no right of appeal by the complainant). It is not clear how either of these proposed solutions might be implemented, and the second proposed solution in particular runs contrary to the terms of this Review, since the Terms of Reference mandate that the Review considers strengthening, not weakening, complaints processes.
- Some SRE Boards believe that the Department does not handle complaints fairly, citing (without details) perceived bias against SRE providers, both in cases of complaints about SRE providers and in cases of complaints by SRE providers about the SEE provider.
- The Department has effectively addressed complaints about providers' resources and approaches through direct negotiation with provider contacts. However, three principals who responded to the survey raised issues about providers' conduct, which they perceive as the provider aggressively promoting their preferred delivery approach.

### **Case study examples**

The case studies provided a few examples where complaints about inappropriate content of lessons were resolved at the local level through discussions between schools, parents and providers. These complaints encompassed comments about gender roles or sexuality, and voicing more extreme interpretations of the scriptures that are not part of the curriculum. Principals described talking with all parties to establish the veracity of the claims and/or clarify any misunderstanding. Where the complaint was verified, then schools and providers reminded the SRE teacher to follow curriculum, or took stronger action such as removing the authorisation of the SRE teacher. Across all case studies, there were three reported cases of SRE teachers (from different providers) being asked not to return to a school, due to concerns around how they interacted with students for discipline reasons or because the views they expressed in the classroom were not part of the approved curriculum.

*Last year there was also some inappropriate content that a school teacher picked up was being taught by one SRE teacher, so the principal contacted the provider. The provider acknowledged that this was not in the approved curriculum, and provider then contacted the SRE teacher about this. There was an apology and the error was recognised. The school is pleased with outcome.—Case study interview*

Where the complaint has involved the use of unauthorised resources then the complaints have been addressed through discussions between the Department and providers. In all cases, the provider has removed the resources in question.

### **4.3.3 Conclusions**

The current complaints handling procedures allow complaints to be made about SRE, and in many cases the issues to be resolved satisfactorily and swiftly. Complaints procedures when followed are generally seen as effective by principals and providers and those involved in the delivery of SRE.

However, parents appear to be less satisfied than others that their complaints about SRE are handled appropriately, either because they are dissatisfied with the outcome or have not been informed about the outcome.

## **4.4 Perceived benefits and main challenges of providing SRE**

### ***Perceived benefits***

Although not one of the Terms of Reference for the Review, perceptions of the benefits of SRE are pertinent to the assessment of the implementation of SRE. The Reviewers have briefly documented the common views about the benefits of SRE, as expressed in contributions to the Review. However, there is no objective data about the benefits and nor was systematic data on beliefs about benefits collected, because the structure of surveys and submissions closely reflected the Terms of Reference.

There was a great deal of consistency across stakeholders about the benefits of SRE for students, the school community and for volunteer SRE teachers themselves. SRE:

- contributes to a well-rounded education and provides students with a values perspective to make informed ethical choices.
- contributes to students' understanding of their cultural heritage and is an avenue for their spiritual care.
- builds tolerance in schools around diverse communities and promotes multiculturalism through joint celebrations of different faith groups and the recognition of different cultural heritages.

- is community building and helps connect schools with the local community.
- gives SRE teachers a lot of personal satisfaction and helps strengthen connections to their own faith community and also to the school community.
- gives SRE teachers an opportunity to volunteer as a way to build skills and stay connected to the workforce, especially for ex-teachers who have retired or mothers with tertiary qualifications who are not currently in paid work.

### **Main challenges**

- **Classroom space.** Schools have different capacities to accommodate SRE classes and those not attending SRE. Having enough rooms is a genuine challenge, especially in schools with students from different faiths groups and a range of providers holding SRE lessons. One regional secondary school occasionally holds SRE classes at the local church because of a lack of classroom space. In primary schools where most students attend one SRE provider class, the SRE class can take place in the home classroom and this is quite easily accommodated.
- **SRE teachers not showing up** to conduct their scheduled classes without prior notice. This appears to be more common amongst smaller provider groups. Larger providers are more likely to notify the school in advance and/or source replacement SRE teachers. Schools commented on not knowing whose responsibility it is to inform the school, the volunteer teacher's or the provider's.
- **Negotiating scheduling of SRE** and reconciling competing provider interests. Similar proportions of schools with SRE classes nominated administration and timetabling for SRE as always or often a concern (36%), as did those who say it is never a concern (37%). In schools with well-established providers and not much change in SRE choices, there tends to be a historical precedent that sets the day/ time of SRE. However, this can make it difficult for new SRE providers or SEE to work within the given timetable. Generally, the wishes of the established provider are given precedence over new providers. Some principals also commented that it can be difficult to change the usual morning schedule for SRE, which schools regard as prime learning time, to an afternoon time slot because the morning arrangement has been in place for a long time. Some SRE providers perceive that schools they work with occasionally orchestrate timetable clashes in order to ensure that providers are unavailable, but there is no suggestion that this practice is widespread. Some principals see SRE as 'competing' for valuable teaching time.
- **Managing low or decreasing participation rates** in SRE. When a school has low student participation in SRE schools can find it challenging to stay within the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015):

*Principals support special religious education by ensuring that no academic instruction or formal school activities occur during time set aside for special religious education. Such activities create conflict of choice for some parents and students attending special religious education.*

Secondary schools are responding by scheduling SRE classes to minimise disruption for the majority of students not participating in SRE, for example:

- holding SRE occasionally, e.g. for a full day a term, or other blocks of time. A few schools expect all students to attend SRE under this approach
  - holding SRE classes at lunchtime
  - holding SRE classes in the last period of the day and allowing other students to go home
  - continuing the normal school timetable, and scheduling SRE classes at the same time.
- **For secondary schools, managing differences in parental preferences and student preferences.** In practice, especially for older students, the student makes the decision about attending SRE. One secondary school indicated they collect information about a student’s religion but do not automatically place students into SRE—information about SRE options are covered in orientation for Year 7 students and the student makes their own decision. Another secondary school requires Year 7 students with parental approval to attend a 10-week block of SRE, but after that most students make their own decisions about continuing. One case study secondary school allowed students to choose if and when they go to the SRE class.
  - **Classroom behaviour management.** More principals (29%) than provider SRE coordinators (19%) indicated that classroom behaviour is always or often a concern. The most common response amongst both groups was that it is sometimes a concern. However, 56% of provider SRE coordinators identified student behaviour as one of the main challenges for SRE as do 72% of SRE. Although many SRE teachers are now receiving basic training in classroom management, it was common for principals to remark that some SRE teachers have insufficient experience and training to properly manage disruptive student behaviour. Where classroom behaviour has been mismanaged, this can have a ripple effect on student behaviour in other lessons. As such, many schools take steps to assist SRE teachers in this respect by having classroom teachers sit in on classes or by having a teacher regularly check in on how the lesson is proceeding. The perspective of SRE teachers and providers is that having classroom teachers in the class can be helpful in managing difficult behaviour. At the same time, some SRE teachers feel that classroom teachers interrupt lessons too frequently, or that they are capable of managing the behaviour themselves.
  - **Large class sizes.** Forty-two percent of the 3,033 SRE teachers who completed a survey for the Review teach SRE to classes with more than 25 students. Around half of the SRE coordinators say this is sometimes a problem for them. Principals are more inclined not to recognise large classes as being a concern—in fact, for principals trying to accommodate many SRE and SEE classes, small class sizes can create logistical issues.

**Table 27. Main challenges schools and providers face in facilitating SRE classes**

| Challenge                   | School perspective  | Provider perspective   |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Information for parents     | Want to be transparent without marketing.   | Not able to provide information at orientation. Unsure if written information is passed along.   |
| Communication/ coordination | Teachers not turning up, often without notice.<br>Some providers are demanding.   | Challenge to provide relief when a teacher cancels.<br>Sometimes no notice (or very late) about school events that cancel SRE.<br>Helpful to know special needs of students. |
| Timetabling                 | Complex admin with many competing demands.<br>More complex with SEE and increased need for rooms.<br>More complex with high non-SRE.<br>Morning is prime learning time. | Late start in the year and early finish.<br>Shift to afternoon classes/ end of day.<br>Clashes with events, e.g. sports days, excursions, sometimes without notice.          |
| Classroom space             | Some schools very stretched to find enough spaces.  | Can be inadequate, sometimes unsafe, unpredictable changes.  |
| Class sizes                 | Small classes needing their own space can be challenge.   |  |
| Behaviour                   | If students not engaged.<br>Change in room/ peer group can unsettle.<br>Unsettled behaviour can continue into next lessons.   | Some see it related to teacher attitudes.<br>Often helpful to have teacher in room.  |
| Technology                  | May need to provide training in use.  | Not always available in a room.<br>Not always accessible (need for password).<br>Compatibility varies across schools.  |

**Table 28. How often SRE coordinators and principals are concerned about specific areas of SRE delivery**

| Response category                 | Administration and timetabling for SRE |                   | Behaviour issues in SRE          |                   | Large class sizes for SRE        |                   |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
|                                   | Provider SRE coordinator (n=551)       | Principal (n=652) | Provider SRE coordinator (n=565) | Principal (n=652) | Provider SRE coordinator (n=535) | Principal (n=641) |
| Always                            | 6%                                     | 22%               | 2%                               | 12%               | 4%                               | 7%                |
| Often                             | 16%                                    | 14%               | 13%                              | 17%               | 9%                               | 8%                |
| Sometimes                         | 50%                                    | 27%               | 69%                              | 44%               | 50%                              | 28%               |
| Never                             | 28%                                    | 37%               | 15%                              | 28%               | 38%                              | 57%               |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>100%</b>                            | <b>100%</b>       | <b>100%</b>                      | <b>100%</b>       | <b>100%</b>                      | <b>100%</b>       |
| <i>Don't know/ not applicable</i> | 38                                     | 0                 | 20                               | 20                | 76                               | 9                 |

Sources: Survey of Provider SRE Coordinators, and Survey of Principals. Note that 855 of 1,003 principals who responded had SRE classes in 2015. Only those with SRE were asked these questions.

**Table 29. The main challenges for delivering SRE**

| Challenge                             | Provider SRE coordinators<br>n=617 | SRE teachers<br>n=1,783 |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                       | Percent                            | Percent                 |
| Student behaviour                     | 56%                                | 72%                     |
| Large class sizes                     | 23%                                | 29%                     |
| Limited assistance from schools       | 15%                                | 18%                     |
| Limited assistance from your provider | 2%                                 | 5%                      |

Sources: Survey of Provider SRE Coordinators and SRE Teacher Survey. Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%.

## 5. Curriculum review

This chapter responds to Term of Reference 7—Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SRE across all Years K to 10. Specifically, this chapter presents the findings of the review of SRE curriculum outlines, SRE teachers' manuals and SRE student activity books and resources.

At the start of the Review, 43 SRE curriculum outlines/ scope and sequence documents were downloaded from the websites of approved providers or their associated faith group. All of these documents were reviewed.

SRE curriculum documents include teacher's manuals, student activity books and other student resources. Large Christian SRE providers that produce curriculum resources used widely in Christian SRE classes across NSW<sup>15</sup> provided the Review with a comprehensive set of materials in hardcopy. Other providers made curriculum materials available to the Review through the Survey of Providers and at case study interviews (see Appendix 2 for an overview of the source of documents reviewed).

A total of 121 documents were reviewed using the evaluation framework developed for the Review. The sources of the curriculum documents that have been reviewed are those used by at least 86%<sup>16</sup> of approved providers.

A small number of providers did not supply details of their curriculum materials. Most of these are independent Christian churches and it is likely that many of them also use materials purchased from the large Christian denominations such as CEP or GodSpace.

### 5.1 SRE curriculum outlines

Forty-three curriculum outlines or scope and sequence documents from 21 sources were collected and reviewed.

---

<sup>15</sup> Christian Education Publications (Anglican Church), Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, GodSpace (Baptist Churches of NSW and ACT), PREP (Presbyterian Church of Australia, NSW)

<sup>16</sup> Combined evidence from Survey of Providers, case study interviews and DoE information from approved providers



### 5.1.1 Assessment approach

The SRE curriculum outlines were reviewed by allocating a three-point rating scale against five indicators of quality, as shown in Table 30. The scale measures the extent to which there is evidence available to show the indicator has been met.

The table below describes how each indicator was reviewed and the rating allocated using the three-point scale.

**Table 30. SRE curriculum outlines evidence matrix**

| Indicator   | 0=No evidence   | 1=Some evidence   | 2=Sufficient evidence   |
|---|---|---|---|
| An outline of the curriculum is provided.                             | An overview of the curriculum is not provided.  | A broad overview is provided, for example, by listing topics. There is insufficient detail for the general reader to gain an understanding of the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. | Sufficient detail is provided for the general reader to gain an understanding of what is being taught and the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. |
| A scope and sequence is presented in the order in which it is taught. | A scope (what is to be covered) is not provided. A sequence of learning is not evident.       | The scope is provided without a clear sequence of the order of the learning.  | The scope provided an overview of what is to be taught. The sequence outlines the order in which it will be taught.   |
| Learning is sequenced across year levels and/or phases of learning    | Year levels and/or phases of learning are not identified in relation to what is to be taught. | There is a general connection between year levels and/or phases of learning in relation to what is to be taught.  | Year levels and/or phases of learning are clearly identified in relation to what is to be taught.   |
| Age appropriate learning experiences are clearly identified.          | Learning experiences are not identified.  | Learning experiences are identified. There is an inconsistent connection between these experiences and age appropriate teaching strategies and student activities.                                    | Learning experiences consider and reflect age appropriate teaching strategies and student activities.   |

| Indicator  | 0=No evidence  | 1=Some evidence   | 2=Sufficient evidence                               |
|--|--|---|---|
| What is to be taught in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills is clear. | An overview of what is to be taught is not provided. | A broad overview of learning is provided. Distinctions between knowledge, understanding and skills are not clearly evident. | Knowledge, understanding and skills are identified. |

### 5.1.2 Findings

The table below summarises the frequency with which the indicators were evident across the 43 documents reviewed.

**Table 31. Findings for SRE curriculum outlines**

| Indicator  | 0  | 1  | 2  |
|--|----|----|----|
| An outline of the curriculum is provided.                                      | 3  | 22 | 18 |
| A scope and sequence is presented in the order in which it is taught.          | 7  | 7  | 29 |
| Learning is sequenced across Year levels and/or phases of learning.            | 17 | 2  | 24 |
| Age appropriate learning experiences are clearly identified.                   | 42 | 0  | 1  |
| What is to be taught in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills is clear. | 18 | 16 | 9  |

Note: Scores: 0=No evidence; 1=Some evidence; 2=Sufficient evidence

In relation to the provision of a curriculum outline:

- 18 documents provided an outline in sufficient detail to offer clarity about what was being taught and the kinds of learning experiences planned for students.
- 22 documents provided a list of broad topics to be covered. The detail was insufficient to provide clarity about what was being taught or the kinds of learning experiences planned for students.
- three documents did not provide any information about what was being taught or the kinds of learning experiences planned for students.

In relation to scope and sequences:

- 29 documents provided an overview of what was to be taught (the scope) and the sequence in which it was to be taught.
- seven documents provided the scope without a clear sequence of the order of the learning.
- seven documents did not provide a scope or sequence.

In relation to sequencing learning across Year levels or phases of learning:

- 24 documents identified Year levels.
- two documents identified broad phases of learning.
- 17 documents did not identify Year levels or phases of learning.

In relation to clearly identifying age appropriate learning experiences:

- one document identified learning experiences that acknowledged the developmental stages in learning and identified age appropriate learning experiences.
- 42 documents did not provide descriptions of learning experiences.

In relation to clearly describing what was to be taught in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills:

- nine documents identified the knowledge, understanding and skills.
- 16 documents provided an overview, which did not clearly distinguish between knowledge, understanding and skills.
- 18 documents did not provide any descriptions of learning in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills.

### **5.1.3 Conclusions**

The majority of documents reviewed under this category provided some form of curriculum outline. However, just over half of the documents (25 of the 43 documents) had insufficient detail to provide clarity to the general reader about what was being taught or the kinds of learning experiences planned for students.

The majority of documents that included a scope and sequence provided both an overview of what was to be taught (scope) and the sequence in which it was to be taught. However, 14 of the 43 (33%) did not clearly articulate how learning was to be sequenced across Year levels or phases of learning.

Across the 43 documents reviewed, little to no attention was given to identifying and articulating the kinds of learning experiences each program planned to provide to students. Forty-two of the 43 documents did not identify age appropriate learning experiences as part of the curriculum overview or scope and sequence. Only nine of the 43 documents expressed desired student learning in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills.

## 5.2 SRE teachers' manuals

Forty-seven teachers' manuals from 14 sources were reviewed.

### 5.2.1 Assessment approach

Low levels of SRE teacher experience were assumed when reviewing documents in this category. It was also assumed that SRE teachers would be volunteers with little to no formal training in teaching. The SRE teachers' manuals were reviewed by allocating a three-point rating scale against six indicators of quality, as shown in Table 32. The scale measures the extent there is evidence available to show the indicator has been met.

The table below describes how each indicator was reviewed and the rating allocated using the three-point scale.

**Table 32. SRE teachers' manuals evidence matrix**

| Indicator   | 0=No evidence  | 1=Some evidence   | 2=Sufficient evidence  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Provides clarity for SRE teachers about what is to be taught.   | An overview of the curriculum is not provided.       | A broad overview is provided, e.g. by listing topics. There is insufficient detail for a teacher who is unfamiliar with the program to be clear about the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. | The curriculum is clearly described in terms of depth and breadth of learning. Teachers have clear guidance in relation to what is to be taught. |
| Articulates a clear sequence of learning.   | Neither a scope nor sequence of learning is evident. | The scope is provided without a clear sequence of the order of the learning.  | Teachers are provided with a clear sequence of learning.   |
| Identifies age appropriate learning experiences that support and deepen student learning, understanding and skills. | Learning experiences are not articulated.            | Learning experiences are identified. There is an inconsistent connection between these experiences and age appropriate  | Learning experiences consider and reflect age appropriate teaching strategies and learning   |

| Indicator   | 0=No evidence   | 1=Some evidence  | 2=Sufficient evidence  |
|---|---|--|--|
|   |   | teaching strategies and student activities.  | experiences for students.  |
| Themes/ units/ lessons assist SRE teachers to identify the focus for learning.                                    | Units or lesson plans are not provided.   | Themes/ units/ lesson plans provide some explanation of learning outcomes to be achieved.                            | Themes/ units/ lesson plans have clear goals or learning outcomes.                                       |
| Assists SRE teachers to plan opportunities for students to actively engage with and participate in lessons.       | Student activities are not identified.  | Activities are articulated. They are related predominately to completion of student workbooks or activity sheets.    | Activities include age appropriate opportunities that promote student engagement and participation.      |
| Assists SRE teachers to include the range of students in classes, e.g. cultural backgrounds, age, learning needs. | Practical advice on teaching strategies and inclusive practices are not provided. | General advice on teaching strategies is provided. Specific, practical advice on inclusive practices is not evident. | Practical advice is provided on teaching strategies to include the diverse range of students in classes. |

## 5.2.2 Findings

The table below summarises the frequency with which the indicators were evident across the 47 documents reviewed.

**Table 33. Findings for SRE teachers' manuals**

| Indicator   | 0  | 1  | 2  |
|---|----|----|----|
| Provides clarity for SRE teachers about what is to be taught.   | 5  | 11 | 31 |
| Articulates a clear sequence of learning.   | 5  | 8  | 34 |
| Identifies age appropriate learning experiences that support and deepen student learning, understanding and skills. | 25 | 10 | 12 |
| Themes/ units/ lessons assist SRE teachers to identify the focus for learning.                                      | 5  | 10 | 32 |

| Indicator  | 0  | 1  | 2  |
|--|----|----|----|
| Assists SRE or SEE teachers to plan opportunities for students to actively engage with and participate in lessons. | 12 | 17 | 18 |
| Assists SRE teachers to include the range of students in classes, e.g. cultural backgrounds, age, learning needs.  | 25 | 5  | 17 |

Note: Scores: 0=No evidence; 1=Some evidence; 2=Sufficient evidence

In relation to clarity about what is to be taught:

- 31 teachers' manuals provided teachers with sufficient detail to clearly describe what was to be taught and the kinds of learning experiences intended for students.
- 11 teachers' manuals provided an overview with insufficient detail for inexperienced teachers or teachers new to the program.
- five teachers' manuals did not provide advice to teachers in terms of what was to be taught and the kinds of learning experiences planned or intended for students.

In relation to articulating a clear sequence of learning about what is to be taught:

- 34 teachers' manuals provided SRE teachers with a clear sequence of learning.
- eight teachers' manuals provided a broad overview without a clear sequence of learning.
- five teachers' manuals did not provide a scope or sequence of learning.

In relation to providing SRE teachers with guidance and examples of age appropriate learning experiences to support and deepen learning:

- 12 teachers' manuals provided SRE teachers with guidance and examples of age appropriate learning experiences.
- 10 teachers' manuals identified learning experiences; however, low levels of cognitive demand (not age appropriate) were evident in student activities.
- 25 teachers' manuals did not articulate planned or intended learning experiences.

In relation to providing clarity about the focus for learning:

- 32 teachers' manuals provided SRE teachers with units and/or lesson plans with clear goals or learning outcomes.
- 10 teachers' manuals provided some explanation of the focus for learning.
- five teachers' manuals did not provide SRE teachers with unit or lesson plans.

In relation to providing advice or strategies to maximise student engagement and participation in lessons:

- 18 teachers' manuals included age appropriate opportunities that could promote student engagement and participation.
- 17 teachers' manuals included student activities. These activities were predominately about completion of student activity sheets following a teacher-directed lesson.
- 12 teachers' manuals did not include advice or guidance on activities for students.

In relation to advice or strategies to include the range of students in classes:

- 17 teachers' manuals provided advice on teaching strategies to include the diverse range of students in classes.
- five teachers' manuals provided general advice on teaching strategies. Specific, practical advice on inclusive practices was not evident.
- 25 teachers' manuals did not provide practical advice on teaching strategies or inclusive practices.

### 5.2.3 Conclusions

The majority of documents reviewed under this category provided clarity about what was to be taught. Sixteen manuals (34%) did not provide this direction or support.

Of note is the lack of quality advice in relation to age appropriate learning experiences evident in the SRE teachers' manuals reviewed. Only 12 manuals (25%) included explicit advice and examples of age appropriate learning experiences. While 10 manuals did identify some learning experiences, there was a significant reliance on activities requiring relatively low levels of cognitive demand. Twenty-five (53%) of the manuals did not provide teachers with assistance in selecting and using teaching strategies to support intended learning experiences.

SRE teachers' manuals did not consistently provide practical guidance on strategies to maximise student engagement and participation in lessons. Eighteen manuals included age appropriate activities, while twenty-nine either relied predominantly on activity sheets with low cognitive demand or did not provide any advice.

SRE teachers' manuals did not consistently provide advice on inclusive practices to include the range of students in classes. Twenty-five manuals (53%) did not provide any practical advice to teachers in relation to inclusive practices.

## 5.3 SRE student activity books and resources

Twenty-four student activity books from eight sources were reviewed.

### 5.3.1 Assessment approach

The SRE student activity books were reviewed by allocating a three-point rating scale against five indicators of quality, as shown in Table 34. The scale measures the extent there is evidence available to show the indicator has been met.

The table below describes how each indicator was reviewed and the rating allocated using the three-point scale.

**Table 34. SRE student activity books evidence matrix**

| Indicator  | 0=No evidence   | 1=Some evidence   | 2=Sufficient evidence  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Organise learning into manageable 'chunks' that can be taught in available time with available resources.        | Activities are not linked to lessons and/or timed.                                  | Activities are planned for students. Consideration of the time taken to complete the activities is not evident. | Activities planned for students can be completed in the time available.  |
| Provide age appropriate learning experiences with opportunities for students to actively participate in lessons. | Activities are not related to the age of students.                                  | There is limited evidence of intellectual challenge evident in the majority of activities.                      | Activities include age appropriate opportunities that promote student engagement and participation.                |
| Provide opportunities for all students to achieve success.   | Activities are often too easy for students in that age group.                       | Activities are predominately related to individual completion of tasks.   | Successful completion of activities is supported through the lesson focus. Activities include collaborative tasks. |
| Reflect the range of students in classes, e.g. cultural backgrounds.   | Illustrations and examples do not reflect the diverse range of students in classes. | At least a few illustrations and examples reflect aspects of the diverse range of students in classes.          | Illustrations and examples reflect the diverse range of students in classes.                                       |
| Include the use of ICTs and multi-media resources.   | ICTs and multi-media resources are not provided.                                    | Multi-media resources (CDs, DVDs, charts) are provided.   | ICTs (network hardware and software) and multi-media resources are provided.                                       |

### 5.3.2 Findings

Table 35 below summarises the frequency with which the indicators were evident across the 24 documents reviewed.



**Table 35. Findings for SRE student activity books**

| Indicator  | 0  | 1  | 2  |
|--|----|----|----|
| Organise learning into manageable 'chunks' that can be taught in available time with available resources.        | 1  | 5  | 18 |
| Provide age appropriate learning experiences with opportunities for students to actively participate in lessons. | 7  | 14 | 3  |
| Provide opportunities for all students to achieve success.   | 0  | 17 | 7  |
| Reflect the range of students in classes, e.g. cultural backgrounds.   | 6  | 11 | 7  |
| Include the use of ICTs and multi-media resources.   | 15 | 4  | 5  |

Note: Scores: 0=No evidence; 1=Some evidence; 2=Sufficient evidence

In relation to whether student activity books organised learning into manageable chunks:

- 18 of 24 activity books were organised to support lesson plans.

In relation to providing age appropriate learning experiences and opportunities for students to actively participate in lessons:

- three activity books demonstrated evidence of age appropriate learning experiences.
- 14 activity books were predominately related to individual completion of tasks following teacher-directed lessons. Limited evidence of intellectual challenge was evident across the range of activities.
- seven activity books did not relate directly to lessons. Limited evidence of intellectual challenge was evident across the range of activities.

In relation to providing opportunities for all students to achieve success:

- seven activity books provided age appropriate activities, including collaborative learning.
- 17 activity books were predominately related to students working individually on repetitive tasks requiring low levels of cognitive demand. Some activity books used in multi-age classrooms selected complex page layouts and texts that would be challenging for the younger students in classes.

In relation to reflecting the range of students in classrooms:

- seven activity books included illustrations or pictures that reflected people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- 11 activity books included at least two illustrations or pictures that reflected people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- six activity books did not include illustrations or pictures that reflected people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In relation to the use of ICTs and multi-media resources:

- five activity books were supported by teacher or student use of networked hardware and software such as SMART Boards.
- four activity books were supported by multi-media resources.
- 15 activity books were not supported by ICTs or multi-media resources.

### 5.3.3 Conclusions

Most student activity books were predominately related to individual completion of tasks following teacher-directed lessons. Limited evidence of intellectual challenge was evident across the range of activities included.

A number of activity books used in multi-age classrooms selected complex page layouts and texts that would be challenging for the younger students in classes.

Most student activity books did not include illustrations, pictures or examples that adequately reflected the diverse range of students in classrooms.

The student activity books reviewed did not provide students with direct access to ICTs. Student learning was supported by teacher use of ICTs and multi-media resources in less than half the resources reviewed.

## 5.4 Case examples from the curriculum assessment

Four case examples from the assessment of curriculum materials produced by large Christian providers whose materials are widely used in Christian SRE classes show the sampling strategy used in each case and the findings using the evaluation framework.

### 5.4.1 Case example 1: Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay

Teachers' manuals (K–6) and student activity books (K–6) were provided by the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay for the *Walking with Jesus* program.

Teachers' manuals and student activity books for Years 1, 3 and 5 were reviewed together in order to determine the extent of alignment and consistency between the two sets of resources.

The three teachers' manuals reviewed met all indicators for this category.

- SRE teachers were provided with clarity about what to teach and the sequence in which this should occur. The manuals also provide advice on how the program was organised and lesson plans structured.
- The unit plans included learning outcomes described in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding.

- Lesson plans provided the learning focus through articulating aims for each lesson and included opportunities for students to participate. These included brainstorming ideas, reading texts, reflecting on ideas and meanings, recording own ideas and setting personal goals.
- There was evidence of activities increasing in complexity within and across Year levels.
- An appendix provided additional information on teaching strategies that actively involved students.
- While no specific advice was provided to SRE teachers on strategies to include the range of students in classes, a range of identified teaching strategies would assist them to achieve this.
- The teachers' manuals were closely linked to the related student activity book.

The three student activity books reviewed met all indicators for this category.

- Activities were sequenced and linked closely to the lesson plans in the teachers' manuals.
- Although not evident in every lesson, overall, age appropriate learning experiences and opportunities for students to actively participate were included.

#### **5.4.2 Case example 2: Christian Education Publications**

The teachers' manuals (K-6) and student activity books (K-6) were provided by Christian Education Publications (Anglican Church) for the Connect program.

Teachers' manuals and student activity books for the Connect program for Lower Primary B1 (for children aged 7 to 9 years) and Upper Primary A2 (for students aged 10 to 12 years) were reviewed in order to determine the extent of alignment and consistency between and across a selection of these resources.

Two sets of resources were also reviewed for secondary school students.

- *Finding Your Way*, a teachers' manual and student activity book for students in Years 7 to 8.
- *No Turning Back*, a teachers' manual and student activity book for students in Years 9 to 10.

The two teachers' manuals reviewed as part of the Connect program met or demonstrated some evidence of the indicators for this category.

- SRE teachers were provided with clarity about what to teach and the sequence in which this should occur. The manuals provided advice on how the program was organised and lesson plans structured.
- The sequence of learning was articulated through lesson titles (twenty lessons per manual) and organised into two themes (ten lessons per theme). SRE teachers may need to read each lesson plan to gain an overall understanding of the kinds of learning experiences planned for students.

- Lesson plans were scripted. They provided the learning focus through articulated aims and learning outcomes for each lesson. Teachers were provided with ideas for planning and supporting information for each lesson. Optional ideas to reinforce learning were provided through a 'Taking it further' section.
- Opportunities for students to participate were provided. A reliance on teacher presentation and students responding individually to teacher questions were evident in lesson plans. There was some evidence of age appropriate activities. There was limited evidence of activities increasing in complexity in the series of 20 lessons.
- An appendix provided additional information to assist SRE teachers to include a range of students in classes.
- While no specific advice was provided to SRE teachers on strategies to include the range of students in classes, a range of identified teaching strategies would assist to achieve this.

The two student activity books reviewed as part of the Connect program met or demonstrated some evidence of the indicators for this category.

- The student activity books linked to specific lesson plans in the teachers' manuals.
- There was some evidence of age appropriate learning experiences. A number of activities were repetitive and require relatively low levels of cognitive demand.
- Some of the texts included may be difficult to access for students in the lower age levels.
- SRE teachers were provided with CDs with music, PowerPoints and other resources.

The teachers' manuals for SRE teachers in secondary schools—*No Turning Back*, and *Finding Your Way*—met or demonstrated some evidence of the indicators for this category.

- SRE teachers were provided with clarity about what to teach and the sequence in which this should occur. The manuals also provided advice on how the program was organised and lesson plans structured.
- Lesson plans provided the learning focus through articulating aims and outcomes for each lesson.
- There was evidence of learning activities that supported and deepened student learning, such as peer discussions, debating and expressing ideas through personal writing, particularly in the *No Turning Back* manual. Students were provided with opportunities to make connections with their own lives. There was also evidence of repetitive activities across the sequence of lessons. A reliance on teacher presentation and students responding individually to teacher questions was evident in the *Finding Your Way* manual.
- While no specific advice was provided to SRE teachers on strategies to enhance student engagement and participation, teaching strategies within lesson plans would assist to achieve this.
- Each teachers' manual was closely linked to the related student activity book.

The two student activity books reviewed as part of the secondary school resources met or demonstrated some evidence of the indicators for this category.

- The student activity books linked to specific lesson plans in the teachers' manuals.
- There was some evidence of age appropriate learning experiences. A number of activities were repetitive and require relatively low levels of cognitive demand.
- Some of the texts included may be difficult to access for students in the lower age levels.
- SRE teachers are provided with a range of audio-visual resources to support the programs.

### 5.4.3 Case example 3: GodSpace

Teachers' manuals (Lesson Manuals), Lesson Tools and Student Workbooks for GodSpace were provided by the Association of Baptist Churches of NSW and ACT.

Teachers' manuals and student activity books for GodSpace for Lower Primary (for children aged 6 to 7 years) and Upper Primary (for students aged 10 to 12 years) were reviewed in order to determine the extent of alignment and consistency between and across a selection of these resources.

The Purple 2 Lesson Manual (teachers' manual) met or demonstrated some evidence of the indicators for this category.

- SRE teachers were provided with clarity about what to teach and the sequence in which this should occur. The manual provided advice on how the program was organised and lesson plans structured.
- The sequence of learning was articulated through a semester at a glance and unit overviews. Lesson plans for each phase of learning were clearly identified. SRE teachers may need to read each lesson plan for the age group they are teaching to gain an overall understanding of the kinds of learning experiences planned for students.
- Lesson plans were scripted. The learning focus was articulated through a big idea, lesson aim, underlying value and learning outcome. Lesson plans were divided into three sections.
- Opportunities for students to participate were provided. A reliance on teacher presentation and students responding individually to teacher questions was evident in lesson plans. There was some evidence of age appropriate activities. There was limited evidence of activities increasing in complexity over the Year levels reviewed.
- While no specific advice was provided to SRE teachers on strategies to include the range of students in classes, a range of identified teaching strategies would assist to achieve this.

The two student activity books were reviewed: Purple 2 Student Workbook Adventurers (age 6–7 years) and Purple 2 Student Workbook Voyagers (age 10–12 years). Both activity books met or demonstrated some evidence of the indicators for this category.

- The student activity books linked to specific lesson plans in the lesson manuals.
- There was some evidence of age appropriate learning experiences. A number of activities were repetitive and required relatively low levels of cognitive demand.

- Some of the texts included in the Adventurers Workbook may be difficult to access for students in the lower age levels. Text difficulty was exacerbated by a complex layout.
- SRE teachers were provided with CDs with music and other resources.

#### **5.4.4 Case example 4: PREP**

PREP Volume 3 for 5 to 12 year olds, provided by the Presbyterian Church of Australia, NSW, was reviewed.

PREP Volume 3 met or demonstrated some evidence of all but one of the indicators for this category.

- SRE teachers were provided with some clarity about what to teach and the sequence in which this should occur. Lesson plans were divided into infants, Lower Primary and Upper Primary. The manual provided advice on each unit and supporting lesson plans and how the program was organised and lesson plans structured.
- The sequence of learning was provided through lesson topics. SRE teachers would need to read each lesson plan for the age group they were teaching to gain an overall understanding of the kinds of learning experiences planned for students.
- Lesson plans were scripted. The learning focus was articulated through lesson aims.
- Opportunities for students to participate were provided. A reliance on teacher presentation and students responding individually to teacher questions was evident in lesson plans. There was some evidence of age appropriate activities. There was limited evidence of activities increasing in complexity over the Year levels reviewed.
- SRE teachers were not provided with practical advice on strategies to include the range of students in classrooms.

Student activities within PREP 3 met or demonstrated some evidence for most of the indicators for this category.

- The student activity books linked to specific lesson plans in the lesson manuals.
- There was some evidence of age appropriate learning experiences. A number of activities were repetitive and required relatively low levels of cognitive demand.
- Illustrations and pictures included in the PREP 3 manual did not reflect the diverse range of students in classrooms. While no specific advice was provided to SRE teachers on strategies to include the range of students in classes, a range of identified teaching strategies would assist to achieve this.
- SRE teachers were provided with CDs and other resources.

## 6. Pedagogy/ teaching and teacher training structures

This chapter covers three Terms of Reference: Term of Reference 4—SRE providers' training structures; Term of Reference 7—Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SRE; and Term of Reference 6—New modes and patterns of delivery using technology.

The main sources of evidence for this chapter are the case study interviews; the surveys of principals, SRE providers, SRE Coordinators and SRE teachers; and submissions and meetings with stakeholders involved in providing training for SRE teachers.

### 6.1 SRE providers' training structures

This section looks at ToR 4. It describes the diversity of training structures for SRE, and the kinds of training and hours of training these produce.

#### 6.1.1 What is required or intended

##### *Department of Education*

The Department's *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* state it is the responsibility of the approved provider to recruit, train and authorise teachers of SRE.

##### *Providers*

All Christian providers who are members of ICCOREIS have agreed that SRE teachers should complete six mandatory Basic Training modules before or soon after becoming an SRE teacher:

*1\_Teaching SRE in Government schools*

*2\_Learning and Teaching*

*3\_Preparing and Delivering a Lesson*

*4\_Classroom Management*

*5\_Introduction to the Bible*

*6\_Classroom Experience.*

The basic training has the following features.

- A list of competencies, outcomes and processes, arranged in modules.
- Delivering a lesson while being observed by an experienced SRE teacher.
- Optional means of delivery—members have developed both online and DVD versions.
- No indicative timing for the training.
- No prescribed assessment method.

Basic training is intended to facilitate all member churches of ICCOREIS to confidently cross-authorise teachers from other member churches. Training under this standard must include training from each module and cover no less than 80% of the competencies, outcomes and processes. In the secondary school situation, members have produced a training course using the modules of the Basic Training. This is available online and is being upgraded to certificate level. ICCOREIS states that teacher authorisation carries the expectation that the SRE teacher does two hours of continuing professional development each year.

Providers that are not part of ICCOREIS have similar policies, but the focus and amount of training required for new SRE teachers differs somewhat (Table 36).

**Table 36. Providers' training policies**

| Provider organisation         | Training policy   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Christian members of ICCOREIS | SRE teachers of member organisations must complete mandatory Basic Training modules x 6 (available online and DVD).   |
| Anglican Diocese of Sydney    | Anglican Diocese of Sydney SRE teachers must complete Safe Ministry Training and Accreditation training through Youthworks to become authorised (5 x 2 hour modules). SRE teachers must be observed in the classroom; and do professional development training each year. Training is free for Anglican SRE teachers; \$500 for other denominations.<br>There is an annual conference for teachers. |
| Catholic                      | SRE teachers must complete mandatory Basic Training (ICCOREIS) and additional training specified by the relevant CCD office in the dioceses. Dioceses deliver Child Protection and Classroom Management training. Additional online training and assessment program and a Certificate III education are available. Training is offered annually plus there are opportunities for ongoing training.  |
| Baha'i                        | Volunteer teachers are trained through the Ruhi Institute.  |
| Buddhist                      | New SRE teachers are expected to attend two days of training.   |
| Greek Orthodox                | New SRE teachers are expected to complete training in classroom management and child safety. Advanced training is also offered.   |



| Provider organisation         | Training policy  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Hindu                         | No guidelines from the Hindu Council of Australia. Training is developed and delivered by Hindu providers.   |
| Islamic Council of NSW        | New teachers are expected to attend introductory training in child safety and classroom management.  |
| NSW Board of Jewish Education | New teachers must complete basic training covering duty of care, child protection, workplace health and safety, curriculum and use of technology tools (SMART Boards). |

### 6.1.2 What occurs in practice

The type and amount of training that providers require their SRE teachers to undergo and which is made available for them was canvassed in the providers' survey, which received a response rate of 80%. The questions about training were answered by around 60 providers, which is 60% of the approved providers.

For most providers who responded to the survey, some form of basic training appears to be a pre-requisite for new teachers to achieve accreditation and become authorised to teach SRE; although some providers are not specific about the time period within which the basic training has to be completed. Training does not necessarily occur before the SRE teacher begins delivering SRE in classrooms. For example, Catholic providers expect their SRE teachers (catechists) to attend training within the first year.

#### ***What basic training is offered***

Eighty percent or more of providers who responded to the survey cover child safety, the purpose of SRE, SRE pedagogy, classroom behaviour management and working with schools, in their basic training (Table 37). The median hours for these topics are between one to two hours for each. Other training can include the following: in-class observation; Bible foundations; introduction to Scripture and Tradition; Safe Ministry Training/ Safe Church policies/ Creating Safe Spaces Workshop/ Safe Church child protection course; behaviour and attitude as catechists; understanding students with diverse learning needs; creative teaching; interactive whiteboard training. Catechists receive regular newsletters that include practice tips for SRE teachers.

The survey of SRE teachers showed that a high proportion (over 85%) had completed training in child safety/ child protection, the purpose of SRE, SRE curriculum materials, and SRE pedagogy. Slightly fewer (83%) had completed training in classroom behaviour management, and around two-thirds had received training in working with schools, and workplace health and safety (Table 37).

Around half of all Christian SRE teachers complete their SRE training through organisations external to their provider (Table 39). GodSpace (Baptist) and Youthworks (Anglican) both provide face-to-face training and are the main SRE training providers for people outside of their own organisation (see Figure 12). Other organisations that provide training used by SRE teachers include: Timothy Partnership, Generate Ministries, National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA, including the Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA)), Uniting Church, Albury Christian Ministry Fellowship (provides online training from safeministrytraining.com.au), Western Region Inter-Church Committee for SRE, Hunter Christian SRE Committee, and local Management Boards.

SRE Boards and providers are broadly satisfied with the levels of training of their own teachers. Several of the SRE Boards who made contributions to the Review made the point that some or all of their teachers are paid and have tertiary qualifications.

**Table 37. Proportion of providers that offer basic training topics**

| Topic                          | Percent providers offer | Percent SRE teachers completed the training |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Child safety/ child protection | 90%                     | 96%   |
| Purpose of SRE                 | 83%                     | 93%   |
| SRE pedagogy                   | 82%                     | 86%   |
| Classroom behaviour management | 80%                     | 83%   |
| Working with schools           | 80%                     | 66%   |
| SRE curriculum materials       | 77%                     | 86%   |
| Curriculum overview            | 75%                     | <i>No data</i>                              |
| Workplace health and safety    | <i>No data</i>          | 65%   |

Sources: Survey of Providers, n=59 to 61; and Survey of SRE Teachers.

**Table 38. Hours of training**

| Subjects                       | Minimum        | Maximum        | Usual practice |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Curriculum overview            | 15 minutes     | 10 hours       | 1–2 hours      |
| SRE curriculum materials       | 30 minutes     | 10 hours       | 1–2 hours      |
| Purpose of SRE                 | 10 minutes     | 4.5 hours      | 1–2 hours      |
| SRE pedagogy                   | <i>No data</i> | <i>No data</i> | <i>No data</i> |
| Classroom behaviour management | 30 minutes     | 8 hours        | 1–2 hours      |
| Working with schools           | 15 minutes     | 8 hours        | 1–2 hours      |
| Child safety/ child protection | 30 minutes     | 8 hours        | 1–2 hours      |

Source: Survey of Providers.

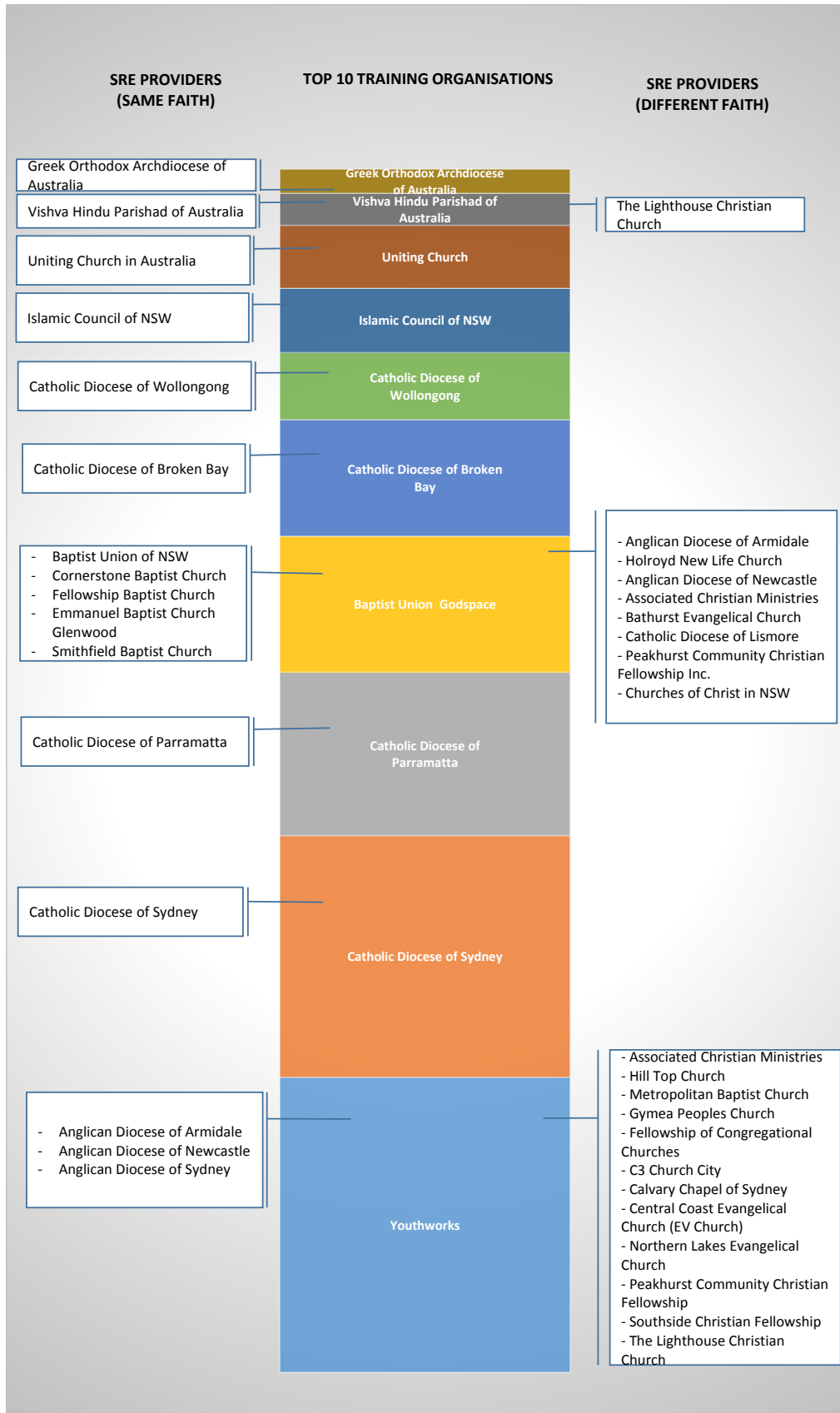
**Table 39. Internal and external training provision**

|                        | N         | Internal only | External only | Both       | No data   |
|------------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>Christian</b>       |           |               |               |            |           |
| ▪ Catholic             | 11        | 64%           | 9%            | 27%        |           |
| ▪ Anglican             | 4         | 25%           | 50%           | 25%        | 1         |
| ▪ Evangelical          | 11        | 36%           | 9%            | 55%        |           |
| ▪ Baptist              | 1         | 0%            | 0%            | 100%       |           |
| ▪ Independent Baptist  | 5         | 60%           | 20%           | 20%        | 3         |
| ▪ Presbyterian         | 1         | 0%            | 0%            | 100%       |           |
| ▪ Other                | 24        | 17%           | 46%           | 38%        | 8         |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>57</b> | <b>33%</b>    | <b>28%</b>    | <b>39%</b> | <b>12</b> |
| <b>Other religions</b> |           |               |               |            |           |
| Baha'i                 | 1         | 100%          | 0%            | 0%         |           |
| Buddhist               | 3         | 67%           | 0%            | 33%        |           |
| Hindu                  | 2         | 100%          | 0%            | 0%         |           |
| Islamic                | 2         | 100%          | 0%            | 0%         |           |

|                    | <b>N</b>  | <b>Internal only</b> | <b>External only</b> | <b>Both</b> | <b>No data</b> |
|--------------------|-----------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Jewish             | 1         | 100%                 | 0%                   | 0%          |                |
| Sikh               | 1         | 100%                 | 0%                   | 0%          | 1              |
| Vedic              | 1         | 100%                 | 0%                   | 0%          |                |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>11</b> | <b>91%</b>           | <b>0%</b>            | <b>9%</b>   | <b>1</b>       |
| <b>Grand Total</b> | <b>68</b> | <b>43%</b>           | <b>24%</b>           | <b>34%</b>  | <b>13</b>      |

Source: Survey of Providers.

**Figure 12. SRE training organisations, and which providers they train**



### **How many SRE teachers complete basic training**

More than 90% of SRE teachers who responded to the survey reported they had completed child safety/ child protection, and the purpose of SRE; and 80% or more had completed training in SRE pedagogy, and classroom behaviour management (Table 37). Fewer indicated they have completed working with schools training (66%), which is relatively low when compared to the high proportion of providers who say they offer this training (80%). It is unclear why there is a difference here, especially as this is a mandatory unit for ICCOREIS members and their teachers together make up a large percentage of all SRE teachers.

### **Ongoing mentoring and training**

The evidence about how much and how often SRE teachers are involved in ongoing mentoring and training is mixed. A high proportion of providers who answered this question in the survey indicated they provide mentoring (91%) and ongoing training (90%) for SRE teachers; 79% of providers said they provide observation and feedback to SRE teachers (Table 41). However, a large number of providers either indicated they did not know, or they did not answer all parts of this question (23 to 29 respondents out of 84). This implies these providers may not be offering any ongoing training and mentoring. Only the Jewish SRE provider reported they do formal annual evaluations of their employed SRE teachers' skills.

A relatively high proportion of SRE teachers say they participate in ongoing training—78% of SRE teachers reported they receive mentoring by more experienced SRE teachers, and 70% of SRE teachers said that more experienced teachers observe their lessons and give feedback. However, the case studies show that the most common practices are for a new SRE teacher to sit in on at least one class before taking their own class, or for them to be observed during the training period. Ongoing observation and feedback on lessons (observation by a more experienced teacher of a new teacher) is, on the whole, not common—although provisions are generally made for teachers if they specifically ask for some advice/ feedback. There is no evidence of regular, embedded mentoring practices in any of the data, although some mentoring does occur on occasions, often for a short period of time for new teachers. Case study SRE teachers talked about meeting regularly with SRE coordinators or other SRE teachers, and some talked about doing ongoing formal training organised through their parish (or other coordinating body). Examples of ongoing training include training days on a variety of topics, e.g. classroom management, liaising with schools, creative teaching techniques, interactive whiteboard; regular newsletters with updates and teaching tips. Youthworks holds annual conferences for SRE teachers, as does Generate Ministries. Some providers encourage SRE teachers to re-do Module 1 of the online training endorsed by ICCOREIS. Anglican and Presbyterian providers are working jointly to develop more online training material (Diploma of Theology) for secondary school SRE teachers. CCRESS has developed an online training and assessment program available to Catholic SRE staff and volunteers, and one diocese has developed a Certificate III qualification that is available for Catholic SRE teachers.

Where mentoring is provided, generally by SRE coordinators or more experienced SRE teachers, this was highly valued. Some SRE teachers commented on the value of having spent time assisting in SRE classes as assistants before taking their own classes.

*First year contributed as assistant. Thereafter was given my own class. Have opportunity to have more training when/ if necessary. Can discuss (if required) with other teachers or our leader. —SRE teacher*

*I trained with another SRE teacher before I was allowed my own class; even though I was a fully trained teacher through the University of Newcastle. Whenever I come across situations where I need help I can talk quite openly to my peers and other SRE teachers; I can bounce ideas off others. I don't feel like I'm on my own. I am happy to ask for help and I feel like I am a part of the community thanks to Our Blessed God. —SRE teacher*

**Table 40. SRE teacher's reports about ongoing training and support**

|   | N     | Yes | No  | Unsure | Total |
|---|-------|-----|-----|--------|-------|
| Provision of curriculum materials and workbooks         | 2,785 | 96% | 3%  | 1%     | 100%  |
| Yearly training updates                                 | 2,741 | 91% | 4%  | 5%     | 100%  |
| Assistance with completing Working With Children Checks | 2,681 | 90% | 7%  | 3%     | 100%  |
| Funding to pay for curriculum materials                 | 2,654 | 80% | 14% | 7%     | 100%  |
| Mentoring by more experienced SRE teachers              | 2,562 | 78% | 14% | 8%     | 100%  |
| Organises lesson times with the school on your behalf   | 2,575 | 76% | 19% | 6%     | 100%  |
| Observation and feedback on lessons                     | 2,476 | 70% | 21% | 9%     | 100%  |
| Online training   | 2,360 | 38% | 32% | 30%    | 100%  |

Source: Survey of SRE Teachers.

**Table 41. SRE providers' reports about the ongoing support provided to SRE teachers**

|                                     | Yes | No | Total | Percent | Don't know | No data |
|-------------------------------------|-----|----|-------|---------|------------|---------|
| Mentoring                           | 50  | 5  | 55    | 91%     | 7          | 19      |
| Further training                    | 55  | 6  | 61    | 90%     | 6          | 14      |
| Observation and feedback on lessons | 45  | 12 | 57    | 79%     | 7          | 17      |

Source: Survey of Providers.

Some parents expressed uncertainty about how much and what training SRE teachers get; and what is taught and covered by the various SRE curricula.

### ***Suggestions for improving training***

Some SRE teachers can find it difficult to access seminar-based training, particularly if they live in regional and rural locations. Some SRE teachers suggested that a shift to more online training would assist ongoing training efforts because travel would not be necessary and the training could be done at a time convenient to individuals. Provision of online training modules are being used by some providers (Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican) to make training more accessible.

Many principals would like to see improved training among SRE teachers, especially to improve their skills in the following areas:

- understanding of the school setting of SRE classes
- ability to engage with students
- understanding of mandatory reporting requirements, since students may disclose sensitive in SRE classes.

Some suggestions were received about provision of a standardised, government —approved course.

*As a teacher operating full time in a school I have access to relevant DoE training. It is helpful & perhaps schools could invite SRE teachers to join relevant training activities they are facilitating i.e. E-care training etc. —SRE teacher*

*This is an area that has room for improvement; I think teachers should not feel afraid to give feedback on the techniques that SRE teachers use. If a teacher is being very ineffective in their teaching style feedback from a trained professional at the end of a lesson would be very valuable. The answer to this problem is often sitting in the class room. I also think that SRE would benefit from a standard government course that teaches effective classroom teaching and management skills. At the moment each religious group has their own course and there is no one nationally recognised standard other than child safety procedures. —SRE teacher*

### **6.1.3 Conclusions**

Most providers require some form of basic training (as a pre-requisite for new teachers to achieve accreditation and become authorised to teach SRE), but the provision of ongoing training for SRE teachers varies widely between providers. The majority of SRE teachers surveyed had completed a variety of topics covered in basic training.



Setting up training structures is a challenge for smaller providers because they do not have sufficient resources or capabilities. As a result, it is common for small providers to tap into the structures established by faith groups/ large providers and third party organisations; and this is particularly well organised for Christian providers. Around half of all Christian SRE teachers complete their SRE training through organisations external to their provider. GodSpace (Baptist) and Youthworks (Anglican) are the main external SRE training providers. Other organisations that provide training to internal and external SRE teachers include: Timothy Partnership, Generate Ministries, National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA, including the Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA)), Uniting Church, Albury Christian Ministry Fellowship (provides online training from safeministrytraining.com.au), Western Region Inter-Church Committee for SRE, Hunter Christian SRE Committee, and local Management Boards.

SRE Boards and providers are broadly satisfied with the level of training of their own teachers. Several of the SRE Boards who made contributions to the Review made the point that some or all of their teachers are paid and have tertiary qualifications. However, the evidence about how much and how often SRE teachers are involved in ongoing mentoring and training is mixed.

## **6.2 Pedagogy and appropriateness of teaching and learning across in SRE across Years K to 10 in a variety of demographics**

This section addresses ToR 7. The main sources of evidence about SRE teachers' practices are feedback from parents, principals and from SRE teachers themselves and their coordinators. The parents who commented on the skills and practices of SRE teachers were a mix of those active members of a congregation, those who said they were religious but are not regular worshippers, and others who are not religious. Most parents commented on Christian SRE, a small number on Hindu and Buddhist SRE, and some did not make clear what faith group they were commenting on. Their views on SRE teaching practices were said to be based on conversations with their children about what they learnt in their scripture class; looking at the children's scripture workbooks; and occasionally from their experiences observing classes. Although there was some correlation with being religious and satisfaction with the quality of SRE teachers, there were many religious parents who thought the quality of SRE teaching could be improved. And conversely, there were parents who were not actively religious appreciating good quality SRE teaching.

### **6.2.1 What is required or intended**

The Department does not give any specific guidance about pedagogy, relevance and age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SRE, except to broadly define what SRE is and to seek assurance that authorised SRE teachers are only using materials and pedagogy authorised by the provider. The lesson content is the responsibility of the approved provider.

## 6.2.2 What occurs in practice

*Some are woeful and some are great. —Parent*

*As I have found over the years, the quality of the religious instruction varies according to the capabilities of the scripture teachers and their ability to connect with the students. —Secondary principal*

*The best encourage children to make thoughtful and compassionate choices on moral and ethical issues, and the worst foster a sense of judgment about right and wrong which is more tolerant and loving than general ignorance. —SRE teacher*

### Views of parents who responded

The clear majority of parents who responded to the online survey were positive about their child's learning experience in SRE lessons; 67% satisfied, 17% mostly satisfied; and 16% mostly dissatisfied/ dissatisfied<sup>17</sup> (Table 42). However, nine percent of parents indicated they had made a formal complaint about either the content of a SRE lesson or the quality of teaching.

**Table 42. Parents' satisfaction with students' learning experiences in SRE**

| Level of satisfaction | Number       | Percent     |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Satisfied             | 2,640        | 67%         |
| Mostly satisfied      | 688          | 17%         |
| Mostly dissatisfied   | 131          | 3%          |
| Dissatisfied          | 531          | 13%         |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>3,990</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | <i>871</i>   |             |
| <i>Don't know</i>     | <i>148</i>   |             |

<sup>17</sup> Proportions of parents satisfied in May 2015, before lobby campaigns by Christian groups, was still relatively high but not as high: 57% satisfied, 16% mostly satisfied, and 27% mostly dissatisfied/ dissatisfied.

Parents who were satisfied with the SRE teaching practices talked about their children saying they enjoy scripture lessons, and about the teachers being good people. Some of the adjectives parents used to describe their child's SRE teachers were 'trustworthy', 'dedicated', 'passionate' and 'caring'. Some parents commented on their child's SRE teacher having a good knowledge of the Bible and that teachers seem to follow plans for their lessons. A few parents commented on particular workbooks being appropriate. Where parents talked specifically about secondary school SRE teachers, they commonly perceived them as being more qualified and skilled than the volunteer scripture teachers in primary schools.

Those parents who were dissatisfied with the quality of SRE teaching said this was either because the students were not engaged in the lessons or the students had bad experiences during the lessons. Parents frequently said they had withdrawn their child from SRE lessons, where their child was unhappy and not engaged in SRE. Parents who were negative about SRE teacher practices talked about:

- children who express boredom because the lessons were repetitive or the SRE teacher was just talking at the child. For example, one parent said their child's SRE teacher only ever read passages from the Bible.
- poor behaviour management impacting on students. Parents said where other children in the class were rude, disrespectful and disruptive their child was not able to enjoy the SRE lesson as a result.
- inappropriate language and topics discussed, which had disturbed and/or frightened their child—most commonly younger infant school-aged or early primary children—or was seen as being too evangelical. For example, parents gave examples of what their child had been told by an SRE teacher: that people who do not believe in God would die young; that someone who doesn't love Jesus is the enemy; and that children who had stopped going to scripture would go to hell.
- particular SRE teachers who they felt were in the school to proselytise (convert students to their faith and church), and/or promote their own personal religious beliefs, and/or did not stick to the curriculum.
- their child's SRE teacher was unable to explain concepts well, and about their child getting confused messages or messages which they misinterpreted. For example, the language used was too heavily steeped in metaphor.
- SRE teachers 'overstepping' the mark and addressing personal development issues. A small number of parents objected to secondary school SRE teachers addressing issues of sexuality and expressing homophobic views, which one parent specifically felt could impact on the mental health of students questioning their sexuality.<sup>18</sup>
- an older child not being permitted to ask questions or express their own views.

---

<sup>18</sup> The Department indicated that covering sex education in SRE is not appropriate and should be taught by professional educators according to the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) curriculum.

- teaching what parents' perceive as fundamentalist views or literal interpretations of the scriptures that could be seen as anti-science. For example, teaching creationism or that dinosaurs never existed.

### **Views of principals**

Principals indicated they had seen mixed results regarding the quality of SRE lesson delivery from excellent to poor', depending on the providers and the skills of the individual SRE teachers involved. Some principals noted that SRE teachers' practices have improved in recent years.

Amongst the 855 principals that have SRE in 2015 and who completed a survey, 22% indicated they had a complaint about the content of an SRE lesson and 11% about the effect of the lesson on a child. Primary schools and secondary schools had received similar levels of complaints in these areas.

In general, principals who were positive about the quality of SRE teaching practices highlighted:

- very professional presenters and engaging lessons, age appropriate activities
- SRE teachers having excellent rapport with students and the respect of the community
- staff, parents and students and the community being happy and confident with the program
- SRE teachers have a genuine interest in the wellbeing of the students.

Principals in both primary schools and secondary schools raised similar issues to parents about poor SRE teaching practices, with a particular focus on some SRE teachers having difficulties managing disruptive classroom behaviour and on inappropriate content. A very small number of principals also raised concerns about SRE teachers actively recruiting students to go to SRE classes, feeling that recruitment should not occur. For example, asking students to persuade others to go to scripture; or approaching children in the playground and encouraging them to go to scripture.

Some principals were concerned that SRE takes time away from core curriculum subjects in a crowded learning program and they would prefer SRE to be taught outside of school hours. Principals argued that the demands of the Key Learning Areas are very difficult to meet and that religious teaching is essentially a family responsibility. A related view is that SRE teachers (primary schools) are enthusiastic amateurs, and that only people with professional training or sufficient skills should be teaching children in government schools.

### **Primary principals' views**

Primary schools were largely positive about the quality of SRE teaching, especially where the SRE teachers used interactive teaching approaches such as stories, music and craft activities. SRE teachers talked about adapting lesson plans to the age of the students, for example,

using more games and stories for younger students. Where the class includes students across different Stages, then this can pose challenges for less experienced SRE teachers. A minority of primary principals characterised SRE teachers in primary schools as well-meaning local community members who they felt sometimes struggle with managing class behaviour and lack skills in teaching and engaging students in the lessons. Certainly some SRE teachers nominated managing class behaviour as their main challenge, especially in the short 30 minutes provided for SRE.

### **Secondary and central school principals' views**

Secondary and central school principals had very mixed views about the quality of SRE lessons. Most related the quality of SRE teaching in secondary schools with the individual skills and attitudes of the SRE teachers. Those who were positive said SRE is well organised, that the SRE teacher engages well with students/ relates well and that their students enjoy the classes. Where there is a paid SRE teacher (employed by an SRE Board as part of combined SRE arrangements, or by the NSW Jewish Board of Education) then principals also took account of the person's qualifications as well as their ability to be accepted by the school community. Some paid SRE teachers have professional teaching qualifications and principals tended to have more trust in their ability to deliver quality SRE lessons. This is especially important to secondary principals because they often do not have the staff resources to place classroom teachers in SRE lessons; five of the nine secondary schools who participated in case studies did not have teachers sit in on SRE classes.

Some principals were concerned about poor teaching practices in SRE for example, lessons being not sufficiently engaging, the person lacking student management skills, and giving questionable or fundamentalist messages. Concerns about lesson content can mean that principals have to manage parent complaints—case study principals mentioned dealing with complaints about Christian, Hindu and Islamic SRE teachers. One principal spoke of receiving threatening letters from an SRE teacher when he had raised concerns about the content of the SRE lessons. Some felt lessons were poorly constructed, and others were concerned about the attitudes of some SRE teachers to issues such as sexuality, which they felt could adversely impact on vulnerable students' mental health.

### **SRE teachers' views**

SRE teachers commonly described their role as a SRE teacher as a privilege and noted that it is personally very rewarding and satisfying.

Most SRE teachers who responded to the survey agreed (85%) or mostly agreed (13%) that the organisation for which they teach SRE provides them with enough training and support for them to successfully fulfil their role (Table 43).

More than half were very confident they understand effective ways to engage students in learning, of their skills in engaging students in lesson content, and about their ability to adapt

materials to the age of the student (Table 45). They were slightly less confident of their abilities to adapt the lessons for children from a range of backgrounds (44% very confident and 53% quite confident), and less confident in the use of technology tools in teaching (22% not very or not at all confident, and 41% quite confident).

SRE teachers are confident that they are seeing benefits for children attending SRE. Several noted that the fact that children ask questions and remember content from the previous week is an encouraging indication that they are engaged. Others have had positive feedback from parents.

SRE teachers pointed to the importance of coming well prepared for lessons, and understanding the needs of the classroom (e.g. age appropriate lessons); the importance of having a positive attitude towards interacting with students on an individual level, and delivering a quality, interesting lesson that adapts to different learning styles in the room to ensure engagement; and the importance of having a relationship with and love for God. Many SRE teachers said they were careful not to talk about their own beliefs but rather to follow the curriculum. Some churches also talked about the need for what is taught to be orthodox in nature. SRE teachers also commented on the increase in accreditation requirements in recent years making it difficult for 'all but the extremely committed volunteer to keep going.'

Christian, Islamic and Jewish SRE teachers all commented about having more access to basic and ongoing training than in the past. In the case study schools, it was not uncommon for SRE teachers to have some sort of relevant professional background and/or experience, for example, training in theology or a degree in education for example, retired school teachers/principals, or Youthworks youth and children's ministry training. Others had prior experience instructing religion in their church, mosque or temple. These SRE teachers perceive they have stronger skills in engaging students than those without similar professional backgrounds.

It was common for SRE teachers to note the importance of having support from the school; in particular, having a teacher sit in on the lesson, which many said is needed to help manage behaviour. Because the contact time with the students is relatively short, it can be difficult for SRE teachers to establish effective relationships with the children and deal with behavioural issues at the same time. A few noted that behaviour tends to improve as the term progresses.

A number of SRE teachers who made a submission to the Review, see SRE as a clear opportunity to teach the values of their faith to students who might not otherwise be well informed, or instil their religious beliefs in children. These respondents were emphatic about the importance of SRE, many noting that it provides exposure to the beliefs that are foundational to Australia as a nation or important to their faith. Many see SRE as a critical aspect of a child's education and development. They see SRE as a valuable opportunity to teach children about faith, and religious values and morals, and see it as an important part of a child's spiritual development. Others said that SRE provides a safe environment for children to ask questions about big concepts. There was a particular focus in the comments from SRE

teachers at secondary schools, on the benefits of SRE. These SRE teachers noted that SRE is a very valuable opportunity for students to ask questions about real-life issues and subject matter that generally 'we don't touch', and for students to develop morally, socially and spiritually to become informed members of society. Some SRE teachers see themselves as an important source of support and pastoral care for children. Others, however, see their role as providing an unbiased religious education that will allow children to make more informed decisions about spirituality. They recognised the religious diversity of society, and felt that SRE is an important opportunity to educate children about their faith.

**Table 43. SRE teachers' views on training and support provided**

| <b>The organisation I teach for provides me with enough training and support for me to successfully fulfil my role</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|---------------|----------------|
| Agree  | 2,391         | 85%            |
| Mostly agree   | 377           | 13%            |
| Mostly disagree  | 26            | 1%             |
| Disagree   | 18            | 1%             |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>2,812</b>  | <b>100%</b>    |
| <i>Not applicable</i>  | <i>12</i>     |                |

Source: Survey of SRE Teachers.

**Table 44. SRE teachers' views on student engagement in SRE**

| <b>Most students I teach are engaged in learning about SRE</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|---------------|----------------|
| Agree  | 1,919         | 66%            |
| Mostly agree   | 953           | 33%            |
| Mostly disagree  | 26            | 1%             |
| Disagree   | 17            | <1%            |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>2,915</b>  | <b>100%</b>    |

Source: Survey of SRE Teachers.

**Table 45. SRE teachers' ratings of their confidence in teaching and learning skills**

| Level of confidence   | Your understanding of effective ways to engage students in learning (n=2,936) | Your ability to engage students in the lesson content (n=2,935) | Your ability to adapt the lessons for students from a range of backgrounds (n=2,893) | Your ability to adapt the curriculum materials you use to the age of the students (n=2,908) | Using technology tools to help deliver lessons (n=2,856) |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|---|--|
|                       | Percent   | Percent   | Percent  | Percent   | Percent  |
| Very confident        | 53%   | 52%   | 44%  | 62%   | 37%  |
| Quite confident       | 46%   | 47%   | 53%  | 37%   | 41%  |
| Not very confident    | 1%  | 1%  | 3%   | 1%  | 19%  |
| Not at all confident  | 0%  | 0%  | <1%  | 0%  | 3%   |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>100%</b>   | <b>100%</b>   | <b>100%</b>  | <b>100%</b>   | <b>100%</b>  |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | 2   | 3   | 29   | 25  | 68   |

Source: Survey of SRE Teachers.

In case study visits, the Reviewers found that SRE teachers generally spoke about using more games, songs, colouring in and stories with younger primary school students, more use of technology with older primary school students, and more seminar/ discussion style lessons in secondary schools. Most SRE teachers said that the curriculum they are working with provides enough guidance but also flexibility to allow this, but that learning to adapt your teaching approach comes with experience.

### 6.2.3 Conclusions

The evidence indicates that SRE teachers' skills/ practices are variable, as is lesson quality, which reflects the differences in individuals' backgrounds and in the training and support given by providers to SRE teachers. On balance, all stakeholder groups were mainly positive about SRE teachers' practices and their ability to engage students in lessons, but where teaching practices were poor then these lessons had an adverse impact on some students' behaviour and wellbeing. Poor SRE teaching practices can damage providers' reputations and standing in the school community and contribute to parents taking their children out of SRE classes. Of particular concern are the complaints about SRE teachers not following the curriculum and instructing students in their beliefs, and about inappropriate lesson content, upsetting children and young people. The evidence indicates that although ongoing training



is helping to improve teaching practices, more monitoring of classroom practice and additional mentoring may be required to reduce poor practices. It is also apparent that a couple of hours training in classroom management is not sufficient to prepare inexperienced SRE teachers with knowledge on how to adequately manage disruptive classroom behaviour, and more focus is needed in this area.

Parents, principals and SRE teachers clearly associated the quality of SRE teaching with a number of factors: the ability of the SRE teacher to engage students in the lessons and manage classroom behaviour, the use of interactive teaching methods, the age appropriateness of the resources and lesson content, and the attitude and personal style of the SRE teacher.

Box 6.1: Illustrative quotes showing a range of experiences

The teachers are lovely and friendly and the kids love going. —Parent

Scripture is important to nurture children's spiritual development. —Parent

The content is good and integrates local church members into the school and the delivery is mostly by local church members and not all by experienced educators so they struggle at times. —Parent

Having people come in not as teachers but as people who know a little bit about the community it is difficult for them to relate. Telling children who are grieving the loss of their Mum to cancer that their Mum isn't an angel because God has already picked his angels does not benefit the health of these children. Hence I removed my child from the presence of this heartless scripture teacher. I complained to the local Minister and nothing was done. —Parent

Interacting with our local school communities children is such a wonderful privilege. —SRE teacher

It gives students an opportunity to be educated as a whole person and teaches values along the way, values that cannot be taught as part of other subject areas. It relates to them personally on so many levels. It would be an injustice to our future generations to remove the ability to have such an education. —SRE teacher

It is my observation that children need Scripture because through it they can find meaning and purpose in life. To know they are not an accident or random conglomerate of atoms. They can know they were created by Someone Who loves them, and is there to be their Friend, Who hears their cries for help, and helps and cares and is in control, and working all things together for good for a grand plan – to bring many children to glory. —SRE teacher

As Christianity is the basis of our society and values in Australia it is good for children to learn the source of those values i.e. the Bible and the positive influence it has had and still has on our society.—SRE teacher

I feel as an SRE teacher I am well equipped and trained by my denomination to teach the Bible to the children at my local school. I appreciate the work that is done to prepare materials for me to use that enhance the teaching opportunity I have. —SRE teacher

I feel Christian SRE where I teach has an excellent curriculum (we use Connect material) that is consistent and well developed. There is rigorous training including an annual conference and ongoing learning for our teachers so that we maintain a high standard of teaching. We are trained to

be aware of different learning styles, different needs children may have... We also meet regularly to discuss how our classes are going and we have a coordinator who knows how to help us with any difficulties. —SRE teacher

Not coming from a teaching background, I sometimes find classroom management a challenge; particularly as I'm only teaching my Year 6 class for half an hour a week. It can be hard to get to know the students better, in such a way as to really help them engage with the lesson content. I'm thankful that the teacher stays in and offers to be the disciplinarian for us, as it's a role I don't feel comfortable playing. —SRE teacher

Teaching scripture needs to be attractive and engaging to the student that is why I love to use lots of different methods and styles of teaching. —SRE teacher

I do not believe that SRE should be implemented under our existing protocol. Whilst respecting those we work with, public education should not be involved. Untrained 'teachers' are not acceptable, much of the 'curriculum' is poorly devised, moralistic and not connected to our mainstream learning. Its impact is unacceptable. —Secondary principal

The feedback we receive from students, parents and staff regarding the delivery of SRE at our school is overwhelmingly positive. Although we currently only deliver a multi-denominational Christian SRE class in Years 7 & 8, the parent community is open to the opportunity for other approved providers to deliver SRE lessons at the school. The delivery of SRE and the opportunity for students to learn about religious faiths in a public school setting is valued by our school community. —Secondary principal

We have an effective program with a fellow from Gener8, who is also a qualified teacher, delivering a cycle of lessons to all Year 7 and Year 8 classes for one 50-minute lesson/ fortnight. He is a very friendly teacher who engages with staff and students well and participates in other activities on the Tuesdays he is present, including staff meetings, faculty meetings, NAPLAN supervision and the like. His teaching is biblically based and in accord with DoE requirements, using appropriate materials and resources. We are quite satisfied with this fellow in this role. —Secondary principal

Varied. Providers are often unreliable - not realising/ respecting the imposition of lateness or absence with little or NO notice. I have raised SERIOUS concerns about the content of material delivered. Once, resulting in threatening letters to myself from the SRE teacher over a sustained time. I followed policy at each step. —Secondary principal

I believe that SRE in its present form of being instructed by non-teaching staff who do not have to abide by the Code of Conduct is dangerous. If SRE examined Christianity in light of informing students rather than pushing one area of faith then I feel that it would be far better received and taught. —Secondary principal

## 6.3 New modes and patterns of delivery using technology

This section looks at ToR 6.

### 6.3.1 What is required or intended

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* do not address the use of new modes and patterns of delivering SRE using technology.

## 6.3.2 What occurs in practice

### ***How providers support the use of technology***

Large Christian providers want SRE to use the same patterns of delivery as DoE teachers, as a best practice approach. As such, the large Christian curriculums include resources that use technology in classrooms to help deliver SRE material. Their curricula provide materials such as interactive games, PowerPoints, mp3s and CDs for use via SMART Boards or other devices. CCRESS members are developing a computer-based version of the curriculum.

*CCRESS and its members have developed and use SMART Board, USB and multi-media resources in the delivery of SRE. The Catholic Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes delivers SRE via the School of the Air platform and this initiative was recognised at the Celebration of SRE at Parliament House in October 2014. CCRESS and its members are currently working on the development of Apps to support the implementation of SRE across the State...and exploring the possibility of streaming SRE lessons into classrooms in remote areas. — CCRESS submission*

*As part of its Teacher's Resource pack, GodSpace provides traditional cut out pictures (with suggestions of how to use them creatively and interactively) as well as a CD-Rom filled with PowerPoints, songs, mp3's, interactive revision games and memory verses, and additional approved resources. We are committed to keeping pace with developing technologies. —GodSpace submission*

The NSW Board of Jewish Education provides online modules for students who may be in a school that does not offer Jewish SRE because of location and/or small enrolments. Students may do these in non-scripture time or at home.

SRE Boards that provided feedback generally agreed that increased use of technology is essential and that providers must make technology available for SRE teachers. In some cases they reasoned such technology would assist pedagogy, but also said that the students expect it. In some instances the curriculum materials are only available in multi-media formats. By contrast, some respondents expressed the view that the use of technology is unimportant compared to the ability of SRE teachers to personally engage their students.

### ***Use of technology by SRE teachers***

A high proportion (78%) of SRE teachers who responded to the survey report that they use some technology tools to help deliver lessons. The use of technology did not depend on location, but was considerably higher in secondary schools where 92% of respondents use it compared with 76% of those teaching only in primary schools. Jewish, Hindu and Baha'i SRE teachers all reported using technology in lessons.

SRE teachers who use technology mostly use interactive whiteboards for delivering PowerPoint presentations, playing videos and for accessing internet material. For example, YouTube clips or songs, song lyrics, games and quizzes, pictures, cartoons and maps. Some use a digital projector when interactive whiteboards are not available, for similar purposes.

*SMART Board computer with data projector. Sound equipment- wireless headset microphone, speakers, etc iPod with Bluetooth speaker. I try to use whatever technology and other means that are available to ensure the lesson is as engaging as possible. —SRE teacher*

*I prepare my lessons using PowerPoint and use animation and sounds where possible. As well I integrate into my PowerPoint presentation music and video clips. —SRE teacher*

Music plays an important role in many SRE classes and SRE teachers use a range of technical devices to this end, including interactive whiteboards, mp3s, iPods, smartphones with Bluetooth speakers and CD players.

One commented that they use *polleverywhere.com* on student smartphones to ask interactive questions. Another uses *biblegateway.com* on iPads with Year 6 students.

Many SRE teachers commented on the availability of classroom technology and how this can vary across schools, or from week to week.

*If a SMART Board is available I use this to my advantage for watching short clips or using a PowerPoint for cartoons and storytelling however this technology is not always reliable or available. —SRE teacher*

*This varies with the age of children I am teaching. At present I teach a Year 2 class. I use professionally produced DVDs which use animated children's Bible readings. These are age appropriate and help children to engage with the Bible passages. I use PowerPoint slides to illustrate lesson material and for quizzes as well as to display words to songs I sing (I play guitar for these). One problem is that the SMART Board technology is not that reliable in my classroom so I always have to have 'plan B' that doesn't rely on the SMART Board. Sometimes I bring my laptop and a portable speaker but this is not ideal, often I just have a non tech option prepared. —SRE teacher*

*Our SRE committee fundraised to donate to our school an interactive whiteboard that we use in every SRE lesson in that school. —SRE teacher*

According to SRE teachers, it is common for SRE lessons to be held in different rooms at each visit, which makes it more difficult to plan for and use technology items, such as interactive whiteboards.

*Increasingly access to and how to use technology such as SMART Boards is a problem and we are having to run after school classes for scripture teachers on how to do so - adding to the teachers load. —Primary principal*

A suggestion was made that SRE teachers receive a generic SRE password that will allow them to use interactive whiteboards so that they do not need to use classroom teachers' passwords.

Those who do not use technology to help deliver SRE classes offered several reasons for this. Often they are not familiar with how to use interactive whiteboards, or there is no back-up available if they need some assistance. For others, the school does not allow access to the school interactive whiteboards, or classroom teachers are using the computer during the SRE lesson. Others have found their personal software is not compatible with what is available in the classroom.

Some SRE teachers commented that the lesson time is too short to set up or use equipment, or there is too much risk if something goes wrong. Others stated a preference for using low-tech approaches, such as drama, good storytelling and books. One commented that the curriculum resources that use technology did not engage the students in their classes.

*I find that using the SMART Board makes the lesson more interesting for students but by the time we set it up, say our prayers, check class attendance and introduce the day's lesson, time is always not enough. —SRE teacher*

### **Case studies**

Evidence from case studies confirmed that new modes of delivery using technology tend to relate to interactive whiteboards and supplementing the curriculum with online resources, e.g. YouTube clips. The latter raises issues around approval of these materials: some providers are clear that any such materials need to be approved by the SRE coordinator before use, but others are less clear about this, and there is mixed practice among teachers. Many of the SRE teachers in the case studies were occasional rather than regular users of interactive whiteboards. There seemed to be more regular use by Catholic SRE teachers.

Some teachers say that there is not enough time to worry about technology in a 30 minute lesson, so they keep it simple. Some teachers feel that interactive whiteboards are good for students in upper primary, but younger students are happy with stories and colouring in.

Gaining access to the internet while teaching SRE can be an issue for some teachers and a barrier to using technology. Some teachers report that they can access the internet through the school computer/ interactive whiteboards, while others use their personal mobile connections. Some schools have staff available who are able to troubleshoot issues with technology if they arise, but others do not.

### Confidence in using technology

Provider SRE coordinators and SRE teachers expressed confidence about SRE teachers' ability to use technology tools in their delivery of SRE lessons (81% coordinators, 79% SRE teachers). A sizable minority in each group (19% coordinators, 22% SRE teachers) said they are either not very or not confident about this (Table 46), suggesting that further training in this area would be useful.

**Table 46. Level of confidence about SRE teachers' ability to use technology tools to help deliver lessons**

|                                   | Coordinators | Teachers |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| N                                 | 554          | 2,856    |
|                                   | Percent      | Percent  |
| Very confident                    | 23%          | 38%      |
| Quite confident                   | 58%          | 41%      |
| Not very confident                | 17%          | 19%      |
| Not at all confident              | 2%           | 2%       |
| Total                             | 100%         | 100%     |
| <i>Don't know/ not applicable</i> | 39           | 68       |

Source: Survey of Provider SRE Coordinators; Survey of SRE Teachers.

### 6.3.3 Conclusions

Many providers are providing curriculum resources for SRE teachers that enable them to use a variety of technology tools in the delivery of their classes, such as interactive games, PowerPoints, mp3s and CDs for use via interactive whiteboards or other devices.

Many SRE teachers report that they use interactive whiteboards or digital projectors and other devices to bring audio-visual, multi-media and internet resources into their classes. While this works well in many cases, there can be challenges associated with the use of technology including accessibility, functionality and short lesson times. There is some variation between schools in providing access to school equipment such as interactive whiteboards.

A sizable minority of SRE teachers are not very confident in the use of some technologies and could benefit from receiving training in this area. An issue with the use of multi-media and internet resources is whether materials are part of the authorised curriculum.

## 7. Alternative activities

This chapter looks at Term of Reference 9—Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE.

### 7.1 What is required or intended

The Education Act 1990, Section 32 says:

*Children attending a religious education class are to be separated from other children at the school while the class is held.*

Section 33 says:

*No child at a government school is to be required to receive any general religious education or special religious education if the parent of the child objects to the child's receiving that education.*

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* state that:

*In the times set aside for special religious education, students not attending are located in a separate physical space from special religious education classes.*

*Schools provide meaningful activities with appropriate care and supervision. These activities neither compete with special religious education nor are they lessons in the curriculum. Suitable activities include reading, private study and completing homework.*

*Special education in ethics is an option for students not attending special religious education, where it is practicable and requested by the parents/caregivers.*

*When insufficient teachers or accommodation are available, the school's policy on minimal supervision operates.*

### 7.2 What occurs in practice

It appears that the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) are usually implemented by schools. The suggestions provided for alternative activities are intended as guidelines, and there are a variety of different responses. A small number of case study schools and survey respondents 'bend the rules' to fit their local context for example, offering normal class lessons during SRE lessons for the majority of students not participating in SRE. Some SRE Boards expressed concern that the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*

(2015) are not always strictly adhered to and that some students who are not participating in SRE or SEE may in fact be given additional coursework.

Many principals, at both primary schools and secondary schools, believe that the prohibition on coursework activities is problematic, and that students should be engaged in structured activities such as coursework and sport during all their timetabled sessions. The argument for this rests on the view that students are not (and cannot be) equipped to be productive in unstructured sessions, and that unstructured time spent in a classroom therefore tends to weaken the culture of spending academic time productively, and so reduces students' academic motivation.

The *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) do not address the issue of schools having a majority of students not participating in SRE. The NSW Secondary Principals' Council expressed a serious concern that the choice of some students denies the opportunity for learning for others.

Parents are generally satisfied with the level of supervision that their children receive while doing alternative activities. They are mostly not satisfied with the type of activities that their children participate in during alternative activities. Their main concerns are that:

- students have a right to learning, which is being denied them. This is considered particularly irksome when it affects the majority of students in a class or Year.
- the lost learning time is often at the prime learning time of the day, i.e. morning.
- organisational and supervision issues are created through having large numbers of students doing alternative activities. Issues are ongoing through the year and are exacerbated by additional numbers of students doing alternative activities when an SRE teacher or SEE teacher does not show up to hold their class.

**Increasing numbers of students are doing alternative activities.** Many principals have noted that the number of students opting out of SRE and doing alternative activities is increasing, especially as they get older. Increasing numbers creates pressure on schools to find suitable spaces for students to meet, and to provide adequate supervision. It also accentuates the problem of not providing structured learning opportunities for students while their peers are at SRE.

*Increasing number of students participating in non-scripture means it becomes a supervising activity because children from different classes come together in one classroom for supervision. Organising the classes and housing them in appropriate places takes an enormous amount of time of the organising teacher. The organisation issues also do not stop at the beginning of the year. —Primary principal*

*The provision of SRE is a disruption because of the large number of students who opt-out but who are not allowed to be taught normal lessons. —Secondary principal*



*Most of the students are not participating in SRE and this creates logistical issues to accommodate for such large student numbers. I am also concerned about the value of alternative arrangements made for non-participating students. —Secondary principal*

*Our 7–10 SRE cohort is only 9% of our student body. This makes timetabling SRE difficult and causes angst from non-SRE teachers, students and parents about the provision of alternative tasks etc. —Secondary principal*

*More parents asking for their children not to attend SRE lessons so timetabling, planning for children not attending is more difficult. When scripture lessons collapse on short notice on a regular basis also cause for concern as time could be used more beneficially to cover KLAs teaching and learning. —Primary principal*

*Students not attending SRE are growing and it is difficult to keep them occupied with the restrictions imposed on the kind of activities they are permitted to undertake. Supervision of all classes is difficult in a small school with all classes needing teacher supervision to maintain discipline... SRE teachers, whilst well meaning, find the presentation of engaging lessons difficult with the nature of the current learners. Regular intervention is necessary by staff to assist with discipline. —Primary principal*

## **Supervision**

Supervision for students not participating in SRE appears to be generally well organised but limited staff availability and classroom space is a challenge for some schools, especially where large numbers of students need supervision. Managing supervision is more of a challenge for smaller primary schools and secondary schools with low levels of participation in SRE.

Close to two-thirds (63%, n=354) of parents who responded to the survey are satisfied (31%) or mostly satisfied (32%) with the level of supervision that their children receive while doing alternative activities (Table 47).

Supervision of students who are engaged in alternative activities is almost always by teachers, sometimes within another class (18% of primary schools; four percent of secondary schools who responded to the principal survey). Teachers may be rostered for supervision on a rotation basis. Executive teachers, deputy principals and principals also assist with supervision (17% of primary schools, 15% of secondary schools who responded to the principal survey). Librarians provide supervision for about 10% of primary schools and 22% of secondary schools surveyed. Some teacher's aides assist with supervision (Table 48). In some schools where there is limited availability of staff for supervision, such as small schools or schools with many SRE and/or SEE classes running simultaneously, teachers may provide supervision by checking in on different groups. At one school the school chaplain assists with supervision of alternative activities.

**Table 47. Level of parent satisfaction in supervision for alternative activities**

|                       | Number     | Percent     |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Satisfied             | 111        | 31%         |
| Mostly satisfied      | 112        | 32%         |
| Mostly dissatisfied   | 44         | 12%         |
| Dissatisfied          | 86         | 24%         |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>353</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>Don't know</i>     | 87         |             |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | 91         |             |
| <i>No data</i>        | 20         |             |

Source: Parent/ Caregiver online contribution portal. Filtered for those with children engaged in alternative activities.

**Table 48. Supervision of alternative activities**

|                                 | Primary | Secondary | Central | Specific Purpose |
|---------------------------------|---------|-----------|---------|------------------|
| N                               | 487     | 134       | 15      | 6                |
| Supervised within another class | 18%     | 4%        | 7%      | 0%               |
| Librarian                       | 10%     | 22%       | 7%      | 0%               |
| Executive teacher               | 15%     | 13%       | 27%     | 0%               |
| Teacher                         | 79%     | 75%       | 53%     | 100%             |
| Teacher's aide                  | 4%      | 1%        | 7%      | 50%              |
| Principal                       | 2%      | 1%        | 0%      | 0%               |
| Other                           | 2%      | 2%        | 0%      | 0%               |

Source: Survey of Principals. Note: More than one option could be selected.

Close to 10% of schools surveyed (mostly primary schools) have groups of more than 30 students per adult supervisor doing alternative activities while SRE classes are running (Table 49).

**Table 49. Adult to student ratio for students doing alternative activities**

|                                 | Primary    | Secondary  | Central   | Specific Purpose | Total       |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------------|-------------|
| N                               | 475        | 133        | 13        | 6                | 627         |
| Less than 20 students per adult | 26%        | 11%        | 1%        | 1%               | 38%         |
| 20 to 30 students per adult     | 41%        | 10%        | 1%        | 0%               | 51%         |
| More than 30 students per adult | 10%        | 1%         | 0%        | 0%               | 11%         |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>76%</b> | <b>21%</b> | <b>2%</b> | <b>1%</b>        | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>No data</i>                  | 195        | 27         | 6         |                  | 228         |

Source: Survey of Principals.

*Large non-scripture group is becoming an organisational issue in relation to available spaces and supervision. School policy has all scripture classes supervised by the teacher to ensure duty of care policy is complied with. There is a group for each Year group and a Stage group and this takes classrooms spaces and all staff. Which then leaves a very large non-scripture group with issues related to available space and supervision. —Primary principal*

*Child safety can be an issue. As we are a small school there are no teachers available to watch all of the students who have opted out. —Primary principal*

*As a small, one teacher school, we have supervision issues for students during SRE delivery. Sometimes I am needed for classroom behaviour management during an SRE lesson but I also need to be supervising the large number of children who do not participate in SRE lessons. —Primary principal*

## **Activities**

Generally speaking, schools follow the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures (2015)* about suitable activities of reading, private study and completing homework, with reading emphasised in primary schools and private study in secondary schools (Table 50). Primary schools (and a very small number of secondary schools) also use recreational activities including drawing, colouring in, art, use of computers or iPads, jigsaws, board games, constructive play, and craft. A small number of secondary schools continue class work at this time, contrary to the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures (2015)*. Some commented that a lack of space within the school limits the possibilities for alternative activities.

**Table 50. Alternative activities by type of school**

| School           | N          | Homework   | Reading    | Private study | Recreation | Other      | Do not provide |
|------------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| Primary          | 491        | 21%        | 65%        | 46%           | 11%        | 37%        | 8%             |
| Secondary        | 136        | 49%        | 51%        | 65%           | 1%         | 30%        | 10%            |
| Central          | 15         | 40%        | 47%        | 27%           | 0%         | 47%        | 13%            |
| Specific Purpose | 6          | 0%         | 17%        | 0%            | 33%        | 83%        | 0%             |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>648</b> | <b>27%</b> | <b>61%</b> | <b>49%</b>    | <b>8%</b>  | <b>36%</b> | <b>9%</b>      |

Source: Survey of Principals.

Close to one-third of the principals who responded to the survey also nominated other activities that students do at this time. In primary schools these included some formal programs such as peer support program, KidsMatter and Resilience; behaviour and/or social skills; educational movies or documentaries; and gardening (Box 7.1).

#### Box 7.1: Alternative activities in primary schools n=181

|  |   |
|--|---|
| iPads with educational games                 | Playground  |
| Interactive whiteboard activities            | Play activities   |
| Computer-based learning programs             | Set up hall for assembly                                    |
| Computer usage                               | Weekly assembly   |
| Visit a buddy classroom                      | Personal development  |
| Teacher-directed activities                  | Peer support program  |
| Work booklets, e.g. literacy                 | KidsMatter and Resilience                                   |
| Literacy and numeracy activities             | PBL value discussions                                       |
| Activities related to other curriculum areas | Social skills/ values                                       |
| Research tasks/ library                      | Moral dilemma stories                                       |
| KLA activities                               | Positive Behaviour lessons                                  |
| Stage work                                   | Singing   |
| Discussion                                   | Gardening   |
| Revision of work                             | Educational movie; documentary DVDs                         |
| Class work; regular lessons                  | Study of special events/ celebrations in different cultures |
| Fine motor activities                        | Activities provided by parents                              |
| Drawing                                      | Students provide their own activities                       |
| Handwriting                                  | Time fillers/ colouring in                                  |
| Craft group activities                       | Speech therapy  |
| Construction materials                       |   |

Secondary students may also have some formal program, such as assembly, welfare lessons, values lessons, social skills, or recycling program (Box 7.2).

**Box 7.2: Secondary schools and Central schools n=48**

|   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| Non-curriculum related classroom activities | Values lessons       |
| Revision and consolidation exercises        | Welfare lessons      |
| Work set by teachers                        | Recycling program    |
| Workbook based on general subjects          | Attend assembly      |
| Revision involving literacy/ numeracy       | School service       |
| In class with timetabled teacher            | Board games          |
| Technology                                  | Sitting around bored |
| Skill development                           | Early finish         |
| Social skills                               |                      |

Secondary schools with only small numbers of SRE students find different ways of providing SRE for these students with minimal disruption to other students. Some do this by scheduling SRE at the end of the day (sometimes after sport). Case studies showed that a small number of secondary schools with low SRE enrolments withdraw SRE students from normal classes, which students need to catch up on later.

*How can other activities be provided effectively when the groupings are spread across the Years and different classes. It also becomes difficult because there are weeks that either scripture or ethics teachers do not come for the lessons. —Primary principal*

*Almost impossible to program an alternative activity for the 95% of students who opt-out of SRE. There is anger amongst staff when asked to assist with SRE behaviour management. Would be much better if we could get rid of SRE. —Secondary principal*

Responses received from parents to the online contribution portal confirm the range of activities listed by principals, and give some indication of parents' views about what alternative activities are available for their children and the extent of these (Table 51).

**Table 51. Alternative activities reported by parents**

| <b>N=551</b>      | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Reading           | 153           | 27%            |
| Homework          | 40            | 7%             |
| Private study     | 66            | 12%            |
| <i>Don't know</i> | 151           | 27%            |
| Other             | 276           | 50%            |

Filtered for those who responded 'Do not attend SRE classes'. Multiple answers could be selected so responses do not add to 100%. Other activities included: activity books, art, craft, colouring in, board games, clean up of school grounds, watching DVD, discussion in groups, drawing, free time, games, join another class, Lego, Maths, computer research skills, games on computer or iPad, revision, regular class work, sitting in the library, values, leave early (secondary school), and attend normal class (secondary school).

### ***Satisfaction with arrangements***

Based on responses to the parent/ caregiver online contribution portal, a high proportion (75%, n=397) of parents are dissatisfied (62%) or mostly dissatisfied (13%) with the type of activities that their children participate in while other students do SRE or SEE.

**Table 52. Level of parent satisfaction with types of activities**

|                       | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Satisfied             | 50            | 13%            |
| Mostly satisfied      | 47            | 12%            |
| Mostly dissatisfied   | 52            | 13%            |
| Dissatisfied          | 248           | 62%            |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>397</b>    | <b>100%</b>    |
| <i>Don't know</i>     | 52            |                |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | 90            |                |
| <i>No data</i>        | 12            |                |

Source: Parent/ Caregiver online contribution portal. Results are filtered for those with children engaged in alternative activities.

By contrast, 71% of primary principals and 60% of secondary principals who responded to the survey are satisfied with the arrangements for alternative activities, while the rest (29% of

primary principals and 40% of secondary principals) would like to be able to offer different activities to their students (Table 53). In some cases they are constrained by the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015), but in others it is a question of available resources, both material and human.

**Table 53. Principals' satisfaction with arrangements for alternative activities**

|  | Primary | Secondary | Central | Specific Purpose |
|--|---------|-----------|---------|------------------|
| N                                      | 483     | 135       | 16      | 6                |
| I am satisfied with what is provided   | 71%     | 60%       | 63%     | 100%             |
| I would like to offer other activities | 29%     | 40%       | 38%     | 0%               |
| Total                                  | 100%    | 100%      | 100%    | 100%             |
| No data                                | 254     | 66        | 9       | 34               |

Source: Survey of Principals.

### **Lost learning time**

Some principals expressed concern about the inequity of having the choice of some students who do SRE impact on those who choose otherwise, particularly in the secondary school setting. This is not reflected in other areas of school life, such as choosing to be involved in additional activities involving music, sport or art.

*In a high school the issues are very different from primary schools. Our timetables are much more complex. Additionally in high schools when a student elects to take up an opportunity it never causes their peers to be denied opportunities to learn. SRE is the only area where the choices made by some (often very few) prevents other students from exercising their normal rights to learning and denies teachers their rights and desire to teach and indeed reduces their role to that of a supervisor/ babysitter. This does not 'sit well' within our values framework. —Secondary principal*

*This is the most outrageous element of the current practice, that students who opt-out of the SRE have their learning affected by the decisions of a vast minority of parents. —Secondary principal*

There is concern expressed about loss of learning time for different groups of students.

- For all SRE students.
- For students who choose to not do SRE or SEE.
- For all students when SRE classes are held in the mornings during prime learning time.

*Our students are generally not interested in SRE and many see it as an opportunity to opt-out of regular classes. No new work is done during the SRE periods so the school sees this as a waste of everyone's time in an overcrowded curriculum. Timetabling is always a problem as we are short of rooms and it is the same subjects impacted in each Year group throughout the year. —Secondary principal*

*Ludicrous that students who do not wish to be involved in Scripture can't be offered substantial alternative work from curriculum....System isn't working. —Primary principal*

*Would like the opportunity to offer engaging and high quality educational alternatives for non-scripture students. They should not have to lose half an hour of their learning time because they do not choose to do scripture. —Primary principal*

*The policy requirement that students not in SRE classes cannot engage in meaningful learning is seriously flawed. —Primary principal*

**Table 54. Activities that principals would like to offer during this time for students not attending SRE or SEE**

**Primary n=150**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Normal lessons   | Formal peer support or other form of ethical behaviour program delivered by classroom teacher |
| Something educationally meaningful: creative writing workshops, Maths enrichment, art workshop | Environmental groups  |
| Literacy/ numeracy support   | Comparative religion  |
| Curriculum areas: music, sport, art  | Personal development  |
| Run a book club  | Academic extension  |
| Work on Individual Education Projects  | Social skills   |
| Formal lessons around values and ethics  | Social and Emotional Learning activities  |
| Values education by teachers   | Community service/ citizenship activities   |
| Welfare programs, e.g. You Can Do It   | Band, dance, garden programs  |
| Ethics classes   |   |

**Secondary and Central schools n=68**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Regular curriculum                          | Mentoring                                    |
| Normal class with catch-up for those in SRE | Pastoral care                                |
| Class material—review, consolidate, extend  | Support programs to improve soft skills      |
| Literacy/ numeracy/ reading                 | Cyber-safety                                 |
| Study skills based activities               | Research skills                              |
| Ethics classes                              | More formal activities, e.g. organised games |
| Welfare program                             | Positive Behaviour for Learning              |
| Year meetings                               |  |



The NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations says:

*We would also ask that meaningful alternatives with adequate supervision be provided to students whose parents decide to opt-out of SEE (sic). Where no SEE is offered due to the lack of volunteers the P&C would advocate that students be offered normal classes relevant to their curriculum.*

The NSW Secondary Principals Council argued that SRE is a program that does not need to have protectionist policy settings. In particular, it argued against the policy of not continuing with schoolwork for non-participants while SRE classes are run. Comments from principals reveal decisions in this area as a major source of angst in secondary schools. Indeed parental frustration about the value of alternative activities to SRE was driver behind the introduction of SEE in primary schools and continues to motivate parents to volunteer to give SEE lessons. Some SEE teachers in case studies said that they would gladly give back the time of SEE classes to schools, if it was used for productive schoolwork.

### **7.2.1 Conclusions**

The question of alternative activities for students not participating in SRE or SEE is of great concern for many parents who withdraw their children from SRE, and for schools. While around two-thirds of parents who responded to the online contribution portal are satisfied with the level of supervision their child receives at this time, a majority are not satisfied with the type of activities they participate in.

While a majority of principals who responded to the survey said they are satisfied with the alternative activities that are offered (70% of primary principals and 60% of secondary principals surveyed), many expressed strong dissatisfaction with not being able to offer structured learning activities for students not participating in SRE or SEE, as did their peak groups.

## B: Review of Special Education in Ethics

### Introduction

This part of the report describes the implementation of SEE in 2015; with each chapter addressing a Terms of Reference. On December 1 2010, the NSW Parliament passed the Ethics Education Amendment Act. Section 33A gives students the right to attend ethics classes if their parents request it and if Primary Ethics can provide trained and vetted volunteers to organise and teach the classes. These classes are made available to children who don't attend the SRE classes at their primary schools.

The report on SEE does not canvass two Terms of Reference (ToR)—ToR 5 Registration of SRE and SEE Boards, Associations and Committees, and ToR 9 Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE —as these have been addressed in the relevant SRE chapters and the findings are common to both SRE and SEE.

The first chapter describes the nature and extent of SEE. The remaining chapters are structured to first describe what is intended or required, examine what occurs in practice and then draw conclusions about how implementation might be improved and any issues are addressed. Where evidence is available the role of Primary Ethics (the only current SEE provider) and the Department are drawn out and different stakeholders' perspectives on what occurs in practice captured.

#### *Education Act (1990) Section 33A*

#### **33A Special education in ethics as secular alternative to special religious education**

- (1) Special education in ethics is allowed as a secular alternative to special religious education at government schools.
- (2) If the parent of a child objects to the child receiving special religious education, the child is entitled to receive special education in ethics, but only if:
  - (a) it is reasonably practicable for special education in ethics to be made available to the child at the government school, and
  - (b) the parent requests that the child receive special education in ethics.
- (3) A government school cannot be directed (by the Minister or otherwise) not to make special education in ethics available at the school.

## 8. The nature and extent of SEE

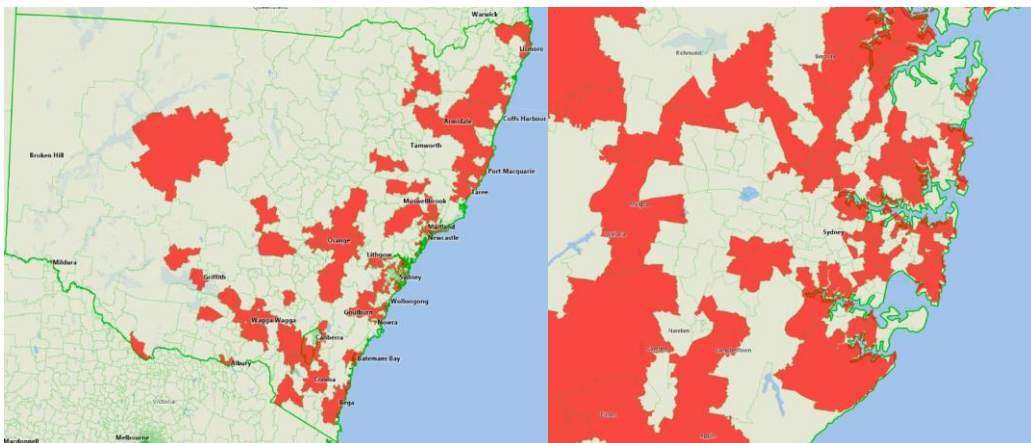
This chapter describes the nature and extent of SEE, covering school and student participation in SEE and how SEE is resourced and managed.

### ***Availability of data on the extent of SEE***

The data on participation in SEE was provided by Primary Ethics (February 2015) and the primary schools who responded to the survey of principals during May to July 2015. Almost half of all primary schools in NSW (47%) completed a survey. Primary Ethics publishes which schools offer SEE and the total number of students enrolled in SEE across NSW (for the current year) on their website <http://www.primaryethics.com.au>. The maps (Figure 13) showing where SEE is offered are based on Primary Ethics' school participation data published on their website as of November 2015.

Department data on student participation in SEE is collected by each school and is held locally. It is not published annually by the Department<sup>19</sup>, although this was recommended in the Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012).

**Figure 13. SEE availability: NSW and Sydney metropolitan area**



Source: Primary Ethics website, <http://www.primaryethics.com.au/> (November 2015); and the Survey of Principals.

<sup>19</sup> Recommendation 6. That the Department of Education and Communities collect and publish data annually on the number of students participating in Special Education in Ethics, Special Religious Education and for those students who do not attend either.

## 8.1 The nature of ethics classes

SEE is described in the *SEE Implementation Procedures* as 'a program in ethical decision-making, action and reflection within a secular framework, based on a branch of philosophy'. The Primary Ethics website notes that 'Ethics is a branch of philosophy that examines ethical concepts and issues, asking what is right or wrong in particular circumstances.'<sup>20</sup> It states that the topics covered in the SEE curriculum 'comprise a wide range of age-appropriate issues that primary-aged children find interesting. Students learn to think about these ethical matters together and engage in the give-and-take of reasoned argument. This process allows students to properly consider other people's points of view and to be sincere, reasonable and respectful in dealing with their differences and disagreements.'

## 8.2 Shared responsibilities, governance and management

### *Shared responsibilities*

Responsibility for managing and delivering SEE is shared between the Department, Primary Ethics and at the local level, with principals and Directors, Public Schools NSW. Departmental policy outlines the broad parameters of SEE, with details in the *SEE Implementation Procedures*.

**Table 55. Main areas of responsibility for SEE**

| Group responsible       | Areas of responsibility  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Department of Education | <p><i>Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures</i></p> <p><i>Approval of providers</i></p> <p><i>Resolution of complaints not resolved at the school level</i></p> <p>Oversight of policy, executive support for the Consultative Committee for Special Education in Ethics</p> <p>Review of the age appropriateness of SEE curriculum</p> <p><b>Principals:</b> Oversight of the implementation of SEE within the school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Providers are approved by the Department</li> <li>▪ SEE teachers are authorised by their provider</li> <li>▪ Parents receive information</li> <li>▪ Enrolment processes are followed</li> <li>▪ Students not participating in SRE or SEE have adequate supervision and meaningful activities</li> </ul> |

<sup>20</sup> Primary Ethics website, <http://www.primaryethics.com.au/infoforschools.html>

| Group responsible                  | Areas of responsibility  |
|------------------------------------|--|
|                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Resolution of complaints</li> </ul> <p><b>Directors, Public Schools NSW:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitoring of the implementation of SEE</li> <li>▪ Resolution of implementation issues between the school, its community and Primary Ethics (or any new SEE providers)</li> </ul>     |
| Approved provider (Primary Ethics) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authorisation of SEE teachers</li> <li>Arrange criminal record checks</li> <li>Provide access to training for SEE teachers</li> <li>Provision of curriculum outline on website for parent information</li> <li>Satisfactory complaints procedures</li> <li>Authorisation of the pedagogy and materials</li> </ul> |

Parents and caregivers also have a responsibility to take an active interest in what their children participate in at school.

### **Primary Ethics governance arrangements**

Primary Ethics is an independent not-for-profit charity, which is governed by a four-person Board of Directors, whose members' experience encompasses roles as Directors for not-for-profit and industry organisations, governance and risk management, financial management and teaching philosophy. The membership of the Board is listed on the Primary Ethics website.

## **8.3 Patterns of organisation**

SEE is offered to primary school students only. Primary Ethics sets a minimum and maximum number of students for SEE lessons; at least eight students from the same Stage or Year group and a cap of 22 students per class. SEE classes are offered at the same time set aside for SRE classes in schools, and for the most part occur on a weekly basis. Most SEE classes are composed of students in the same Stage (75% of classes), or less commonly, the same Year group (35%) (Survey of SEE Coordinators, multiple responses permitted). Only seven percent of Ethics coordinators indicated that the SEE classes they facilitate included students from mixed Year groups.

At the school level, a volunteer appointed by Primary Ethics coordinates the delivery of SEE lessons (Ethics coordinator) and is the main contact point for schools. Schools vary in their approach to negotiating the timetabling of SEE: in some schools, lesson times are largely pre-determined either by the school or the historically dominant SRE provider, and SEE must work within these parameters. For other schools, timetabling varies annually to cater for the availability of providers. Generally, SEE in primary schools is timetabled for 30 minutes per

class, at the same time each week. It is common for the school to put aside an hour or two during the morning to cover two or three sessions of SEE classes, accommodating different Year or Stage groups. This arrangement can also allow the same SEE teachers to do multiple classes per day. In the odd instance, SEE is scattered throughout the school timetable during the week. Almost all schools (99%) have weekly classes; the remaining two schools have fortnightly classes (Survey of SEE Coordinators).

Most schools and Ethics coordinators agree they have good relationships, and the case study interviews confirm these reports (Table 56).

**Table 56. Extent coordinators and principals report a good working relationship**

| Ethics coordinators   |            |             | Principals        |            |             |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|
|                       | Number     | Percent     |                   | Number     | Percent     |
| Agree                 | 101        | 70%         | Always            | 112        | 68%         |
| Mostly agree          | 42         | 29%         | Often             | 48         | 29%         |
| Mostly disagree       | 1          | 1%          | Sometimes         | 3          | 2%          |
|                       |            |             | Never             | 1          | 1%          |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>144</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>Total</b>      | <b>164</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>Don't know</i>     | 3          |             | <i>Don't know</i> | 15         |             |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | 5          |             |                   |            |             |
| <i>No data</i>        | 2          |             | <i>No data</i>    | 12         |             |

Source: Survey of SEE Coordinators; Survey of Principals.

## 8.4 School participation

School participation in SEE delivery is growing. At November 2015, SEE classes were offered in 451 primary schools in NSW, which is 29% of all primary schools.<sup>21</sup>

Although SEE is being delivered in schools across the Sydney metropolitan area and in regional cities and rural areas, the availability is patchy (Figure 13). In the Sydney metropolitan area, SEE is offered in most schools on the northern beaches, the northern suburbs and the inner west of Sydney, but fewer schools in suburbs west of Homebush offer

<sup>21</sup> Amongst the schools that responded to the Survey of Principals, 30% offered SEE lessons.

it. SEE is also offered in many primary schools located in the regional cities of Wollongong and Newcastle. In other regional and rural schools, it is not consistently offered.

The main reasons for SEE not being offered in a school are either there is no demand for SEE lessons from parents, or there are insufficient trained volunteers to deliver lessons (see below). Amongst the primary principals who responded to the survey who did not offer SEE (n=432), 49% indicated that there was no demand for SEE from parents, 36% said there was no supply of volunteers (lack of trained volunteers) and 15% gave other reasons.

## 8.5 Number of SEE teachers and Ethics coordinators

In February 2015, there were 1,212 volunteer SEE teachers, commonly parents/ caregivers of students attending the school where they offer the SEE lessons. According to Primary Ethics, volunteers are also drawn from grandparents, retirees and other members of the wider community who are interested in helping children think about ethical issues. Primary Ethics is aiming to have 4,000 SEE teachers to meet anticipated demand in the coming years. There are no employed SEE teachers.

Each school has a volunteer Ethics coordinator who does not have SEE teaching responsibilities. There were 330 volunteer Ethics coordinators at February 2015.

Primary Ethics reports that it is not uncommon for a school to have some but not a sufficient number of parents interested in having their child go to SEE to form a class. Just over half of the Ethics coordinators who responded to the survey said that the lack of SEE teachers is always or often a challenge (Table 57).

**Table 57. Extent that a lack of SEE teachers is a challenge for Ethics coordinators**

| Response              | Number     | Percent     |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Always                | 36         | 25%         |
| Often                 | 41         | 28%         |
| Sometimes             | 54         | 37%         |
| Never                 | 14         | 10%         |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>145</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>Don't know</i>     | 0          |             |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | 2          |             |

Source: Survey of SEE Coordinators.

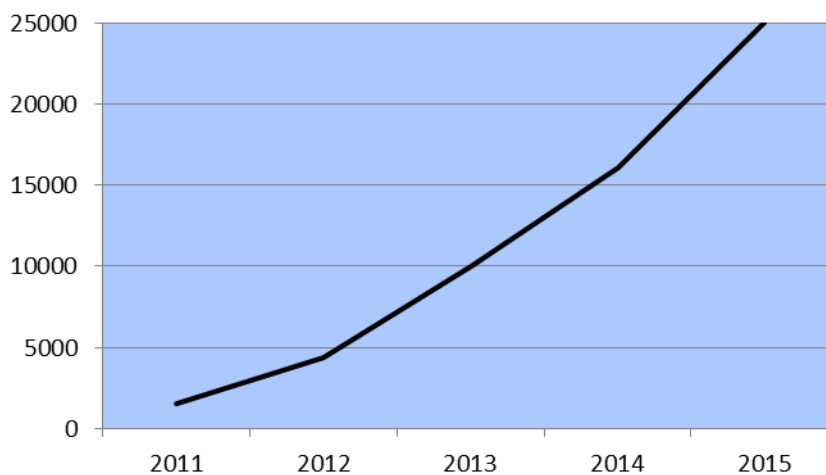
## 8.6 Student participation in SEE

Primary Ethics estimated that 25,000 students were enrolled in SEE lessons at the beginning of 2015. Participation rates more than doubled annually for the first three years SEE was available, with growth slowing over the last two years (Figure 14.). When SEE was introduced in 2011, there were 1,530 students enrolled in SEE and SEE was not offered for all infant and primary school Years. Since Term 3 2014, the curriculum has been available for all children from Kindergarten to Year 6.

The data are mixed on the question of whether and how much the introduction of SEE has impacted on enrolment in SRE. Anecdotal evidence from the case studies suggests that the introduction of SEE most often coincides with a decline in enrolments in smaller faith groups such as Baha'i. Where there is an impact on participation in SRE offered by a particular religious persuasion, the context is influential. For example, parents saying their child/ren did not relate well to a particular SRE teacher or the student demographics changing.

Students generally migrate to SEE from alternative activities to SRE lessons, when SEE is made available. Interestingly, many SEE teachers report that the main reason they got involved in teaching ethics is that their children were not enrolled in SRE and were *'doing nothing'*.

**Figure 14. Estimated student enrolments in SEE over time**



Source: Survey of Providers

## 8.7 Conclusions

SEE is experiencing a rapid growth, with increasing numbers of students and schools offering SEE for students whose parents indicate they do not wish them to participate in SRE. Demand for SEE classes amongst parents appears to vary according to location.



The evidence indicates that Primary Ethics has responded to and is managing the increase in demand. However, in some schools and areas, the main barrier to growth is Primary Ethics' inability to supply sufficient SEE teachers to meet the demand for classes in the short term.

At the school level, delivery is well coordinated, with the patterns of organisation reflecting those in place for SRE. Students appear to be mainly moving to SEE from doing alternative activities, rather than moving from SRE classes.

## 9. SEE approval and authorisation

This chapter responds to Term of Reference 2—Department of Education implementation procedures for SEE, specifically approval of providers and authorisation of teachers and curriculum. The chapter makes recommendations about what changes might be needed to approval and authorisation processes and procedures to better support the successful delivery of SEE in NSW Government schools.

The Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012) recommended:

*That the Department of Education and Communities ensure that the revised Religious Education Implementation Procedures and Special Education in Ethics implementation procedures are effectively communicated to and implemented by principals once they are finalised.*

*That the Department of Education and Communities ensure that the revised Religious Education Implementation Procedures and the Special Education in Ethics (SEE) implementation procedures include templates of letters that can be provided to schools for their use to:*

- Advise parents/carers of the various Special Religious Education (SRE) classes available for year groups each year
- Advise parents/carers of any changes in organisation and/or availability of any new SRE classes
- Offer parent/carers of non-SRE students the option to attend SEE classes (advice should be clear to principals that this letter should only be distributed to parents/carers of potential non-SRE students only after an 'opt out' decision by parents/carers has been communicated to the school)
- SRE and SEE letter templates should differ in appearance to avoid confusion for parents/carers.

*That the Department of Education and Communities ensure that the Learning Services team of the NSW Curriculum and Learning Innovation Centre be adequately staffed and resourced to enable 'in servicing' of school leadership teams with regard to providing support for the implementation of Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics.*

## 9.1 SEE implementation procedures

The 2015 *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures*<sup>22</sup> outline how SEE should be delivered and the roles and responsibilities of schools and the provider (Primary Ethics), in line with the Department's Special Education in Ethics Policy<sup>23</sup>. The Education Act 1990 has been amended to allow SEE as an option for children whose parents have withdrawn them from SRE (section 33A). The provision of SEE is not government funded. The implementation procedures also take account of Recommendations 1 to 5 of the report, *NSW Ethics Course Trial, Final Report (2010)*, and the recommendations of the Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012).

As for SRE, the principles that shape the procedures are availability, universality and resourcing. Following these principles, the implementation procedures set out what is essentially a form of self-regulation for the delivery of SEE in government schools with the exception of the SEE curriculum, which unlike SRE includes a role for the Department to review age appropriateness.

Self-regulation in public policy always involves rights and responsibilities. For SEE, the rights relate to the ability of the provider (Primary Ethics) to access schools, and determine teachers. The responsibilities are to fit within the Department's overall commitment to the education and welfare of children, and the management of schools. A closely related responsibility under self-regulation is transparency to parents, the Department, school communities and the wider public, through publication of important information and the provision of regular monitoring. These rights and responsibilities are considered in detail in the following sections.

All Department policies and procedures are expected to be well drafted, disseminated, understood and implemented by intended users, and monitored by senior managers. The following sections consider how these expectations are met by the SEE implementation procedures.

It is also critical to recognise that the implementation procedures do not stand alone—the Department and schools understand that other departmental policies apply to the provision of SEE, and the *SEE Implementation Procedures* specifically state that they should be read in conjunction with the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* to which they are related. The 2015 implementation procedures do not directly reference how they relate to

---

<sup>22</sup> Last updated 4<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/ethics/PD20130436.shtml>

other Department policies, although such a reference is given in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*.

Two aspects of the procedures are discussed in detail in this chapter, together with guidelines developed by the provider, Primary Ethics:

- the Department to approve providers
- providers to authorise and supply volunteer teachers.

### ***Resources available to support implementation and monitor compliance***

The departmental resource of one dedicated full time officer to support implementation and monitor compliance is shared with SRE (Chapter 3, 3.1.1). The Department also chairs the NSW Department of Education Consultative Committee for Special Education in Ethics. This Committee comprises—Executive Director, Learning and Teaching; Director, Early Learning and Primary Education; Special Religious Education and Ethics Officer; representatives of the NSW Primary Principals' Association, The Ethics Centre and Primary Ethics.

The Committee meets four times a year and provides advice on the Special Education in Ethics Policy and its implementation and consideration of new developments and approaches to SEE.

Primary Ethics has a mix of volunteers (Primary Ethics estimates 1,500), and seven employed staff members with management and coordination responsibilities, some of which are described below. Primary Ethics also has a centralised computerised teacher management system (Volunteer Management System) to manage recruitment and training processes, and as a repository for key documents/ templates, e.g. templates for interviews, application forms and letters. For the most part, those involved in using these systems, who participated in interviews for the case studies, said these work well.

**Table 58. Primary Ethics' roles and responsibilities**

| <b>Position</b>                                 | <b>Responsibilities</b>   |
|---|---|
| CEO   | Management and overall coordination, including providing annual written assurance to DoE.   |
| General Manager                                 | Policy development.   |
| Regional Managers<br>(Volunteers, 25 positions) | Authorisation of SEE teachers (includes review of interview notes, checking of WWCC documentation), Police Checks, advise Ethics coordinators. Expected to dedicate 10-15 hours per week. |
| Volunteering Managers                           | Authorisation of SEE teachers.  |
| Training Manager                                | Coordination of training and for SEE teachers.  |

| Position  | Responsibilities   |
|---|--|
| Ethics coordinators<br>(Volunteers, 330 across NSW) | Coordinate SEE classes at the school level, liaise with schools re SEE delivery, allocates SEE teachers to classes and students to classes, recruit new SEE teachers, interviews potential candidates. Do not teach SEE. |

Source: Survey of Providers.

### 9.1.1 Currency and appropriateness of SEE implementation procedures

The *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* (2015) emphasise the need to implement SEE in a flexible way, based on consultation and cooperation, whilst outlining responsibilities of all those involved in delivery. The current procedures closely reflect the structure and wording encompassed in the related *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015). This has produced some ambiguities, for example, 1) discussing providers in the plural when there is only one provider, and not mentioning the role of Primary Ethics coordinators in coordinating delivery with schools; 2) stating, 'It is the responsibility of an approved provider to authorise the materials and pedagogy used by special education in ethics teachers',<sup>24</sup> without mentioning the Department's role in reviewing the age appropriateness of the SEE curriculum. A further ambiguity is whether SEE can be delivered in primary schools where SRE is not offered. The implementation procedures state, 'It is offered during the time set aside for SRE to students whose parents/caregivers have withdrawn them from special religious education.' The implementation procedures further state under the section heading, 'Timing of special education in ethics' that 'If no special education providers are available, special education in ethics may still be delivered.'

The advice about informing parents about SEE given in the *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* (2015) is inconsistent with the advice given in the *Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics Fact Sheet* available on the Department's public website (both these documents are undated). Similar to SRE, the SEE implementation procedures do not directly reference or fully take account of a number of areas (Chapter 3, section 3.1). The areas relevant to SEE are other departmental policies, the differences between schools according to location, the governance of SEE and the broader role of SEE teachers as volunteers. Primary Ethics does not encourage SEE teachers to get involved in broader volunteer activities, as is the case amongst some SRE providers. However, a small number of SEE teachers who contributed to the survey on the online contribution portal indicated they were involved in volunteer roles within the school/s where they offer SEE classes; noting that most SEE teachers are also parents.

<sup>24</sup> *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* (2015), page 6.

## 9.1.2 Conclusions: overview of SEE implementation procedures

The *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* (2015) represent the Department's view about how SEE should be delivered in schools, and identify certain boundaries of practice and behaviour, within the underlying principles of the Special Education in Ethics Policy and the *Education Act* (1990). These implementation procedures should be reviewed in parallel with any review of the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*, given the two sets of guidelines are interrelated. As part of the revision, more focus is needed on the specifics of SEE delivery rather than on common areas to SRE, for example, acknowledging there is one provider and referencing the specific coordination and management structures that Primary Ethics has in place to support SEE. Dating key documents and any updated advice on procedures (fact sheets) would assist principals, Primary Ethics and parents/caregivers to understand and comply with the procedures.

## 9.2 Approval of SEE providers

This section discusses the implementation of processes to approve SEE providers, which is the responsibility of the Department of Education.

### 9.2.1 What is required or intended

According to the Department's 2015 *Implementation Procedures for Special Education in Ethics*:

#### **Approval to deliver special education in ethics**

*Providers must have the approval of the Minister for Education to deliver special education in ethics.*

*Providers wishing to obtain approval should contact the executive officer of the NSW Department of Education and Communities Consultative Committee on Special Education in Ethics at [seecontact@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:seecontact@det.nsw.edu.au).*

The Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012) recommended:

*That the Department of Education and Communities establish an open and transparent expression of interest process to allow other organisations to apply to deliver Special Education in Ethics in NSW government primary schools before 2014.*

The report noted that this recommendation arose because:

*A concern for some inquiry participants was whether Primary Ethics' position as the only provider of SEE was monopolistic and therefore unfair. Building on this concern, some*

*participants suggested that the provision of SEE should be put out to an open tender managed by the NSW Government.*

*We understand that Primary Ethics' position as the sole provider of SEE can be attributed to the context in which ethics classes were introduced into NSW government schools. Firstly, the approach to DEC to teach ethics as an alternative to non-SRE was made by the SJEC and not any other organisation. Secondly, that government tendering guidelines have applied to the purchase of services by the Government, not necessarily to the voluntary provision of services.*

*We were pleased to note Primary Ethics' willingness to see other organisations apply to DEC to provide SEE. The Committee also noted the advice of DEC that other organisations will be able to apply to provide ethics classes in the future and that this process is under development.*

## 9.2.2 What occurs in practice

Only one provider (the original provider approved by the Department) has approval to deliver SEE in NSW primary schools—Primary Ethics. The St James Ethics Centre (now The Ethics Centre) was chosen as the first approved provider of classes in philosophical ethics. To achieve this, the Centre founded Primary Ethics Limited, an independent public company limited by guarantee, a not-for-profit organisation incorporated on November 4 2010. The provider is responsible for all aspects of course delivery, including providing trained volunteers and resources. Primary Ethics relies entirely on donations from supporters and sponsors and the time of volunteers to fund the provision of SEE.

According to the Department<sup>25</sup>:

*Other interested parties may apply to become approved providers of SEE. Currently there is no formal process for SEE and there is not currently a SEE application form. To date, there have been no other application enquiries to become an approved provider of SEE. If an application is received, a process similar to the SRE process would be established.*

## 9.2.3 Conclusions

Although it is possible to approach the Department to become a provider of SEE, the Department is yet to establish an 'open and transparent expression of interest process' for other groups wishing to become an SEE provider, as recommended in the Legislative Council

---

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication, Special Religious Education and Ethics Officer. Early Learning & Primary Education, 16 November 2015.

General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012).

The Department has indicated that an application process will be established should they receive any enquiries. It is difficult to establish if the lack of enquiries about becoming an SEE provider is related to how information about approval is given by the Department on their website, or whether other reasons prevail. The Review received no submissions about the lack of open and transparent approval processes for becoming an SEE provider, which implies that there is little interest from other groups four years on from the inquiry into the *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011*. Since that time, SEE delivery has increased substantially, as have Primary Ethics support and management structures to support the delivery.

### 9.3 Authorisation of teachers

This section discusses the process for authorisation of SEE teachers, which is the responsibility of the provider, Primary Ethics. The effectiveness of training in preparing and supporting SEE teachers to instruct students in SEE is considered in chapter 12.

#### 9.3.1 What is required or intended

##### ***Department***

The responsibilities of providers for the supply of authorised teachers, and the detailed requirements, are set out in the 2015 *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures*, specifically to:

- *provide sufficient SEE teachers*
- *recruit, train and authorise teachers of special education in ethics.*
- *ensure that the school is informed of the names and contact details of its local representatives and authorised teachers.*
- *ensure that all special education in ethics teachers are provided with a name badge to be worn at all times when on a school site.*
- *inform the principal when there are insufficient authorised teachers available.*

##### **Authorisation to teach special education in ethics**

*The authorisation of personnel to teach special education in ethics is the sole responsibility of each individual approved provider.*

*An approved provider is not to authorise any person as a special education in ethics teacher who has not signed a prohibited employment declaration or who has a criminal conviction for one of the following:*



- *a crime against a minor*
- *violence*
- *sexual assault*
- *the provision of prohibited drugs.*

*Paid employees of approved providers must undergo a Working With Children Check. Volunteers providing special education in ethics in NSW public schools must complete a declaration that they are not a person prohibited from undertaking child-related employment. This includes anyone under the age of 18 who may volunteer to teach special education in ethics.*

*Every approved provider must provide annually to the Department, a written assurance that they have procedures in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998.*

The requirements related to volunteers involved in child-related employment for SEE teachers and SRE teachers differ. The Department's advice is that

*The Office of the Children's Guardian set the phase-in schedule for the new Working With Children Check system. Religious services had a phase-in date of 31 March 2015. Advice from the Office of the Children's Guardian was that Primary Ethics is listed under 'Educational – Other', which has a phase-in date of 31 March 2018.*

### **Primary Ethics authorisation process**

Primary Ethics lists 12 requirements for becoming an authorised SEE teacher (Box 9.1) below. Teachers must first pass an interview process, complete two days of face-to-face training, as well as undertake an online introductory course. They also have to complete an online child protection module that takes 30 minutes. The case studies indicate that some SEE teachers are already seeking Working With Children Checks, which indicates that SEE is transitioning into the new *Working With Children Check* system.

Regional Managers are responsible for authorising SEE teachers, but Ethics coordinators usually complete and document the initial screening interview. Where the person is a relative, the interview must be done by an impartial person.

### Box 9.1: POSITION DESCRIPTION: VOLUNTEER ETHICS TEACHER

Interested persons must:

1. Satisfy the following essential selection criteria: be comfortable working with and able to engage with children; have an interest in helping young people to think about ethics, using our curriculum; have an open-minded, inquiring outlook; have excellent communication skills: both effective listening skills and fluency in English.
2. Have time to volunteer for this role.
3. Have daily access to broadband internet and email and be comfortable in an online learning environment.
4. Complete our online police check at his/her own cost (\$20). A volunteer must not have a criminal conviction for: a crime against a minor; or violence; or sexual assault; or the provision of prohibited drugs.
5. Complete a Working with Children declaration.
6. Successfully complete our online modules, including an introductory course and annual ongoing training on a range of topics including classroom management and child protection.
7. Successfully complete a preliminary two-day face-to-face training course conducted by Primary Ethics.
8. Diligently participate in any other training and support activities provided by Primary Ethics.
9. Diligently teach the approved course in philosophical ethics, using the materials and following the processes given by Primary Ethics.
10. Cooperate with the school Principal and staff.
11. Consistently and punctually attend classes for which he/she is responsible.
12. At all times, follow our guidelines, procedures and policies.

Interested persons might also satisfy one or more of the following desirable criteria: An interest in life-long learning, as demonstrated by tertiary study, or other formal or informal education; Group facilitation experience; Classroom experience; Previous work with young people. While these criteria are desirable, they are by no means mandatory. The most important criteria is that you have a rapport with young people and the capacity to engage with them using the varied topics of our curriculum.

The Ethics Coordinator appointed by Primary Ethics to manage ethics education in a particular school is responsible for recruiting the best possible teachers from among those who apply. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified promptly and the decision justified clearly against our objective criteria.

To avoid any conflict of interest and to ensure we have a rigorous recruitment process to get the best people into the right positions, the recruitment of related or closely-associated persons is subject to specific conditions. These are outlined in our Recruitment Procedure for Related and Associated Persons.

Source: <http://www.primaryethics.com.au/ethicsteacher.html>. Note not all text repeated.

### 9.3.2 What occurs in practice

The evidence indicates that Primary Ethics is authorising SEE teachers as required. Ninety-eight percent of the 414<sup>26</sup> SEE teachers who completed a survey for the Review said they had been formally authorised by their provider organisation to teach SEE, two respondents indicated they had not been authorised and a further 29 respondents either did not know or did not answer the question. It is unclear how the small number of SEE teachers who responded to the survey and indicated they were not authorised or did not know if they were, could slip through the system, especially as the Ethics coordinator has a key role in screening applicants. Most SEE teachers who responded to the survey had completed the required training, which is a pre-requisite to becoming authorised—98% had completed child protection training and 97% had attended training in curriculum materials and in methods for teaching these.

All the SEE teachers who were interviewed for the case studies were able to describe their experiences of the authorisation process and were aware that they had to complete the requisite training and checks before commencing teaching SEE. These matched with the Primary Ethics processes outlined in the *Position Description: Volunteer Ethics Teacher* (Box 9.1). Ethics coordinators and Regional Managers were clearly applying the selection criteria, using the interview templates and documenting interview notes and other requirements on the Volunteer Management System. Both Ethics coordinators and Regional Managers we talked to commented about the lack of formal training for their roles, and Ethics coordinators also commented about the lack of any formal arrangements for networking with others in their role. One Ethics coordinator noted that a training course for Ethics coordinators was offered in 2015 but was unable to attend. The roles of the Ethics coordinators and Regional Managers rely strongly on the information made available on the Primary Ethics website, the Volunteer Management System, and on handovers.

Primary Ethics focuses on the person's motivation for becoming an SEE teacher as a way of weeding out those whose motivations are not compatible with the objectives of SEE.

*We don't want people who are going to be pushing anti-religious views; we want people who can commit for longer than a year; we want people's motivation to be more than what they can get out of it, e.g. students looking for opportunities to learn about school and teach in a classroom but their timetables change and naturally their studies are a*

---

<sup>26</sup> Source: Survey of SEE Teachers, n=414. There were a total of 1,212 active SEE teachers in February 2015; and just over one-third (34%) completed a survey.

*priority for them and I think sometimes they stand to gain more than they can give - some of them have made good volunteers though.* —Regional Manager

All the Ethics coordinators the Reviewers interviewed indicated they had rejected one or more applicants, usually because they felt the person was not able to commit for sufficient time (ideally a minimum of two years). However, one Regional Manager said that because of recruitment pressures she felt that one Ethics coordinator had recommended a few persons that she considered were not suitable. In these cases, as a result of her review of the interview notes these applicants were not authorised. This indicates that the checks and balances in place are working.

### 9.3.3 Conclusions

Primary Ethics has a comprehensive and robust process in place to authorise suitable persons to teach SEE, which is supported by a centralised IT management system that appears to be being used as intended. The process includes interviews of individuals and other checks and balances, which appear to work well in practice. Complaints about SEE teachers' attitudes or teaching inappropriate content are rare. The Review found no reason to suggest changes to the current authorisation processes. However, it is apparent that some Ethics coordinators would like more opportunities to attend training about their role in authorisation and recruitment, and Primary Ethics should consider doing so.

The authorisation process is transparent to those who may be considering volunteering to teach SEE, being clearly outlined on the website. This is good practice as it allows the school community to understand and have confidence in the authorisation process.

## 9.4 Authorisation of the SEE curriculum

This section examines the processes for authorisation of the SEE curriculum; the quality of the curriculum used is explored in chapter 10.

### 9.4.1 What is required or intended

#### ***Department***

The *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures*(2015) (p.6) state:

#### ***Lesson content***

*It is the responsibility of an approved provider to:*

- authorise the materials and pedagogy used by special education in ethics teachers

- provide an annual assurance to the NSW Department of Education and Communities that authorised teachers are only using materials and pedagogy authorised by the provider
- make lesson content or at least provide a program outline and curriculum scope and sequence documents accessible on a website
- provide information about the content of lessons when requested by parents/ caregivers/ principals.

The Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012) recommended:

*That the Department of Education and Communities continue to review the age appropriateness of the Special Education in Ethics curriculum and teaching materials.* (Recommendation 3.54)

*That the Department of Education and Communities, in the revised Religious Education Implementation Procedures and the new Special Education in Ethics procedures, require all providers to post their curriculum outlines and curriculum scope and sequence documents online, and that all relevant curriculum information be presented in the order in which it is taught.* (Recommendation 4)

## **Primary Ethics**

The curriculum used by Primary Ethics is owned and copyrighted by Primary Ethics Limited. The Primary Ethics Curriculum Subcommittee assesses and authorises the philosophical rigour and pedagogy of the curriculum.

### **9.4.2 What occurs in practice**

#### **Use of authorised curriculum**

Primary Ethics directs SEE teachers to follow the curriculum and to only use approved materials that are made available; 97% of SEE teachers who contributed to the survey indicated they were given curriculum materials. Primary Ethics provides online lesson plans and a message board/ online forum where SEE teachers can go for help for when preparing a lesson.

The case study and survey of SEE teachers provides strong evidence that SEE teachers are using approved materials and not sourcing additional material, and that they follow the curriculum closely.

*Primary Ethics is very particular about not adding or taking away anything from the curriculum material.* —SEE teacher

*Not made any changes, too scared of getting busted. Primary Ethics is very insistent we make no changes to the curriculum. —SEE teacher*

SEE teachers are not just motivated by Primary Ethics' messages about following the curriculum; they follow it closely because they see the content as age appropriate and well-researched (case study feedback). SEE teachers said they find the lesson topics interesting, engaging and relevant for students and the lesson plans well set out and easy to follow and deliver. The resource materials provided were seen as valuable by many, and variously described as straightforward, practical and easy to use.

*The curriculum is very clear and set at an age appropriate level with a lot of detailed information for the ethics teachers to be able to deliver it accurately. The training received by ethics teachers is practical and detailed and equips you very well for the role.—SEE teacher*

*The curriculum is generally very practical and provides sufficient guidance towards clearly articulated learning outcomes. —SEE teacher*

*I find the syllabus and material supplied to be of a pretty high standard. This makes delivery straightforward, even for someone like me, with no prior experience of teaching children. —SEE teacher*

SEE teachers who were part of the case studies occasionally truncated lessons to complete them in less time than recommended. Others found it difficult to complete the lessons in the time allocated and did not always get through the whole curriculum over the year. Primary Ethics covers these scenarios in training, saying the pace should be set by the children. A few SEE teachers remarked that the curriculum is somewhat repetitive (something also mentioned by some of the parents who made submissions to the Review), and one very experienced SEE teacher talked about tailoring what they teach for their class, skipping topics which the class has covered in previous years.

*Our kids are very savvy and quick to answer so we move onto the next topic. —SEE teacher*

*Some kids have done Ethics for a while and done topics before. I did a survey of my Ethics class and (as a result) decided not to focus on the topics already done. —SEE teacher*

### ***Developing the curriculum and reviewing it for age appropriateness***

The Department retains a role in reviewing the SEE curriculum. 'The review of the curriculum essentially centres on age appropriateness. However, additional feedback is offered to ensure the curriculum aligns with departmental policies.' (Department advice) The Department offered to assist Primary Ethics when the original SEE curriculum was being developed and then in response to Upper House review, confirmed to Minister that the Department would

continue to review age appropriateness and provide general feedback on new materials and anything updated. In 2015, eight topics were reviewed.

According to Primary Ethics, the curriculum undergoes an annual internal review/ revision process. The Department's involvement in ongoing reviews of the curriculum occurs '*...when it is submitted for review by [the] CEO, Primary Ethics. Primary Ethics review requests involve reviews of sections of the Primary Ethics curriculum. In 2015, the Department has received and reviewed nine topics.*' (Department advice)

SEE teachers in the case study schools remarked that the revisions of the curriculum had improved the content over the years.

### **Communicating the curriculum to parents and schools**

The SEE curriculum scope and sequence is publicly available, on the Primary Ethics website.

### **Assurance of authorised materials and pedagogy**

The *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* require providers to provide annual assurance to the Department that teachers are only using materials and pedagogy authorised by the provider. Primary Ethics has fulfilled this requirement.

## **9.4.3 Conclusions**

The authorisation process for the SEE curriculum is working smoothly and has produced a high quality curriculum (as demonstrated in chapter 10). Primary Ethics is fulfilling their obligation to be transparent by making their curriculum scope and sequence available online.

The curriculum authorisation process—which involves education and subject experts—appears to be effective in that it has produced a high quality curriculum. The curriculum outline provides sufficient detail for the general reader to gain an understanding of what is to be taught and the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. The scope gives an overview of what is to be taught and the sequence outlines the order in which it is to be taught, by Stage of learning and school term.

The authorisation of the SEE curriculum is only partly self-regulated, with Primary Ethics developing the curriculum and authorising the materials and pedagogy. The Department continues to review the age appropriateness of curriculum materials and checks on their alignment with Departmental policies. The feedback from Primary Ethics suggests that the organisation values the Department's role in reviewing age appropriateness of the curriculum teaching materials/ topics.

## 10. SEE implementation processes: complaints and challenges

This chapter looks at implementation processes for SEE in schools, specifically, complaint procedures and challenges for implementation. It responds to and makes conclusion about Term of Reference 3—Development of complaints procedures and protocols.

### 10.1 Development of complaints procedures and protocols

The Terms of Reference for the Review provide for the effectiveness of current complaints procedures and protocols to be examined for SEE and for these to be strengthened should this be proven necessary.

#### 10.1.1 What is required or intended

Principals, and Directors, Public Schools NSW and corporate officers follow the Department's *Complaints Handling Policy* and associated *Complaints Handling Guidelines* when a complaint about the implementation of SEE is made to them. The objective of this policy is that difficulties, grievances and complaints are resolved in a prompt, impartial and just manner. For less serious complaints, informal resolution is encouraged.

The 2015 *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* give the following advice about handling complaints:

*Principals who have received complaints concerning alleged teaching inefficiency or inappropriate lesson content take appropriate steps and should notify the representative of the approved provider that authorised the teacher.*

*If a principal receives allegations of improper behaviour or other complaints of a serious nature it is managed in accordance with the Department's policies and procedures. The principal must refer allegations of a child protection nature to the Department's Employee Performance and Conduct Directorate.*

Primary Ethics has its own complaints process in place. Any complaints concerning SEE teachers are directed to Ethics coordinators at the schools. If they cannot be resolved, there is an escalation process through Ethics coordinators to Volunteering Managers and in turn to Primary Ethics Management.



## 10.1.2 What occurs in practice

### *The extent and nature of complaints*

According to the schools who participated in the case studies, it is rare for serious issues to be raised about the delivery of SEE. Amongst the schools that offered SEE, 44% had received a complaint about SEE in the last two years; while across all schools who responded to the principal survey, 27% had received a complaint (Table 59). Amongst all parents who contributed to the Review, four percent had made a complaint about SEE. Where a parent had a child enrolled in SEE, five percent had made a complaint.

**Table 59. Complaints in relation to SEE - received by schools, and made by parents**

| Type of respondent                 | Complaint |         | No complaint |         | Total |         | No data |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|-------|---------|---------|
|                                    | N         | Percent | N            | Percent | N     | Percent |         |
| All principals                     | 139       | 27%     | 377          | 73%     | 516   | 100%    | 483     |
| Principals, SEE offered*           | 76        | 44%     | 94           | 56%     | 168   | 100%    | 23      |
| All parents**                      | 189       | 4%      | 4,208        | 96%     | 4,397 | 100%    | 1,044   |
| Parents with children in SEE<br>** | 58        | 5%      | 1,110        | 95%     | 1,168 | 100%    | 216     |

Sources: Survey of Principals, and Parent/ Caregiver online contribution portal.

\*Received a complaint in the last two years. \*\* Ever made a complaint.

The most common complaints (reported by both parents and schools) were about access to SEE lessons (Table 62):

- The lack of availability of SEE lessons— 46% of schools that offer SEE; a third of the 189 parents who indicated to the Review who had made a complaint (see chapter 8 for prevalence and section 10.3 for a detailed discussion of this issue).
- Enrolment for SEE—29% of schools that offer SEE, one in five of the 189 parents who had made a complaint.

Other less common complaints were about the content of SEE lessons and a lack of information about SEE lesson availability and enrolling in SEE lessons. Around one-third of Ethics coordinators (34%), and 16% of principals indicated that information about SEE was always or often a concern. Regarding the perceived lack of information about SEE, some principals stated it was unclear about what and when information for parents about SEE can be provided. Principals said that they therefore give out limited if any information about SEE through the normal channels that schools use to communicate with parents/ caregivers, e.g. websites or at enrolment or in school newsletters. This confusion appears to relate to

changes to the SRE/ SEE enrolment forms in 2014 and 2015, and the somewhat contradictory advice given in the SEE implementation procedures and the *Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics Fact Sheet* available on the Department's public website. The latter more clearly distinguishes between giving parents/ caregivers' general information about how SRE and SEE will be organised each year and which organisers will deliver it, from specific advice for parents/ caregivers who notify the school in writing that they wish to withdraw their child from SRE. An example of how such confusion can affect parents is a story told by a parent in their Review submission. Their school produced information material about SEE for parents, only to withdraw the information reportedly because of a complaint from an SRE provider. The parent was angered about the withdrawal of this information. Ethics coordinators told of differing experiences of schools approaches when communicating with parents about SEE. Some schools did and others did not. SEE teachers in the case studies had differing perceptions about the kinds of information about SEE schools are allowed to provide parents and whether they can or cannot put information in school newsletters. One Regional Manager indicated that Primary Ethics makes clear to their volunteers that all information to parents about SEE must go through school channels and they cannot communicate directly to parents, e.g. by sending notes home. However, this informant also indicated that:

*There have been instances where schools haven't supported sending out a message or notification and when looking at the Implementation Procedures we felt they should have supported it. —Regional Manager*

Classroom teachers and parents/ caregivers were the most common sources of complaints made to schools that offer SEE, accounting for almost half the complaints (Table 60). A low proportion of surveyed schools who had received complaints about SEE were from SRE or SEE teachers (11%) or the provider Primary Ethics (2%). Most SEE teachers who responded to the survey indicated they know who to approach at the school if they are unhappy about the school's support for the delivery of SEE (78% agree and 16% mostly agree). Some highlighted the role of the Ethics coordinators in helping resolve any issues that arise. These results reflect the high proportion of principals (97%) who indicated that relationships with Ethics coordinators are always (68%) or often good (29%).

**Table 60. Source of complaints to schools that offered SEE in 2015**

| Schools that received complaints | N  | Percent |
|----------------------------------|----|---------|
| From teachers at the school      | 48 | 29%     |
| From parents/ caregivers         | 33 | 20%     |
| From SRE or SEE teachers         | 19 | 11%     |
| From students                    | 16 | 10%     |
| From providers                   | 3  | 2%      |

Source: Survey of Principals, n=168. Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%.

**Table 61. Main reasons for complaints to schools that offered SEE in 2015**

| N=65   | N  | Percent |
|--|----|---------|
| The alternative activities for students not attending SRE or SEE | 32 | 49%     |
| Lack of SEE lessons  | 30 | 46%     |
| Opt-out process for SRE  | 19 | 29%     |
| Content of SEE lessons   | 7  | 11%     |
| Child safety concerns  | 5  | 8%      |
| Technology issues  | 2  | 3%      |
| Lack of information about SEE                                    | 2  | 3%      |
| Effect on child of SEE   | 0  | 0%      |
| Other  | 5  | 8%      |

Source: Survey of Principals. Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%. Some complaints may refer to SRE.

**Table 62. Most common complaints by parents in relation to SEE in 2015**

| Complaints about              | N  | Percent |
|-------------------------------|----|---------|
| Lack of availability of SEE   | 64 | 34%     |
| Lack of information about SEE | 57 | 30%     |
| Content of SEE lessons        | 49 | 26%     |
| Quality of teaching for SEE   | 50 | 26%     |
| Enrolment processes for SEE   | 39 | 21%     |
| Child safety concerns         | 10 | 5%      |
| Class sizes for SEE           | 9  | 5%      |
| Other                         | 43 | 23%     |

Source: Parent/ Caregiver online contribution portal. All parents who had made a complaint n=189 (four percent of respondents). Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%.

### ***How complaints are dealt with***

In practice, complaints are being dealt with in a similar manner as those about SRE and according to the departmental guidelines (Chapter 4).

The current complaints handling procedures allow complaints to be made about SEE, and where these are related to logistical and behavioral issues, for these to be resolved satisfactorily and swiftly. Complaints procedures when followed are generally seen as effective by principals, Ethics coordinators, and SEE teachers.

**Principals** and their peak groups perceive the complaints procedures as working well, including most principals (86%) who responded to the survey. A small number (n=32) say that procedures could be improved with clearer guidelines. Similarly, 86% of surveyed Ethics coordinators said the complaints procedures work well; and 14% that Department processes need improvement.

**SEE teachers** indicated they are well informed about how to make a complaint about the school's support for delivering SEE; 78% agree and 16% mostly agree with this statement. Many who commented found their school/s to be generally supportive of their role and so have never had to make a complaint. Others described a positive experience using the complaints process, saying schools were approachable when an issue was raised and the issue was resolved quickly and informally. Ethics coordinators assigned to schools were described as helpful in resolving issues. One example of how a complaint about a behavior issue was dealt with in practice relates to a disruptive student.

*I told the Ethics coordinator about a behaviour issue, he told the principal and she responded immediately - so my class is now in the staffroom so I have teacher support— SEE teacher.*

However, a minority of SEE teachers who responded to the survey and commented on complaints processes, felt that their complaints (focused on the availability of classrooms or the timetabling of lessons) had not been resolved satisfactorily. Amongst this group of SEE teachers, there was a strong perception that SEE has less support from the school than SRE, or that SRE is given preference when decisions are made about classroom allocation and timetabling. A small number of SEE teachers stated that their complaints were ignored due to a perceived indifference or lack of support for ethics amongst school staff. SEE teachers in all case study schools said their principals were supportive and endeavored to resolve these kinds of issues through negotiation with all providers.

**Parents.** Amongst the 58 parents who had a child in SEE and made a complaint about SEE just over half indicated they were dissatisfied with how their complaint was dealt with by the school (Table 63). These parents most commonly indicated they were frustrated about a lack of information and lack of SEE classes.

Some perceived that the schools were not acting on their concerns or complaints. Parents talked about receiving vague supportive replies from principals and promises, but seeing no action. At schools where SEE is offered, classes may not be available for children of a particular age, or a place available in an existing class. For example, one parent had been on a waiting list for SEE for four years.

*I complained to the deputy principal. My complaint was acknowledged, and forwarded to the staff Ethics coordinator and the external Primary Ethics administrator. The external guy replied but without any ideas about how to address my concerns. The staff coordinator never responded at all. —Parent*

*Have previously asked principal about information on content for SEE and none was provided. Does not seem to be as well integrated or actively supported by school - nothing in newsletter. —Parent*

*For a start there doesn't seem to even be a procedure!!! The rules appear to change every year, we have NEVER been given any information from the school about what the options are or what our children are doing when not enrolled for scripture. We have no idea who to talk to about it, and any attempt to raise the subject just results in a really vague 'oh yes we are looking into getting some kind of ethics class set up' kind of non-committal response. We have been getting that response for four years now and it seems there was one attempt for less than a year to run an ethics class and now the kids are back to supervised free time - this is what we have found out from talking to our kids not from the school. The school has told us nothing. They have done the minimum obligatory step in providing access to this survey and even that required a bunch of investigation from us*

*since the link provided in the newsletter didn't work and this site is the last place anyone would think they need to look to find this survey. —Parent*

*I just keep being told ethics classes will happen but that the school, which is largely supportive of SEE, is meeting the requirements of the Department in not informing the broader school community. There also seems to be no sense of urgency about making classes available despite trained teachers being ready to go. However when a complaint was made by those involved in SRE that the opportunity for ethics classes was not to be broadcast to any student enrolled in SRE classes the note home was immediately retracted. I don't feel like anyone in the school community is pushing hard enough for the ethics classes to get started despite it being a positive development for students. —Parent*

Issues of supply of SEE teachers are largely outside the control of principals and it appears that parents may not understand that the principal has limited ability to address their complaints in this area. Principals can let Ethics coordinators know about demand for classes at the start of the year, when SEE is already offered in the school, but,

*Where a parent/caregiver requests special education in ethics and it is not currently available in the school, the school will provide the parent/caregiver with the names and contact details of approved providers of special education in ethics. It is the responsibility of the parent/caregiver to follow up with a provider. —Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures (2015).*

**Table 63. Parent satisfaction with complaints in relation to SEE**

|                       | All        |             | Parents with child in SEE |             |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|
|                       | N          | Percent     | N                         | Percent     |
| Satisfied             | 19         | 10%         | 14                        | 24%         |
| Mostly satisfied      | 22         | 12%         | 11                        | 19%         |
| Mostly dissatisfied   | 49         | 26%         | 11                        | 19%         |
| Dissatisfied          | 99         | 52%         | 22                        | 38%         |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>189</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>58</b>                 | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>Don't know</i>     | 53         |             | 13                        |             |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | 4,155      |             | 1,097                     |             |
| <i>No data</i>        | 1,044      |             | 216                       |             |

Source: Parent/ Caregiver online contribution portal.

In any case, it is up to Primary Ethics to respond to that demand. According to Primary Ethics, where there are too many students for a class and no additional SEE teachers available, children whose parents are SEE teachers are given priority, followed by children currently doing alternative activities and then those in SRE. The most common response is to inform the school and parent about progress in recruiting, but also by increasing class sizes to slightly above the cap as an interim short term measure.

## 10.2 Perceived benefits of SEE

Although not one of the Terms of Reference for the Review, the Reviewers have briefly captured the benefits of SEE as perceived by many of those who made a contribution to the Review. The Reviewers have not repeated the arguments documented in the Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012), about whether or not SEE should or should not be offered in schools, although these were canvassed by some contributors to this Review.

- **Benefits for volunteers.** SEE volunteers commonly talked about benefits such as:
  - getting a lot of personal satisfaction and enjoyment from teaching SEE classes, from seeing how the children engage in and relate to the content and from hearing children express their views
  - obtaining new knowledge and skills
  - increasing their sense of connection with the school community and getting to know the school teachers and other students better.
- **Benefits for students.** Principals, parents and SEE teachers commonly talked about benefits for children such as:
  - being engaged in a meaningful activity rather than alternative activities to SRE that may have minimal educational value
  - learning how to form and voice their own opinions on often complex ethical issues; gaining skills of reasoning and logic; problem solving and critical thinking
  - learning to consider and respect the opinions of others
  - being given the opportunity to engage in sustained and reasoned debates and discussions.

## 10.3 Main challenges for delivering SEE classes

Schools and Primary Ethics face a range of challenges in delivering SEE lessons, which both groups largely manage well. However, as demand for SEE increases, some of these issues could be expected to become increasingly challenging, particularly schools' abilities to allocate sufficient classroom space for SEE lessons. For Primary Ethics, the challenge is in meeting the demand for SEE teachers.

- **Primary Ethics: Supply of SEE teachers and other volunteer positions.** Although Primary Ethics actively recruits SEE teachers, for example, through word of mouth and

advertisements in school newsletters, at universities and on volunteer recruitment websites), and has been successful in doing so, the demand for SEE classes currently outstrips the supply of teachers. Just over one-third of all principals who responded indicated that they do not offer SEE because there is no supply of SEE teachers. Amongst those whose schools offer SEE, 28% indicated that they are always concerned that there are insufficient teachers to meet demand, and 24% they are often concerned. A further 33% were sometimes concerned. Where there are insufficient SEE teachers available, this can make it difficult to manage parental expectations regarding their children's participation in SEE, and on occasion enrolment processes and scheduling of classes. For example, where a SEE teacher was expected to be available and for some reason is no longer available and there are no ready replacements, then children need to be reallocated to alternate activities and supervision provided.

- **Primary Ethics: Managing turnover of volunteer coordinator and management positions.** Like many organisations that rely on volunteers, Primary Ethics needs to manage the regular turnover of volunteers from all positions that volunteers occupy. The evidence from the case studies suggests that more structured processes may be needed to do so. Informants indicated that handover for Regional Manager and Ethics coordinator positions may or may not occur, and where there is no turnover this is problematic in the short term for the new incumbent, especially as there are no position descriptions for these roles and networking opportunities are limited.
- **Schools: SEE teachers not showing up** to conduct their scheduled classes with prior notice. Although Ethics coordinators help manage such instances and find replacements where possible, schools still have occasions where an SEE teacher does not show and must manage the situation when this occurs. Some principals see the allocation of classroom teachers to SEE classes as a way of managing the Work, Health and Safety implications and ensuring that classes are supervised in these situations.
- **Schools: Classroom space and allocation.** Schools' capacity to accommodate SEE classes varies, and some schools with moderate to high uptake of SEE report they are very stretched for enough space. For example, a small number of principals who responded to the survey indicated that SEE lessons for specific Year groups/ Stages cannot be offered because of lack of classroom space. SEE teachers also talked about classroom space as being a challenge in some circumstances. Some talked about the classroom space allocated as being inadequate because the space is too small (the lessons include many interactive activities that need a minimum amount of space), or has no technology tools available (where the space is not generally used as a classroom). One example was given of SEE classes being held in the playground. Having enough rooms is a genuine challenge for schools, especially where there are also a number of SRE providers needing classroom space at the same time as a number of small SEE classes needing their own space. Primary Ethics sets a cap on class numbers and rarely combines students from multiple Stages. As such, more classroom space is needed for the same number of students in SEE lessons than would have been the case should they be in alternative activities.
- **Schools: Negotiating scheduling of SEE** and reconciling SEE teacher and SRE teacher interests and preferences. Just under half of the schools offering SEE nominated administration and timetabling for SEE as always or often a concern (43%), and a further



29% say it is sometimes a concern. The data indicate that although this is a concern for schools, principals are handling the negotiations well; just 20% of Ethics coordinators nominated administration and timetabling for SEE as always or often a concern, and 99% agree or mostly agree they have a good working relationship with the school where they work. The Ethics coordinator works with the SEE teachers to allocate them to classes, establishes their availability and informs the school about these. Ethics coordinators face a challenge in reconciling the Year group that SEE teachers prefer to teach (often the same as their child) and the demand for SEE classes, along with their availability given their other commitments. In schools with well-established Ethics providers and not much change in SRE choices, there tends to be a historical precedent that sets the day/ time of SRE and hence, SEE. This approach is generally accepted by Ethics coordinators as reasonable and understandable. However, some SEE teachers expressed frustrations that the school is unable to be more flexible or accommodating of their needs and perceived this is because SEE is given lesser status than SRE. Some principals say they will negotiate new times where SEE numbers outstrip SRE enrolments and the established time is difficult to accommodate. As for SRE, many SEE teachers prefer a morning time slot, which schools regard as prime learning time and would prefer to keep for regular classes. Some Ethics coordinators would like more notice about scheduling of extra-curricular events that clash with SEE lessons.

- **Primary Ethics and Schools: Classroom behaviour management.** Classroom behaviour is an issue where non-professional persons (SEE teachers) are expected to control classrooms after a small amount of training and with minimal experience in managing groups of children. Poorly controlled classes can translate into lesser engagement of students in SEE lessons. For SEE, almost half of the principals (48%) indicated that classroom behaviour is sometimes a concern, and 28% said it was never a concern. Perhaps this is because around half of SEE teachers have a classroom teacher always sit in their SEE class to help manage behaviour, and less than 20% never have one. Sixty-four percent of Ethics coordinators said classroom behaviour was sometimes a concern, and 77% of SEE teachers said classroom behaviour is the main challenge they face in delivering SEE lessons (which is a similar proportion to SRE teachers). The perspective of SEE teachers is that they appreciate having classroom teachers in the class because the students are generally better behaved and it means that they can better manage the flow of the discussion better. SEE teachers also commented that the higher the numbers of students in their class, the more difficult it is to manage classroom behaviour. Although Primary Ethics sets a cap of 22 students per SEE class, SEE teachers indicated in the case study interviews that ideally class sizes would be smaller, between 12 and 18 students.
- **Other challenges.** SEE teachers raised a few additional challenges in the survey feedback and in case studies (not captured elsewhere in the report). Given these were raised in open feedback it is unclear how widely these are shared.
  - Affording the costs associated with volunteering as an SEE teacher; travel costs and photocopying. Noting that just five percent of SEE teachers indicated that limited assistance from Primary Ethics was one of the main challenges they face.
  - Dealing with negativity from some of the religious based community to SEE. On the evidence of the case studies this appears to have lessened over time at the school

level, even though sensitivities were heightened with the changes to the school enrolment form in 2014 and 2015.

- Being part of the school and yet not part of the school, a challenge shared by SRE teachers.

**Table 64. How often Ethics coordinators and primary principals are concerned about administration/ timetabling, behaviour issues and large class sizes**

| Response category                 | Administration & timetabling |                    | Behaviour issues            |                    | Large class sizes           |                    |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
|                                   | Ethics coordinators (n=146)  | Principals (n=161) | Ethics coordinators (n=139) | Principals (n=156) | Ethics coordinators (n=142) | Principals (n=157) |
| Always                            | 4%                           | 22%                | 4%                          | 9%                 | 13%                         | 9%                 |
| Often                             | 16%                          | 21%                | 17%                         | 10%                | 24%                         | 11%                |
| Sometimes                         | 45%                          | 29%                | 64%                         | 48%                | 39%                         | 27%                |
| Never                             | 35%                          | 28%                | 15%                         | 33%                | 24%                         | 53%                |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>100%</b>                  | <b>100%</b>        | <b>100%</b>                 | <b>100%</b>        | <b>100%</b>                 | <b>100%</b>        |
| <i>Don't know/ not applicable</i> | 1                            | 12                 | 7                           | 15                 | 6                           | 13                 |
| <i>No data</i>                    | 7                            |                    | 8                           |                    | 6                           |                    |

Sources: Survey of SEE Coordinators; Survey of Principals. Only primary schools with SEE were asked these questions.

**Table 65. How often Ethics coordinators and primary principals are concerned about child safety, enrolment processes, supply of SEE teachers and information about SEE**

| Response category                | Child safety                |                    | Opt-out process for SRE     | Lack of SEE teachers        |                    | Lack of information about SEE for parents |                    | Lack of information about SEE for the school |                    |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|---|--------------------|--|--------------------|
|                                  | Ethics coordinators (n=130) | Principals (n=154) | Ethics coordinators (n=135) | Ethics coordinators (n=145) | Principals (n=160) | Ethics coordinators (n=143)               | Principals (n=157) | Ethics coordinators (n=139)                  | Principals (n=161) |
| Always                           | 1%                          | 2%                 | 27%                         | 25%                         | 28%                | 6%  | 5%                 | 4%   | 6%                 |
| Often                            | 2%                          | 5%                 | 19%                         | 28%                         | 24%                | 28%                                       | 11%                | 16%  | 7%                 |
| Sometimes                        | 5%                          | 16%                | 31%                         | 37%                         | 33%                | 39%                                       | 33%                | 37%  | 34%                |
| Never                            | 92%                         | 77%                | 22%                         | 10%                         | 15%                | 27%                                       | 51%                | 44%  | 53%                |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>100%</b>                 | <b>100%</b>        | <b>100%</b>                 | <b>100%</b>                 | <b>100%</b>        | <b>100%</b>                               | <b>100%</b>        | <b>100%</b>                                  | <b>100%</b>        |
| <i>Don't know/not applicable</i> | 17                          | 16                 | 20                          | 2                           | 13                 | 4   | 16                 | 8  | 12                 |
| <i>No data</i>                   | 7                           |                    |                             | 7                           |                    | 7   |                    | 7  |                    |

Sources: Survey of SEE Coordinators; Survey of Principals. Only primary schools with SEE were asked these questions.

**Table 66. The main challenges for delivering SEE**

| Challenge  | Ethics coordinators (n=154) | SEE teachers (n=312) |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------|
|  | Percent                     | Percent              |
| Student behaviour: inattentive, restless or disruptive | 64%                         | 77%                  |
| Large class sizes                                      | 49%                         | 39%                  |
| Limited assistance from schools                        | 16%                         | 14%                  |
| Limited assistance from your provider                  | 3%                          | 5%                   |

Sources: Survey of SEE Coordinators; Survey of SEE Teachers. Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%.

## 10.4 Conclusions

The Review found that the current complaints handling procedures are effective. In many cases, the issues raised are resolved satisfactorily and swiftly and at the school level. However, the two most common complaints from parents relate to a lack of SEE classes available for

individual children (not something a school can remedy directly), and a perceived lack of clear information available about SEE provision in individual schools. The solution is not the further development of complaints procedures and protocols. Rather schools and Primary Ethics should communicate more clearly to parents about the provision SEE, both through their websites and directly to interested individual parents. Information about SEE should cover topics where parents are seeking more clarity. These topics are criteria for deciding whether there are sufficient parents seeking SEE for a program to be offered at school and when lessons might be available and for which Year students. Schools should explain clearly when interested parents enquire when there are insufficient students or insufficient trained SEE teachers to start SEE at the school.

## 11. SEE curriculum review

This chapter responds to Term of Reference 7—Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SEE (in part). Specifically, this chapter presents the findings of the review of the SEE curriculum outline and SEE teachers' manuals.

### 11.1 SEE curriculum outlines

#### 11.1.1 Assessment approach

The SEE curriculum outline was reviewed by allocating a three-point rating scale against four indicators of quality as shown in Table 67; the scale measures the extent there is evidence available to show the indicator has been met.

**Table 67. SEE curriculum outline evidence matrix**

| Indicator  | 0=No evidence  | 1=Some evidence   | 2=Sufficient evidence   |
|--|--|---|---|
| An outline of the curriculum is provided.                                      | An overview of the curriculum is not provided.   | A broad overview is provided, for example, by listing topics. There is insufficient detail for the general reader to gain an understanding of the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. | Sufficient detail is provided for the general reader to gain an understanding of what is being taught and the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. |
| A scope and sequence is presented in the order in which it is taught.          | A scope (what is to be covered) is not provided.<br>A sequence of learning is not evident. | The scope is provided without a clear sequence of the order of the learning.  | The scope provided an overview of what is to be taught. The sequence outlines the order in which it will be taught.   |
| Age appropriate learning experiences are clearly identified.                   | Learning experiences are not identified.   | Learning experiences are identified. There is an inconsistent connection between these experiences and age appropriate teaching strategies and student activities.                                    | Learning experiences consider and reflect age appropriate teaching strategies and student activities.   |
| What is to be taught in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills is clear. | An overview of what is to be taught is not provided.                                       | A broad overview of learning is provided. Distinctions between knowledge, understanding and skills are not clearly evident.   | Knowledge, understanding and skills are identified.   |

### 11.1.2 Findings

Table 68 summarises the results of the assessment of the SEE curriculum outline against each indicator.

**Table 68. SEE curriculum outline findings**

| Indicator  | 0 | 1 | 2 |
|--|---|---|---|
| An outline of the curriculum is provided.                                      |   |   | 1 |
| A scope and sequence is presented in the order in which it is taught.          |   |   | 1 |
| Learning is sequenced across Year levels and/or phases of learning.            |   |   | 1 |
| Age appropriate learning experiences are clearly identified.                   |   | 1 |   |
| What is to be taught in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills is clear. |   | 1 |   |

Note: Scores: 0=No evidence; 1=Some evidence; 2=Sufficient evidence

In relation to the provision of a curriculum outline:

- on the whole, sufficient detail was provided for the general reader to gain an understanding of what was being taught and the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. The outline was provided through a combination of topics and a brief summary of the learning.

In relation to scope and sequence:

- a scope was provided giving an overview of what was to be taught (topics). The sequence outlined the order in which it was to be taught by Stage of learning and school term.

In relation to sequencing learning across Year levels or phases of learning:

- learning was sequenced across the following Stages—EI (Kindergarten), Stage 1.1 (Years 1–2), Stage 1.2 (Years 1–2), Stage 2.1 (Years 3–4), Stage 2.2 (Years 3–4), Stage 3.1 (Years 5–6), Stage 3.2 (Years 5–6).
- three topics were covered each term for each of the Stages.

In relation to clearly identifying age appropriate learning experiences:

- on the whole, there was evidence of identified age appropriate learning experiences across the document.
- the summaries for each topic were written in an inconsistent style, which resulted in the learning experiences in some topics not being adequately described.

In relation to clearly describing what was to be taught in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills:

- a broad overview of learning was provided. Distinctions between knowledge, understanding and skills were not clearly evident across all topics.
- in a number of instances, the curriculum overview did not match the coding allocated to lesson plans.

## 11.2 SEE teachers' manuals

### 11.2.1 Assessment approach

Low levels of SEE teacher experience were assumed when reviewing documents in this category. It was also assumed that SEE teachers would be volunteers with little to no formal training in teaching. The SEE teachers' manuals were reviewed by allocating a three-point rating scale against six indicators of quality, as shown in Table 69; the scale measures the extent there is evidence available to show the indicator has been met.

**Table 69. SEE teachers' manuals evidence matrix**

| Indicator  | 0=No evidence  | 1=Some evidence   | 2=Sufficient evidence  |
|--|--|---|--|
| Provides clarity for SEE teachers about what is to be taught.  | An overview of the curriculum is not provided.       | A broad overview is provided, e.g. by listing topics. There is insufficient detail for a teacher who is unfamiliar with the program to be clear about the kinds of learning experiences planned for students. | The curriculum is clearly described in terms of depth and breadth of learning. Teachers have clear guidance in relation to what is to be taught.   |
| Articulates a clear sequence of learning.  | Neither a scope nor sequence of learning is evident. | The scope is provided without a clear sequence of the order of the learning.  | Teachers are provided with a clear sequence of learning.   |
| Identifies age appropriate learning experiences that support and deepen student learning, understanding and skills.* | Learning experiences are not articulated.            | Learning experiences are identified. There is an inconsistent connection between these experiences and those articulated in the Australian Curriculum.  | Learning experiences consider and reflect age appropriate teaching strategies and learning experiences for students. They include: (i) understanding ethical concepts and issues (ii) reasoning in decision- |

| Indicator   | 0=No evidence   | 1=Some evidence  | 2=Sufficient evidence  |
|---|---|--|--|
|   |   |  | making and actions, and (iii) exploring values, rights and responsibilities.                             |
| Themes/ units/ lessons assist SEE teachers to identify the focus for learning.                                    | Units or lesson plans are not provided.   | Themes/ units/ lesson plans provide some explanation of learning outcomes to be achieved.                            | Themes/ units/ lesson plans have clear goals or learning outcomes.                                       |
| Assists SEE teachers to plan opportunities for students to actively engage with and participate in lessons.       | Student activities are not identified.  | Activities are articulated. They are related predominately to completion of student workbooks or activity sheets.    | Activities include age appropriate opportunities that promote student engagement and participation.      |
| Assists SEE teachers to include the range of students in classes, e.g. cultural backgrounds, age, learning needs. | Practical advice on teaching strategies and inclusive practices are not provided. | General advice on teaching strategies is provided. Specific, practical advice on inclusive practices is not evident. | Practical advice is provided on teaching strategies to include the diverse range of students in classes. |

\*This indicator was adjusted to align with the General Capability 'Ethical understanding' in the Australian Curriculum.

Six topics were reviewed to determine the extent of alignment and consistency across three Stages of learning (Kindergarten to Year 6). All topics included three lessons:

- Stage 1.1, Topic 2
- Stage 1.1, Topic 6
- Stage 2.1, Topic 4
- Stage 2.2 Topic 9
- Stage 3.1, Topic 7
- Stage 3.1, Topic 10.

### 11.2.2 Findings

Table 70 summarises the frequency with which the indicators were evident across the six documents reviewed, which represented six separate topics.



**Table 70. Findings for SEE teachers' manuals**

| Indicator   | 0 | 1 | 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Provides clarity for SEE teachers about what is to be taught.   |   |   | 6 |
| Articulates a clear sequence of learning.   |   |   | 6 |
| Identifies age appropriate learning experiences that support and deepen student learning, understanding and skills. |   |   | 6 |
| Themes/ units/ lessons assist SEE teachers to identify the focus for learning.                                      |   |   | 6 |
| Assists SEE teachers to plan opportunities for students to actively engage with and participate in lessons.         |   |   | 6 |
| Assists SEE teachers to include the range of students in classes, e.g. cultural backgrounds, age, learning needs.   |   | 6 |   |

Note: Scores: 0=No evidence; 1=Some evidence; 2=Sufficient evidence

In relation to clarity about what is to be taught:

- SSE lesson plans provided teachers with sufficient detail to clearly describe what was to be taught and the kinds of learning experiences intended for students.
- lesson plans included: aims, objectives, background information, resources and suggested timing.

In relation to articulating a clear sequence of learning about what is to be taught:

- SEE lesson plans provided teachers with a clear sequence of learning. Each topic included three detailed lesson plans.

In relation to providing SEE teachers with guidance and examples of age appropriate learning experiences to support and deepen learning:

- on the whole, lesson plans reflected the three organising elements in the 'Ethical understanding' General Capability, Australian Curriculum.
- on the whole, lesson plans reflected the opportunities for learning reflected in the learning continuum.

In relation to providing clarity about the focus for learning:

- all SEE lesson plans provided teachers with clear aims and objectives.

In relation to providing advice or strategies to maximise student engagement and participation in lessons:

- all lesson plans included age appropriate opportunities that could promote student engagement and participation.

- the lesson plans relied on a repetitive lesson structure, which predominantly relied on beginning with a stimulus text and/or picture followed by activities for focused discussion.

In relation to advice or strategies to include the range of students in classes:

- the lesson plans did not include specific advice on teaching strategies to support inclusive practices.
- all lesson plans reviewed did include opportunities for students to work collaboratively and to share their thinking and reasoning.

### 11.3 Conclusions

Recommendation 3 from the Legislative Council General Response Standing Committee No 2: Report No 38 *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011* (May 2012) states: 'That the Department of Education and Communities continue to review the age appropriateness of the Special Education in Ethics curriculum and teaching materials'. The current Review found an alignment between the SEE curriculum and teaching materials and the learning continuum for Ethical understanding outlined in the Australian Curriculum.

Suggestions to strengthen the enactment of this Recommendation include:

- requiring the curriculum developers to map the SEE curriculum against the learning continuum provided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).
- requesting the curriculum developers to note aspects of the SEE curriculum that support content descriptions and learning areas within the Australian Curriculum, where applicable and appropriate.

## 12. Pedagogy/ teaching and teacher training structures

This chapter covers three Terms of Reference: Term of Reference 4—SEE providers' training structure; Term of Reference 7—Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SEE ; and Term of Reference 6—New modes and patterns of delivery using technology..

### 12.1 Primary Ethics training structure

This section describes the Primary Ethics training structure and the kinds of training and hours of training provided by Primary Ethics.

#### 12.1.1 What is required or intended

##### *Department of Education*

The Department's *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* state:

*It is the responsibility of an approved provider of special education in ethics to recruit, train and authorise teachers of special education in ethics.*

The *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* imply (although it is not explicitly stated) that teacher training is one of the requisites for authorising teachers (along with screening).

##### *Primary Ethics*

Primary Ethics has a structure in place and procedures to train teachers before they first teach an SEE class, and to provide some ongoing teaching support. A full time Training Manager (employed staff) coordinates teacher training and classroom support, and oversees the quality of training. All training is free of charge. An annual survey of SEE teachers collects information about support needs.

Initial teacher training consists of an online introductory course and a two-day face-to-face workshop. These courses were both developed by Primary Ethics. An online child protection module— *Shining the Light on Child Protection*—is also part of SEE teachers training and was developed by the Centre for Community Welfare Training. Primary Ethics also hosts online resources for teachers and runs in-service 'refresher' training. Time spent on pedagogy and curriculum materials accounts for about half of the overall training time, with time also being

spent on learning about behaviour management in the classroom, working with schools and child safety.

The requirements of teachers with regards to this training are outlined in the Primary Ethics Position Description: Volunteer Ethics Teacher (Box 12.1).

**Table 71. SEE training subjects and number of hours training**

| Subject                        | Number hours |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Curriculum overview            | 0.5 hour     |
| Curriculum materials           | 2.5 hours    |
| Purpose of SEE                 | 2 hours      |
| SEE pedagogy                   | 5.5 hours    |
| Classroom behaviour management | 2 hours      |
| Child safety                   | 1 hour       |
| Other                          | 1 hour       |

Source: Survey of Provider.

**Box 12.1: Primary Ethics policy/ requirements for SEE teacher training**

- Successfully complete our online modules, including an introductory course and annual ongoing training on a range of topics including classroom management and child protection.
- Successfully complete a preliminary two-day face-to-face training course conducted by Primary Ethics.
- Diligently participate in any other training and support activities provided by Primary Ethics.

Source: POSITION DESCRIPTION: VOLUNTEER ETHICS TEACHER

[www.primaryethics.com.au/ethicsteacher.html](http://www.primaryethics.com.au/ethicsteacher.html)

Primary Ethics has also established 'training classrooms' where new SEE teachers can observe more experienced teachers deliver lessons.<sup>27</sup>

According to Primary Ethics, their Training Manager has been very proactive in creating different modes of ongoing training delivery, including face-to-face teaching, on-the-job coaching of teachers from their Classroom Support Team, internal website information access, and videos of benchmark ethics teaching in schools, along with instructional videos for different components of the teaching process. In 2015, Primary Ethics informed SEE teachers that they had to complete additional mandatory online training in child safety and classroom behaviour management.

### 12.1.2 What occurs in practice

Ethics coordinators at case study sites described the key components of initial teacher training—the online introductory module, child protection training, and the two-day

<sup>27</sup> This is noted in Primary Ethics' Annual Plan.

[http://www.primaryethics.com.au/resources/PrimaryEthics\\_AR2014\\_final.pdf](http://www.primaryethics.com.au/resources/PrimaryEthics_AR2014_final.pdf)

workshop—as being delivered as intended, with the workshop being run at various university venues. Potential teachers are sent details about dates of upcoming workshops, after they have been through an initial screening interview by Primary Ethics and have completed checks for child safety. Ethics coordinators reported that, in Sydney, there are 12 workshops run each year and that in recent years more workshops are being run to meet demand in regional areas: for example, three in Newcastle and three on the Central Coast. The data from the survey of SEE teachers and interviews during case studies confirm that initial training is being delivered as intended. Being able to access training in a timely way was raised as an issue for those living in country areas, with these informants perceiving that Primary Ethics has a greater focus on recruitment in order to meet the demand for SEE. Some Ethics coordinators and SEE teachers said that volunteers can have a wait of some months to access local SEE training and that at times there is not enough training in certain areas, which delays authorisation of new SEE teachers. This view was also expressed in a small number of interviews with school SRE/ SEE coordinators who commented that they had students enrolled in SEE classes but classes had not commenced as the intended teacher had not completed training. In one school, this caused some logistical challenges around supervising additional students, with some choosing to attend SRE and others alternate activities in the meantime.

From interviews with SEE teachers, two themes emerged around what is most strongly emphasised across all training components: child protection, and teaching within the curriculum.

*There was a big focus on child protection; we also did an online update course on child protection recently – it was compulsory. —SEE teacher*

*At the training we had it drummed into us to stick with the curriculum. —SEE teacher*

### **Participation in basic SEE teacher training**

Ethics coordinators consistently reported that SEE teachers are always trained before they teach classes. All SEE teachers who were interviewed for the case studies said that they completed all components of the training before taking their first SEE class (some had also already observed a lesson).

*You can't be an Ethics teacher until you have done the training, but you can observe a class—this is important. —Ethics coordinator*

Table 72 shows that almost all SEE teachers have received training in core areas around child protection, teaching the curriculum and classroom behaviour management. The content covered in the initial teacher training—described by SEE teachers in the survey and in case study interviews—includes background to philosophy and ethical thinking, the history of Primary Ethics, information about peer support, and first aid. Fewer teachers—although a considerable majority—reported attending training about working with schools, and

workplace health and safety. SEE teachers who were interviewed said the workshop training involved seminar-style instruction, group discussions, practical skills and role playing (e.g. around how to respond in interactions with students).

*The best thing about training: that ethics isn't what you think, training was about getting kids to work out what is right and wrong. —SEE teacher*

**Table 72. Training attended by SEE teachers**

| N=390                                    | N   | Percent |
|--|-----|---------|
| Classroom behaviour management           | 384 | 98%     |
| Purpose of SEE                           | 383 | 98%     |
| Child protection                         | 382 | 98%     |
| Methods for teaching curriculum material | 380 | 97%     |
| Curriculum materials                     | 378 | 97%     |
| Working with schools                     | 295 | 76%     |
| Workplace health and safety              | 266 | 68%     |

Source: Survey of SEE Teachers.

### ***Participation in ongoing training and support activities***

Primary Ethics offers a mix of support through online platforms (web-based forums; online training, e.g. further child protection training and classroom management, videos of lessons being delivered) and through their Classroom Support Team. The Head of the Classroom Support Team and the Classroom Support Team (volunteers) visit SEE classes to observe teaching practice and provide teachers with feedback and coaching.<sup>28</sup> The Ethics coordinators' role in supporting pedagogy encompasses informing SEE teachers about training updates and the supports available and bringing SEE teachers together. However, the role is very self-directed and it is apparent from SEE teachers' feedback that the extent an Ethics coordinator facilitates ongoing training and support for pedagogy varies from little or no activity to being very active in this area.

The evidence shows that SEE teachers are availing themselves of the range of supports available to support their teaching practices. Around half of SEE teachers who responded to the survey indicated they participated in yearly training updates, and 87% had done some

<sup>28</sup> Primary Ethics submission to Review.

online training (Table 73). A high proportion indicated they had been mentored by more experienced SEE teachers, and had had observation and feedback on their lessons either immediately prior to starting their first SEE lesson or after they started in their role.

In three of the four case study schools, SEE teachers spoke about the opportunity they had in 2015 to be observed by a member of the Classroom Support Team while taking a class and then given feedback on their performance. Most took up the opportunity and appreciated getting constructive feedback. In one school, the delivery of the SEE lessons was videoed. SEE teachers in the case study schools also commonly 'buddied up' with more experienced teachers. Most also took the opportunity to read the Primary Ethics monthly newsletters and used the online resources and forums. One area where there appears to be mixed practices is the ability of SEE teachers to network with their peers; some talked about feeling isolated. In one school, the Ethics coordinator organised formal get-togethers at the end of the year, and in two other schools the teachers themselves endeavoured to organise informal meetings. Given these kinds of peer support are highly valued, it may be an area of support that Primary Ethics could help facilitate more often.

*Late last year a Primary Ethics support person sat in on our classes. It was fantastic! You are on your own, you don't know how you are performing and you get constructive feedback. —SEE teacher*

*The biggest support I have is being able to debrief with other SEE teachers. When I was the only teacher I found it isolating. —SEE teacher*

*I have a new coordinator who is getting up to speed after a very non-communicative one. I feel confident there will be a great deal of support where it has been lacking in the past. This is important for the flow of information about training, etc. —SEE teacher*

**Table 73. SEE teacher participation in ongoing training and support**

|   | N   | Yes | No  | Unsure | Total |
|---|-----|-----|-----|--------|-------|
| Yearly training updates                                 | 373 | 51% | 11% | 38%    | 100%  |
| Online training   | 377 | 87% | 2%  | 11%    | 100%  |
| Mentoring by more experienced SEE teachers              | 383 | 79% | 9%  | 12%    | 100%  |
| Observation and feedback on lessons                     | 381 | 80% | 9%  | 11%    | 100%  |
| Organises lesson times with the school on your behalf   | 371 | 72% | 21% | 7%     | 100%  |
| Assistance with completing Working With Children Checks | 381 | 73% | 15% | 12%    | 100%  |

|  | N   | Yes | No  | Unsure | Total |
|--|-----|-----|-----|--------|-------|
| Provision of curriculum materials and work books | 385 | 90% | 9%  | 2%     | 100%  |
| Funding to pay for curriculum materials          | 374 | 13% | 76% | 11%    | 100%  |

Source: Survey of SEE Teachers. Multiple responses were allowed so total does not add up to 100%.

### ***Satisfaction with SEE teacher training and ongoing support***

SEE teacher satisfaction with training is high overall, according to the survey and interviews. Table 74 shows that almost two thirds of SEE teachers agree they were well prepared to teach SEE when they first started giving the lessons, with one-third mostly agreeing. A higher proportion agree (77%) that Primary Ethics provides them with enough training and support for them to successfully fulfil their role; with 22% mostly agreeing.

**Table 74. SEE teachers' reports about ongoing training and support**

| Statement   | N   | Agree | Mostly agree | Mostly disagree | Disagree | Total | Not applicable |
|---|-----|-------|--------------|-----------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| My provider organisation provides me with enough training and support for me to successfully fulfil my role | 392 | 77%   | 22%          | 1%              | 1%       | 100%  | 0              |
| I was well prepared to teach SEE when I first started giving these lessons                                  | 387 | 64%   | 33%          | 2%              | 0%       | 100%  | 2              |

Source: Survey of SEE Teachers.

Of the 60 SEE teachers who made comments in the survey about the training and support they had received, 59 comments were either positive and some of those who commented also suggested how support might be improved. The most common suggestion was that there should be extra focus on classroom behaviour management during training.

*Nothing I needed to go into my first ethics class was omitted in my view. —SEE teacher*

*I have been given everything that I need to ensure I can teach to the best of my ability. —SEE teacher*

The one SEE teacher who commented negatively about the initial training felt the training was 'badly organised'. By contrast, the majority of SEE teachers who were interviewed and/ or completed a survey indicated that the initial training was useful, relevant and helped prepare them for their role in the classroom. Examples of comments made in the survey about the training were, 'fit for purpose', and 'very useful, it related to what you did in the classroom'.



Yet, while on the whole teachers felt well prepared to take classes, in SEE teacher interviews and in some survey comments SEE teachers also reflected on the limits of formal training when it comes to teaching in practice and managing classroom behaviour. Rarely was this view presented as a criticism of the initial training itself, but was expressed to highlight the importance of ongoing SEE teacher support and supervision.

*Few people will be fully competent when first starting to teach SEE. Training provides a base. Then learning and gaining experience by teaching is necessary. Gradually I became comfortable with teaching ethics to primary children. —SEE teacher*

*Training weekend course was excellent and provided me with the ability to run the session—nothing like on the job experience though and I am refining my approach based on my personal experience and learning shared through the online forum. —SEE teacher*

Among the survey comments and interviews with SEE teachers, the quality of the trainers was commonly remarked on. Teachers said that the trainers were 'fantastic', 'very professional and well organised', 'thorough and well delivered'.

*I was surprised at the very high quality. I have a background in training for industry and for service providers as well as education. —SEE teacher*

*The training sessions are rigorous and they change and develop with participant feedback. The full two day program covers a lot of ground including classroom management but also gives practical experiential pedagogy in the community of inquiry method used by Primary Ethics. Volunteers are assessed by trainers and provided with individual feedback on their strengths and needs as well as small group practice with curriculum materials. A booklet is provided that supports learning and is a helpful resource alongside the Janison online<sup>29</sup> curriculum provision. —SEE teacher*

SEE teachers in case study sites and in the survey often commented on the usefulness of the online resources, and the convenience and quality of the online training and other resources.

### 12.1.3 Conclusions

Plans to implement initial training for all SEE teachers have been implemented as intended, with evidence that all training modules are being delivered and that SEE teachers participate in these before taking their first class. The training covers the intended content and appropriate range of topics, and this appears to prepare SEE teachers about child protection requirements and gives them a good understanding of the curriculum content and scope.

---

<sup>29</sup> Janison provides the online platform and information management system for SEE.  
<http://www.janison.com.au/Assessment/Blog/2015/1/primary-ethics>

SEE teachers enjoy the training. They are highly satisfied with the quality of instruction and its usefulness and relevance for instructing students in SEE. Skills in managing classrooms and teaching in practice are covered in the initial training but there is evidence that, as volunteers without professional teacher training, ongoing support in this area is required and that the increased Primary Ethics focus on this area reflects SEE teacher needs.

Because SEE teachers must complete initial training before giving SEE lessons, a challenge for Primary Ethics is offering enough face-to-face training opportunities for would-be SEE teachers to meet demand and also making these sessions available in regional areas.

## **12.2 Pedagogy and appropriateness of teaching and learning**

The main sources of evidence about SEE teachers' pedagogical practices are feedback from parents, principals and from SEE teachers themselves. Parents tended to comment on the quality of SEE teaching and the appropriateness of teaching and learning through the prism of their children's experiences.<sup>30</sup> Where their children discussed SEE at home, parents reflected on these conversations and drew conclusions. A few said they had discussed their child's experiences with other parents who have children in SEE and compared notes. None talked about having observed the classes in action, unless they were SEE teachers themselves. Principals' views either came from directly observing classes or feedback from classroom teachers sitting in on the lessons to help manage student behaviour.

### **12.2.1 What is required or intended**

The Department is not required to give any specific guidance about pedagogy and relevance of teaching and learning in SEE, except to seek assurance that authorised SEE teachers are only using materials and pedagogy authorised by the provider. As discussed previously, the Department has a role in reviewing the age appropriateness of SEE curriculum materials. The lesson content and learning activities are the responsibility of Primary Ethics, as the approved provider.

---

<sup>30</sup> Some parents talked in general about the appropriateness of SEE teaching and learning without reference to children's experiences in SEE lessons or having observed lessons. Amongst those who had negative views, there were a few different themes. The first, that it is not appropriate to teach ethics without the moral framework of religious teachings; the second, that teaching children ethics is the business of parents rather than volunteers in schools; and the third, that ethics should be a key learning area and taught by qualified classroom teachers. Other parents who had no direct feedback on their child's experience of the SEE lessons were reassured about the appropriateness of SEE teaching and learning because they had been able to check the curriculum scope and sequence online and that teachers must follow the curriculum.

Primary Ethics offers guidance about teaching practices and pedagogy to SEE teachers via observations of class presentation; the extent such advice is provided and how often is not clear.

## 12.2.2 What occurs in practice

### *Views of parents*

The clear majority of parents whose children have attended SEE and who responded to the parent/ caregiver online contribution portal were positive about their child's learning experience in SEE lessons; 68% were satisfied, 26% mostly satisfied, with six percent mostly dissatisfied/ dissatisfied (Table 75). Even so, it is apparent that the individual skills of SEE teachers are important to the experiences of the children and the extent they are engaged, and that some children are said to find the lessons repetitive.

Parents who were satisfied with how the classes are facilitated and with the appropriateness of teaching and learning, commonly talked about their child/ren enjoying lessons, participating in discussions and then sharing what they covered in class at home. Parents were positive about their children being able to express their own views and learning to respect others' views as part of the lesson. Less commonly, parents talked about the subjects being discussed as being pitched at the right level for their child's age. Parents variously described SEE teachers as being well trained (they follow the curriculum), motivated and enthusiastic, although fewer remarked on SEE teachers' personal attributes or teaching skills than about their children's reactions to lessons.

*My children are interested and motivated about ethics; this is surely a good reflection on the quality of teaching and learning. —Parent*

*After five years of my kids being sent to the library to colour in, they are finally doing ethics classes and coming home brimming with questions and discussions. Great! —Parent*

*The ethics teacher is very welcoming to ideas and has been great encouraging our bilingual child to participate in discussion. The topics he finds interesting he brings home to us and discusses and therefore we find the concepts are appropriately pitched to his Year group and interesting for him to contemplate on later. —Parent*

Amongst the minority of parents whose children had less positive experiences of SEE lessons, three common themes emerged. Parents talked about some SEE teachers lacking the skills to successfully manage disruptive student behaviour and not being able to control the class, and that skill levels appeared to differ between individuals. On a related theme, a few parents characterised SEE teachers as enthusiastic amateurs, who are given insufficient training to manage a class. Other common and related themes were that their child found the SEE classes boring and/or repetitive (teach the same thing every year). Less commonly, parents

talked about SEE teachers seeming to be unable to manage the flow of discussion well (for example, their child saying the teacher talked all the time, or not completing lessons), or not giving all children an equal opportunity to participate in discussions. Another uncommon view (unsubstantiated by any concrete examples) is that SEE teachers push their own views in classes. Some parents also commented that their child, having tried out SEE classes, preferred unstructured activities or SRE classes.

*It has been uneven and dependent on the individual. She enjoyed ethics classes with one teacher but not at all with the other teacher who could not manage the class. —Parent*

*My son says it's only the ones that talk the loudest that get heard. —Parent*

*Ethics teaching is not engaging - my child was bored not stimulated. —Parent*

**Table 75. Parents' satisfaction with the learning experience their child gets in SEE**

| Response category     | N            | Percent     |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Satisfied             | 798          | 68%         |
| Mostly satisfied      | 304          | 26%         |
| Mostly dissatisfied   | 27           | 2%          |
| Dissatisfied          | 42           | 4%          |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>1,171</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>Don't know</i>     | <i>87</i>    |             |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | <i>40</i>    |             |
| <i>No data</i>        | <i>86</i>    |             |

### **Views of principals**

Principals in the case studies indicated that SEE teachers generally relate well to their students, and they get good reports from children, parents and their staff about the level of student engagement in the lessons. However, they also remarked that the skills of individual SEE teachers vary somewhat, especially as these pertain to managing classroom behaviour.

Amongst the 191 principals that have SEE in 2015, completed a survey and received a complaint about SEE, just four percent had a complaint about the content of an SEE lesson, and none had received any complaints about the effect of the lesson on a child.

In general, principals who were positive about the quality of SEE teaching practices highlighted:

- engaging lessons, the scenario-based interactive activities, age appropriate activities.
- SEE teachers having excellent rapport with students.
- SEE teachers having a good knowledge of the topics they teach.
- staff, parents and students and the community being happy and confident with the program.
- SEE teachers have a genuine interest in the wellbeing of the students.

Principals commented that they routinely place classroom teachers in the room with the SEE teachers to assist the SEE teachers to control the classroom and manage disruptive behaviour, and also to support students with special needs. Some principals (and parents) were concerned that SEE takes time away from core curriculum subjects in a crowded learning program and would prefer SEE to be addressed as part of the curriculum.

### ***Views of SEE teachers***

SEE teachers who responded to the survey were most likely to be quite confident they understand effective ways to engage students in learning, and similar proportions were confident of their skills in engaging students in lessons and adapting lessons (Table 77). These results closely reflect the SEE teachers' assessment of the extent that the students they teach are engaged in SEE lessons; almost two thirds agree the students that they teach are engaged in SEE lessons and one-third, mostly agree (Table 76). A relatively large number of SEE teachers indicated that the questions about adapting the curriculum materials for students' background and to the age of the student were not applicable; perhaps because of the strong message from Primary Ethics in training and support that they must deliver the curriculum and lesson plans as given (Table 77).

SEE teachers who participated in the case studies commonly remarked that the main factor influencing how well they engage students in SEE lessons is their ability to manage classroom behaviour, especially when a classroom teacher is not assisting in this role or where the classes are large. Most felt comfortable about their understanding of the topics and implementing teaching activities required by the lesson plans. Where they are uncertain, these teachers use the online web forum to familiarise themselves with specific lessons and activities. SEE teachers are clear that they must follow the curriculum and where lessons are adapted these adaptations tend to be covering the curriculum in a shorter or longer time period, according to student interests and abilities.

**Table 76. SEE teachers' views on students' engagement in SEE**

| Most students I teach are engaged in learning about SEE (n=396) | Percent     |
|---|-------------|
| Agree   | 62%         |
| Mostly agree  | 36%         |
| Mostly disagree   | 2%          |
| Disagree  | 0%          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>100%</b> |
| <i>No data</i>  | 18          |

Source: Survey of SEE Teachers.

**Table 77. SEE teachers' ratings of their confidence in teaching and learning skills**

| Level of confidence   | Your understanding of effective ways to engage students in learning (n=397) | Your ability to engage students in the lesson content (n=399) | Your ability to adapt the lessons for students from a range of backgrounds (n=335) | Your ability to adapt the curriculum materials you use to the age of the student (n=299) |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|--|
|                       | Percent   | Percent   | Percent  | Percent  |
| Very confident        | 39%   | 42%   | 35%  | 48%  |
| Quite confident       | 59%   | 55%   | 57%  | 47%  |
| Not very confident    | 2%  | 3%  | 7%   | 5%   |
| Not at all confident  | 0%  | 0%  | 1%   | 0%   |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>100%</b>   | <b>100%</b>   | <b>100%</b>  | <b>100%</b>  |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | 1   | 0   | 63   | 98   |
| <i>No data</i>        | 16  | 15  | 16   | 17   |

Source: Survey of SEE Teachers.

### 12.2.3 Conclusions

Overall, on the evidence available, the teaching and learning practices used in SEE lessons are appropriate and use pedagogical effective approaches. SEE teachers are mostly successfully engaging students in SEE lessons and students relate well to the scenario-based lessons. Even so, it is apparent that the individual skills of SEE teachers influence the quality of children's

experiences and that there is some variation in SEE teachers' ability to control classes and facilitate the flow of the discussions. Primary Ethics should continue to promote its online behaviour management training and provide support for SEE teachers who are less confident in this area through their Classroom Support Team. Although schools are not required to place classroom teachers in SEE lessons, this is an effective way to control classes and facilitate student engagement in SEE. There is evidence from parents that some children find the lessons repetitive and boring and Primary Ethics could examine how repetition could be reduced in future iterations of the curriculum.

## **12.3 New modes and patterns of delivery**

This section addresses the ToR 6: New modes and patterns of delivery using technology, and describes how SEE teachers are using technology to deliver lessons.

### **12.3.1 What is required or intended**

This is not covered in the *Implementation Procedures for Special Education in Ethics* (2015).

### **12.3.2 What happens in practice**

#### ***Use of technology in lessons***

Less than half (44%, n=339) of SEE teachers who contributed to the survey report that they use any technology tools to help deliver lessons. Where used, the main technology tool is an interactive whiteboard. Most commonly, these are used to display photographs, which are included in the lesson plan. A few SEE teachers also said they used an interactive whiteboard for PowerPoint slides or to show videos. Other SEE teachers use an iPad/ tablet, again most commonly to display photographs. Other technology tools mentioned by survey respondents were data projectors and CD players.

SEE teachers gave a range of reasons why they are not using technology to deliver SEE lessons. Some argued they have little need to use technology, as the lessons being scenario-based are designed to be delivered without it. Others prefer to use printed materials. Some highlighted barriers to using interactive whiteboards in schools, such as not being given access to the Department's systems, or that setting up the interactive whiteboard takes up too much of the available time for lessons, or that classrooms do not have the technology in place.

#### ***Confidence in using technology***

Ethics coordinators who responded to the survey were more confident (95% very or quite confident) than SEE teachers (76%) about SEE teachers' abilities to use technology tools in

their delivery of SEE lessons. Almost one-quarter of SEE teachers indicated they are either not very or not confident (Table 78). Sixty-two SEE teacher respondents said the question was not applicable to them, presumably because they do not use any technology to deliver the SEE lessons.

**Table 78. Level of confidence in SEE teachers' ability to use technology tools to help deliver lessons**

|                       | <b>Ethics coordinators<br/>N=123</b> | <b>SEE teachers<br/>N=337</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                       | <b>Percent</b>                       | <b>Percent</b>                |
| Very confident        | 29%                                  | 33%                           |
| Quite confident       | 66%                                  | 43%                           |
| Not very confident    | 5%                                   | 20%                           |
| Not at all confident  | 0%                                   | 4%                            |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>100%</b>                          | <b>100%</b>                   |
| <i>Don't know</i>     | <i>8</i>                             | <i>0</i>                      |
| <i>Not applicable</i> | <i>17</i>                            | <i>62</i>                     |
| <i>No data</i>        |                                      | <i>15</i>                     |

Source: Survey of SEE Coordinators; Survey of SEE Teachers.

### 12.3.3 Conclusions

The evidence indicates that the use of technology to deliver SEE lessons can be useful, but is not necessary to support the delivery of the scenario-based SEE lessons. Even so, the quarter of SEE teachers who lack confidence in using common technology tools such as interactive whiteboards would benefit from instructions about how to use these.



## 13. Part C: Recommendations

This chapter lists the recommendations of the Review, based on the evidence presented in this report.

### 13.1 SRE Recommendations by Terms of Reference

#### ToR 1: The nature and extent of SRE

1. The Department of Education investigate and then implement ways to provide accurate and regular monitoring data about the nature and extent of SRE in NSW Government schools. The Department explore:
  - the feasibility of establishing a state-wide monitoring system for SRE, drawing on locally collected data from school enrolment forms—acknowledging this would be complex and there are problems with accuracy of data
  - alternative approaches for monitoring the nature and extent of SRE such as commissioning periodic surveys of a stratified random sample of schools to provide up-to-date data on the extent of SRE.

#### ToR 2: Department of Education implementation procedures for SRE

2. The Department—in consultation with the sector— review the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) to ensure the procedures provide principals, school staff, parents/ caregivers and providers with clear and comprehensive information regarding the implementation of SRE in current and emerging contexts, consistent with broader departmental policies. These should be well promoted to all schools and providers.
  - There should be separate but related implementation procedures for secondary/ central schools and primary schools because of their different operating contexts. This will allow secondary schools/ central schools to deal with the challenges posed by low student participation rates in SRE and other logistical challenges. See also Recommendations 9, 22, 27, 38 and 39.
  - The revised implementation procedures should include advice about minimum standards for teacher authorisation; developed by providers (see Recommendation 17).
3. All advice and related documents about SRE produced by the Department be clearly dated and the updates identified for ease of implementation of the advice.
4. To meet parents' information needs, schools to make information about the provision of SRE in the school publicly available on websites and during school induction days and at enrolment in school.

### ***Parent/ Caregiver choice at school enrolment and opting out***

5. The Department assess the suitability of the new school enrolment form (October 2015) and processes to ensure these are clear and working as intended. Such an assessment should canvas the views of all stakeholders.
6. The Department provides clear, consistent and easily accessible information for parents about their SRE participation choices and processes including alternative activities and SEE where this is offered.
7. The Department makes clear on all information materials relating to SRE participation that parents have the right to withdraw their child from SRE.
8. The Department retains the current method of opt-out SRE participation for primary schools
9. An opt-in SRE participation process is more suitable for secondary school students and the Department should facilitate this change, which may require changes to the current legislation.

### ***Approval of providers***

The Department

10. Revises the provider application form to collect a broader amount of information about potential providers to allow fuller consideration of appropriateness and governance structures and identify radical groups, cults.
11. Provides clear advice to potential providers about the approval process including timing of meetings and processes.
12. Makes it clear in information materials accompanying the application form and in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*, the reasons a provider would lose their status as an approved SRE (nature of breach and frequency).

### ***Transparency of information about SRE***

13. The Department takes steps to make the provider approval process more transparent by publishing the application form and criteria for decision-making on the Department website.
14. Schools place online annual and updated information about approved SRE providers working in their school, links to the SRE curriculums and a list of SRE volunteers so parents are fully informed about SRE provision for their child. This information should be given to schools by the providers who access them.

### ***Authorisation of volunteer SRE teachers***

15. Providers to place in the public domain a sufficiently detailed description of the processes they use to authorise their SRE teachers and the minimum requirements, qualifications and basic training they require of their SRE teachers.
16. Providers conduct regular audits of SRE teaching and use of approved curriculum, and report the results of the audits and any efforts to address any identified issues.

17. Faith groups consider forming a joint committee of **all** faith SRE providers to:
  - assist with development of shared guidelines/ understanding of requirements
  - develop common minimum standards for authorisation of teachers to increase the confidence of schools and parents that the person is known, suitable and adequately prepared. These should be widely promoted to all providers.

### **Authorisation of SRE curriculum**

18. All providers to place in the public domain their curriculum scope and sequence and that this be in sufficient detail for parents/ caregivers and schools to be able to understand what is covered in SRE lessons.
19. The Department negotiates and sets clear timelines for all faith groups and providers to comply with placing their curriculum scope and sequence in the public domain.
20. The Department monitors adherence to clearly stated expectations on a regular basis (e.g. five-yearly basis).

### **ToR 3: Development of complaints procedures and protocols**

21. Schools communicate with complainants about the outcomes of every complaint made about SRE and the reasons for the outcome.
  - Schools make clear to parents and representatives of SRE providers what issues are the responsibility of the school to resolve and which are the responsibility of the provider to resolve.
  - Any resolution/ action taken is communicated in a timely way to parents
22. The Department's *Complaints and Handling Policy* be clearly referenced in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and a link provided to the policy on the Department's Religious Education Webpage.
23. Providers make publicly available their complaints policy and procedures.

### **ToR 4: SRE providers' training structures**

24. Providers consider offering the same basic training for all SRE teachers and more regular on-going training and greater support including mentoring and observation of individual SRE teachers' practices.

### **ToR 5: Registration of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees**

25. Providers inform the Department annually what SRE Boards, Associations and Committees they are part of and where. The Department publishes a list of Boards, Associations and Committees which includes their membership by school network areas on the Departmental website.
26. SRE Boards, Associations and Committees inform schools they work with on an annual basis, which religious persuasions are part of the SRE Board, Association or Committee and which curriculum has been cross-authorised. Schools to publish this information on

the website and update annually. They should also inform schools of any third party organisation to which they have delegated human resource management functions.

27. The revised *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* should recognise the role of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees and third party organisations in supporting SRE delivery. The revised procedures should make it clear to schools and providers the limits of their influence, the rights of other providers and where conflicts of interest may apply.

## **ToR 6: New modes and patterns of delivery using technology**

28. Providers put in place processes for approval of any materials and internet resources that are used by SRE teachers in their classes and educate SRE teachers about these approval processes.
29. Providers consider making available training in use of interactive whiteboards and digital projectors for SRE teachers.

## **ToR 7: Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in SRE across all Years K to 10 —and teaching and learning in SEE in Years K to 6 in a variety of demographics**

30. SRE curriculum developers would benefit from having access to guidelines on what constitutes well-structured curriculum documentation. Providers should seek advice from education experts (the Department is one source of advice) to gain a shared understanding of
  - what is meant by the term ‘curriculum outline’
  - what is meant by the term ‘curriculum scope and sequence’.
31. SRE developers would benefit from having access to guidelines on elements that constitute a well-structured teachers’ manual. Providers seek advice from education experts (the Department is one source of advice) to clarify
  - sequence of learning for each school term
  - lesson plans or lesson planning templates
  - advice on how students can be challenged and supported in age appropriate ways,
  - advice on strategies to increase student engagement and participation ,
  - advice on strategies to accommodate student needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests,
  - access to resources to support teaching and learning.
32. Providers seek to improve the quality of SRE pedagogy, relevance and age appropriateness of teaching and learning materials.
33. Providers and SRE curriculum developers consider effective pedagogies and age appropriate opportunities for learning when reviewing and developing curriculum.
34. Providers and SRE curriculum developers review their curriculums on a cyclical basis (e.g. five-yearly basis).
35. Providers seek advice from education experts (the Department is one source of advice) to develop a shared understanding about what is meant by the term

- ‘effective pedagogies’
  - ‘relevant learning experiences’
  - ‘age appropriate learning experiences’.
36. The Department consider providing SRE curriculum developers with access to advice that highlight and support effective teaching practices, in particular age appropriate learning experiences.
37. The Department monitors adherence to clearly stated expectations on a regular basis (e.g. five-yearly basis).

### **ToR 8: The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice or opting out**

38. Schools continue the practice of continuing enrolment as for the previous year without further confirmation. If principals wish to confirm annually as part of their school practice, that should be allowed under the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*.

### **ToR 9: Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE**

39. In revising the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* for secondary and central schools the Department should allow students not participating in SRE to continue their regular classwork. This provision would apply in secondary/ central schools where there is a low rate of student participation in SRE e.g. affecting more than half of the students.

## **13.2 SEE Recommendations by Terms of Reference**

### **ToR 1: The nature and extent of SEE**

40. Primary Ethics has systems in place to provide data on student participation in SEE, and data on participation rates are publicly available. Departmental processes for regularly monitoring participation in SEE should be established if and when other SEE providers are approved.

### **ToR 2: Department of Education implementation procedures for SEE**

41. The Department—in consultation with the Consultative Committee for Special Education in Ethics—reviews the *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* to ensure these provide principals, school staff, parents/ caregivers and providers with clear and comprehensive information regarding the implementation of SEE in current and emerging contexts, consistent with broader departmental policies. The review should take account of considerations for changes to the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*.

- As part of the revision, greater focus be placed on the specifics of SEE delivery, for example, acknowledging there is one provider and referencing the specific coordination and management structures Primary Ethics have in place to support SEE.
- 42. The Department ensure all advice and related documents about SEE produced by them are clearly dated and the updates identified for ease of implementation of the advice.
- 43. To meet parent's information needs, schools to make information about SEE in the school, publicly available on websites and during school induction days and at enrolment.

### **Approval of providers**

- 44. The Department establishes an open and transparent application process for groups wishing to become providers of SEE.
- 45. The Department makes it clear in information materials accompanying the application form and in the SEE implementation procedures, the reasons a provider would lose their status as an approved SEE provider (nature of breach and frequency).
- 46. Schools place annual and updated information about SEE provision in their school, links to the curriculum and a list of SEE volunteers so parents are properly informed about SEE provision for their child.

### **Authorisation of volunteer teachers**

- 47. Primary Ethics to conduct regular audits of SEE teaching and use of approved curriculum and publicly report the results of the audits and any efforts to address any issues identified.

### **Authorisation of SEE curriculum**

- 48. The Department continue its role in reviewing the age appropriateness of the SEE curriculum.
- 49. The Department monitor adherence to clearly stated expectations on a regular basis (e.g. five-yearly).

## **ToR 3: Development of complaints procedures and protocols**

- 50. Schools communicate with complainants about the outcomes of every complaint made about SEE and the reasons for the outcome.
  - Schools make clear to parents and representatives of Primary Ethics (and any future providers of SEE) what issues are the responsibility of the school to resolve and which are the responsibility of the provider to resolve.
  - Any resolution/ action taken is communicated in a timely way to parents
- 51. The Department's *Complaints and Handling Policy* be clearly referenced in the *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* and a link provided to the policy on the Department's Religious Education Webpage.

52. Any future providers of SEE should make publicly available their complaints policy and procedures.

#### **ToR 4: SEE provider's training structures**

53. Primary Ethics regularly monitors SEE teachers' performance and learning needs and provide more individual support to address these needs including mentoring and observation of individual SEE teachers' practices.

#### **ToR 5: Registration of SRE and SEE Boards, Associations and Committees**

No recommendations specific to SEE.

#### **ToR 6: New modes and patterns of delivery using technology**

54. Primary Ethics provides training in use of interactive whiteboards and digital projectors for SEE teachers.

#### **ToR 7: Pedagogy, relevance, age appropriateness of teaching and learning in —SRE across all Years K to 10 and teaching and learning in SEE in Years K to 6 in a variety of demographics**

55. Primary Ethics curriculum developers to map the SEE curriculum against the learning continuum provided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Requesting the curriculum developers to note aspects of the SEE curriculum that support content descriptions and learning areas within the Australian Curriculum where applicable and appropriate.
56. Primary Ethics curriculum developers consider whether there is a need to reduce the amount of repetition in the curriculum to prevent older primary aged students from disengaging.

#### **ToR 8: The need for annual confirmation by parents and caregivers on SRE choice and opting out**

See SRE Recommendation 36, Response to Terms of Reference 8 for SRE.

#### **ToR 9: Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE**

No recommendations applicable to SEE.





## Appendix 1: Survey of Principals: demographic comparison

**Table 79. Demographics for NSW Government schools and Survey of Principals responses**

|          |                | Primary school |         |        |         | Secondary school |         |        |         | Central/ Community school |         |        |         | Schools for Specific Purposes |         |        |         |
|----------|----------------|----------------|---------|--------|---------|------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------------------------|---------|--------|---------|-------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|
|          |                | NSW Totals     |         | Survey |         | NSW Totals       |         | Survey |         | NSW Totals                |         | Survey |         | NSW Totals                    |         | Survey |         |
|          |                | N              | Percent | N      | Percent | N                | Percent | N      | Percent | N                         | Percent | N      | Percent | N                             | Percent | N      | Percent |
| Location | Metropolitan   | 896            | 57%     | 463    | 63%     | 268              | 67%     | 132    | 66%     | 4                         | 6%      | 2      | 8%      | 103                           | 76%     | 33     | 83%     |
|          | Provincial     | 649            | 41%     | 264    | 36%     | 127              | 32%     | 67     | 33%     | 46                        | 71%     | 14     | 56%     | 32                            | 24%     | 7      | 18%     |
|          | Remote         | 24             | 2%      | 6      | 1%      | 4                | 1%      | 2      | 1%      | 11                        | 17%     | 5      | 20%     | 1                             | 1%      |        |         |
|          | Very Remote    | 8              | 1%      | 4      | 1%      | 1                | 0%      |        |         | 4                         | 6%      | 4      | 16%     |                               |         |        |         |
| Total    |                | 1,577          | 100%    | 737    | 100%    | 400              | 100%    | 201    | 100%    | 65                        | 100%    | 25     | 100%    | 136                           | 100%    | 40     | 100%    |
| Size A   | Fewer than 150 | 563            | 36%     | 240    | 33%     |                  |         |        |         |                           |         |        |         |                               |         | 33     | 92%     |
|          | 150 to 450     | 669            | 42%     | 328    | 45%     |                  |         |        |         |                           |         |        |         |                               |         | 1      | 3%      |
|          | 450 and above  | 345            | 22%     | 169    | 23%     |                  |         |        |         |                           |         |        |         |                               |         | 1      | 3%      |
| Size B   | Less than 900  |                |         |        |         | 276              | 69%     | 138    | 69%     | 62                        | 95%     | 24     | 96%     |                               |         | 1      | 3%      |
|          | 900 and above  |                |         |        |         | 124              | 31%     | 63     | 31%     | 3                         | 5%      | 1      | 4%      |                               |         |        |         |
| Total    |                | 1,577          | 100%    | 737    | 100%    | 400              | 100%    | 201    | 100%    | 65                        | 100%    | 25     | 100%    |                               |         | 36     | 100%    |

**Table 80. Demographic comparison of NSW Government primary and secondary schools, Survey of Principals responses and sample of survey responses that provided figures on SRE student participation**

|          |                | Primary school |         |        |         |        |         | Secondary school |         |        |         |        |         |
|----------|----------------|----------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
|          |                | NSW            |         | Survey |         | Sample |         | NSW              |         | Survey |         | Sample |         |
|          |                | N              | Percent | N      | Percent | N      | Percent | N                | Percent | N      | Percent | N      | Percent |
| Location | Metropolitan   | 896            | 57%     | 463    | 63%     | 245    | 60%     | 268              | 67%     | 132    | 66%     | 25     | 69%     |
|          | Provincial     | 649            | 41%     | 264    | 36%     | 157    | 39%     | 127              | 32%     | 67     | 33%     | 11     | 31%     |
|          | Remote         | 24             | 2%      | 6      | 1%      | 3      | 1%      | 4                | 1%      | 2      | 1%      |        |         |
|          | Very Remote    | 8              | 1%      | 4      | 1%      | 1      | <1%     | 1                | 0%      |        |         |        |         |
| Total    |                | 1,577          | 100%    | 737    | 100%    | 406    | 100%    | 400              | 100%    | 201    | 100%    | 36     | 100%    |
| Size A   | Fewer than 150 | 563            | 36%     | 240    | 33%     | 140    | 34%     |                  |         |        |         |        |         |
|          | 150 to 450     | 669            | 42%     | 328    | 45%     | 179    | 44%     |                  |         |        |         |        |         |
|          | 450 and above  | 345            | 22%     | 169    | 23%     | 87     | 21%     |                  |         |        |         |        |         |
| Size B   | Fewer than 900 |                |         |        |         |        |         | 276              | 69%     | 138    | 69%     | 26     | 72%     |
|          | 900 and above  |                |         |        |         |        |         | 124              | 31%     | 63     | 31%     | 10     | 28%     |
| Total    |                | 1,577          | 100%    | 737    | 100%    |        |         | 400              | 100%    | 201    | 100%    |        |         |

## Appendix 2: Source of curriculum documents

| Source                                     | Category 1:<br>Scope and<br>sequence<br>documents | Category 2:<br>Teacher's<br>Manuals | Category 3:<br>Student<br>Manuals |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Al-Jaafaria Society                        |   |                                     | √                                 |
| CEP (Anglican Church)                      | √   | √                                   | √                                 |
| Apostolic Church of Australia              | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Armenian Apostolic Church of Australia     | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Baha'i Council for South Eastern Australia |   | √                                   |                                   |
| Board of Jewish Education                  | √   | √                                   |                                   |
| GodSpace (Baptist Union of NSW)            | √   | √                                   | √                                 |
| Buddhist Council                           |   | √                                   |                                   |
| CCD (Catholic)                             | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Catholic Diocese of Sydney                 | √   | √                                   | √                                 |
| Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay             | √   | √                                   | √                                 |
| C3 Church Sydney                           | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Central Coast Evangelical Church           | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Christian Life Church Kyogle               | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Coast Evangelical Church                   |   | √                                   |                                   |
| Churches of Christ                         | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Generate Ministries                        | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia    |   |                                     | √                                 |
| Hilltop Church                             | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Holroyd New Life Church                    | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Hwa Tsang Monastery Inc.                   | √   | √                                   |                                   |
| Islamic Charity Projects Association       |   |                                     | √                                 |
| Islamic Council of NSW                     | √   | √                                   | √                                 |

| Source   | Category 1:<br>Scope and<br>sequence<br>documents | Category 2:<br>Teacher's<br>Manuals | Category 3:<br>Student<br>Manuals |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Losang Dragpa Kadempa Buddhist Centre                            | √   |                                     |                                   |
| NSW Christadelphian Committee                                    | √   |                                     |                                   |
| Oasis Christian Church   |   | √                                   |                                   |
| Presbyterian   |   | √                                   | √                                 |
| Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate of Australia and<br>New Zealand | √   |                                     |                                   |
| The Lighthouse Community   | √   |                                     |                                   |
| The Saiva Manram   | √   | √                                   |                                   |
| Vishva Hindu Parishad of Australia                               |   | √                                   |                                   |
| Primary Ethics   | √   | √                                   |                                   |



## Attachment: Survey instruments

Survey of Principals

Survey of SRE Providers

Survey of SEE Provider

Survey of SRE Coordinators

Survey of SEE Coordinators

Online contribution portal: Survey of Parents/ Caregivers

Online contribution portal: Survey of SRE Teachers

Online contribution portal: Survey of SEE Teachers

Online contribution portal: Survey of Other Interested Parties