

# OTHER ACTIVITIES OF A RELIGIOUS NATURE IN SCHOOLS

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Implementation document for Religious Education policy

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## Document history

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Religion has been a significant aspect of our society and culture. Religion and religious references can be found in many fields of study and permeate some aspects of the school curriculum and student activities.

If religion or religious references in curriculum delivery or student activities are deemed controversial within a school community, the school must refer to the Controversial Issues in Schools policy for directions on how to manage controversial issues raised in teaching and learning material or content presented by teachers or visiting speakers.

## 1 General religious education

Many schools offer subjects that study the world's major religions, what people believe and how that belief affects their lives. Information about these elective subjects is available on the [NSW Education Standards Authority \(NESA\) website](#).

### 1.1 Conscientious objection on religious grounds to part of a course of study

Some subjects may include religious themes or references. The [Education Act 1990 Section 26](#) allows an exemption for students from attending classes at the request of parents/caregivers who conscientiously object on religious grounds to a part of a course of study.

Principals are responsible for responding sensitively to the beliefs of parents/caregivers and their children and for taking all steps to minimise any feelings of discomfort or embarrassment on the part of students. This will be aided by the publication of a clear statement of school policy and procedures for the benefit of staff and parents/caregivers and should contain a statement about:

- the right of parents/caregivers under the [Act](#) to take this action
- the responsibility of the school to provide information about courses if requested
- appropriate supervision or alternative studies
- advice to parents/caregivers about any implication for the award of the Record of School Achievement or Higher School Certificate
- the school's certificate of exemption (Illustration 1)
- keeping a record of the written request by parents/caregivers and the certificate of exemption
- provision of a copy of the school's certificate of exemption to the student.

Certificate of exemption	
Name of school:	_____
Student's name:	_____
First name	Surname
Class/Year:	_____
Under the provisions of Section 26 of the Education Act 1990, the above named student is exempt, on the basis of conscientious objection on religious grounds, from the following classes or lessons:	
_____	
_____	
Principal's signature	_____
Date	_____

Illustration 1: Certificate of Exemption

## 1.2 Curriculum-related programs with a religious base

When considering the use of external curriculum-related programs that have been developed by a religious persuasion, principals must ensure that these programs do not implicitly or explicitly promote that persuasion. Programs that promote a particular religious' persuasion should be considered SRE and are unsuitable for instruction outside the provisions for SRE.

## 2 Voluntary student activities of a religious nature in schools

Voluntary student activities of a religious nature in schools (VSA) **are not** part of Special Religious Education (SRE) but may operate under the auspices and supervision of the principal. Examples of VSA include:

- student and/or volunteer led prayer groups
- student and/or volunteer led discussion groups of a religious nature
- talks organised by visitors of religious organisations
- distribution of religious materials to students, when it supports local community expectations.

These may be conducted in or outside school premises. Principals in their supervision of VSA must ensure that:

- parental permission is obtained
- appropriate child protection checks and practices in relation to any volunteers coming from outside the school (see Appendix 10 in the [WWCC Policy](#))
- the content of the activities undertaken are monitored
- an attendance register for all students participating is maintained
- students or members of religious persuasions do not engage in attempts to proselytise or convert non-adherents of their religion to their faith during school authorised activities. Proselytising or converting non-adherents refers to behaviours intended to put pressure on students who do not have permission to participate in VSA.

A [Principal Checklist](#) is available to assist with implementing VSA.

If a parent/caregiver decides to send their child to an event planned by an external organisation, which is not supported by the school principal, the absence would be recorded as unjustified as explained under the [Student Attendance in Government Schools – Procedures](#).

### 2.1 School prayers

Schools are permitted to use or to write school prayers. These prayers are to be interdenominational Christian or multi-faith to reflect the diversity of the school community.

Consultation with the school community should occur about both the prayer and the types of occasions on which it will be used.

The *Education Act 1990*, section 33 states parents/caregivers can object to any general religious education. Children of parents/caregivers who have indicated this objection, including their children being present when prayers are said, should be supervised in another area of the school.

## **2.2 Commemorations, religious observances and multi-faith services in schools**

Schools may wish to hold an event that contains religious elements such as school commemorations, religious observances and multi-faith services.

These events are to be determined in consultation with the school community and parents/caregivers are notified of the nature of the service and reminded of their right to object to the inclusion of their children.

Schools must provide alternative activities in another area of the school for students who do not participate.

Providers of SRE may be invited to participate in commemorations and observances. This includes events such as Education Week, Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and school centenaries.

Religious observances can be conducted as part of GRE and include religious observances from a range of faith groups.

When schools consider a multi-faith service, religious groups and individuals should not be pressured to compromise their faith for the sake of holding the service.

Where there is a desire to bring together people of different religions and a multi-faith service is considered appropriate, the following principles should apply:

- all religious leaders in the local community should be invited to participate from commencement of preparation of the service.
- a local committee set up to develop the service should have adequate representation from all relevant religious groups.
- a 'Multi-Faith Order of Service' should be used to reflect the inclusion of many faiths.

## **2.3 Chaplains**

School Chaplaincy does not fall within the religious education policy. More information on the Commonwealth National School Chaplaincy Program is available on the department's [website](#).