

# SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROCEDURES

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Implementation document for the Religious Education policy

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## Document history

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1.0.0	20/12/2017	First publication SRE Procedures V1.0 Considers the recommendations of the 2015 Review of Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics in NSW government schools. These procedures superseded the Religious Education Implementation Procedures.	Deputy Secretary, Educational Services
1.0.1	10/01/2019	Update of website links	Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics Officer
1.0.2	04/05/2020	Update of contact details	Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics Officer
1.0.3	15/07/2021	Update of website links	Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics Officer
1.1.0	25/07/2022	Updated website links. Updated section 4.2 to reflect current Working with Children Check procedures	A/Executive Director, Curriculum and Reform

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# 1 Introduction

Special religious education (SRE) is the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion delivered by authorised representatives of that persuasion. It is the distinctive religious tenets and beliefs of the home and family, provided by the churches and other religious groups for children of parents expressing the desire that they receive such teaching.

Special education in ethics (SEE) is education in ethical decision making, action and reflection within a secular framework, based on a branch of philosophy. The [Special Education in Ethics policy and Procedures](#) are available on the [religion and ethics website](#).

General religious education is education about the world's major religions, what people believe and how that belief affects their lives. It is taught through the school curriculum. Further information is available on the [NSW Education Standards Authority \(NESA\) website](#).

Voluntary student activities of a religious nature in schools (VSA) is not part of SRE and is not part of the school or SRE curriculum. Information on VSA is available on the [voluntary activities](#) page of the [religion and ethics website](#).

## 2 Context

[Section 32](#) of the Education Act 1990 requires that 'in every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion'. The provision of SRE is not government funded.

The procedure for SRE in public schools consider the:

- Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools (1980) report recommendations 36-72 that were adopted by the government of the day as the basis of an agreement with the churches about the implementation of SRE
- option of SEE for parents/caregivers who do not wish their children to attend SRE (s33A of the Education Act 1990)
- Final Report from the Inquiry into Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011 recommendations
- 2015 Review of Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics in NSW government schools recommendations.

These procedures should be read in conjunction with the [Religious Education policy](#) and [Special Education in Ethics policy](#) and Procedures, to which they are related.

## 3 Responsibilities of schools

### 3.1 Communication about SRE

Parents/caregivers have the right to know how SRE will be organised each school year and which religious organisations will be available to deliver it.

An implementation flowchart assists principals with decisions associated with student participation in SRE. Support documents for schools, including the SRE and SEE participation letter, can be found on the religion and ethics website.

Parents/caregivers can choose to enrol their child into SRE from the school's available approved provider(s) or to withdraw their child from SRE. Students withdrawn from SRE engage in alternative meaningful activities or SEE where available.

A parent/caregiver may at any time notify the school in writing that they do not wish their child to attend SRE or to change their SRE nomination. Students are to continue in the same arrangement as the previous year, unless a parent/caregiver has requested a change.

### 3.2 Provision of SRE

Principals must allow time for SRE where authorised representatives of approved providers are available. SRE is an integral part of school activities, taking place during school hours and under the jurisdiction of the school.

Principals must ensure that no academic instruction or formal school activities occur during time set aside for SRE.

SRE is organised by negotiation and agreement between the principal and the approved providers. Principals need to be sensitive to the fact that SRE teachers are volunteers and that they may have other commitments.

On average, not less than 30 minutes and not more than one hour of meaningful teaching time per week should be allocated for SRE. The lessons or period length for SRE should be consistent with the age and attention span of the students.

A flexible time schedule may be used depending on the length of the school's standard period. For example, schools may hold SRE fortnightly for a minimum of one hour or schools may hold an assembly once per month for a minimum of two hours. These variations can be made if the principal and the approved providers agree and provided that the time allocated does not exceed an average of one hour per school week. Arrangements are reviewed regularly by the principal.

Principals must ensure that adequate learning facilities are provided for the delivery of SRE/SEE, including adequate accommodation and access to classrooms. If available, the principal may consider providing access for the use of school technology for the purposes of delivery of SRE. Providers should negotiate this with the principal of individual schools.

Principals are required to notify representatives of approved providers and their teachers of any changes to school routines that may impact on the scheduled time of SRE classes. This advice should be provided well in advance if known.

Schools must adhere to privacy legislation and make sure that confidential information, in any form, cannot be accessed by unauthorised persons. This includes details about students and SRE teachers.

Schools are responsible for:

- cross-referencing SRE teachers on the department's Not to be Employed (NTBE) database in Electronic Casual Pay Claims (eCPC) each term or when a new SRE teacher commences
- checking that religious groups and their teachers are an approved provider to deliver SRE
- providing access to current information about approved providers working in their school, including links to the approved providers' authorised curriculum scope and sequence(s) and information on alternative meaningful activities. This information needs to be provided at enrolment, on the school's website, and in the school newsletter
- student behaviour management and retain duty of care, including for student supervision, health, safety and wellbeing, during SRE. Schools intervene in cases where it is necessary to maintain good order and conduct. It is the responsibility of the principal to manage such cases with the representative of the approved provider.

Class teachers are not required to attend classes in SRE, but may, with the agreement of the teacher of SRE or at the request of the principal, remain in the classroom to assist with and monitor student behaviour. This is at the discretion of the principal and should be negotiated with the SRE provider.

In line with the department's Code of Conduct, employees of the department are not to teach SRE whilst on duty.

A combined arrangement as outlined in section 4.4, should be reviewed periodically by the school and the approved providers involved.

### **3.3 Students not attending SRE**

In the allocated time/s set aside for SRE, students not attending are to be provided with supervised alternative meaningful activities. This could include reading, private study or completing homework. They must be in a separate physical space from SRE classes and be supervised by a member of the school staff.

Supervision of students is to be consistent with the department's duty of care requirements outlined in the Code of Conduct. Students are not to be participating in lessons in the school curriculum or other extra-curricular activities during this time.

SEE is an option for students not attending SRE, where it is available and requested by the parents/caregivers. The Special Education in Ethics Procedures provide further information about SEE.

### **3.4 School SRE coordinator**

Where appropriate, a member of staff may be appointed as the school's SRE coordinator. Duties of the coordinator include:

- arranging meetings early in term 4 of each year between the school and representatives of the approved providers to discuss SRE organisation for the following year, including estimated numbers
- liaising with SRE teachers to:
  - provide a site induction and familiarise them with the procedures and operations of the school
  - advise of any variations of school routine affecting SRE
  - provide a class list and any special information, such as disability or special needs, which might affect the health, behaviour or performance of particular students

- maintaining SRE records, including:
  - an up-to-date list of the authorised SRE teachers from the approved religious providers
  - a list of the names of students in each class for SRE.
- advising parents/caregivers of arrangements for SRE classes for the next year and ongoing information about any changes as they occur.

### 3.5 School managed complaints

Principals determine whether complaints are to be managed by the school or by the provider. Principals make clear to complainants what issues are the responsibility of the school to resolve and what are the responsibility of the provider to resolve. For example, alleged teaching inefficiency or inappropriate lesson content are managed by the provider.

School managed complaints follow the department's Complaints Handling policy. If a principal receives allegations of improper behaviour or other complaints of a serious nature, it must be managed in accordance with the department's policies and procedures. Any allegations of a child protection nature must be referred to the department's Professional and Ethical Standards (PES) directorate, which will determine how the matter should proceed.

## 4 Responsibilities of providers

### 4.1 Approval to deliver SRE

Religious persuasions must have the approval of the Minister for Education to deliver SRE. Only persons authorised by an approved religious persuasion are permitted to teach SRE.

Religious persuasions wishing to obtain approval to deliver SRE should review the application process.

To maintain approval to deliver SRE every approved provider must return to the department, the annual assurance which includes but is not limited to having procedures in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 including verification of the Working with Children Check (WWCC) clearance.

The department's SRE and SEE Officer will send to approved providers the annual assurance via email in term 4. This must be returned before the start of term 1 of the following school year.

Approved providers will lose their approved provider status if the responsibilities outlined in the annual assurance are not addressed.

### 4.2 Recruitment, training and support

It is the responsibility of an approved provider to recruit, train and authorise sufficient teachers of SRE, and to inform the school of the names, contact details and date of birth of SRE teachers. The approved provider should inform the principal when there are insufficient authorised teachers available.

Approved providers must ensure that all personnel over the age of 18 years have had a Working with Children Check (WWCC) clearance. A volunteer under the age of 18 is exempt from needing a WWCC and is required to complete the approved provider's volunteer authorisation form which has been signed by the volunteer's parent, the volunteer's school and an authorised representative of the approved provider or the department's Declaration for child related workers. A volunteer under 18 is to be supervised by an SRE teacher on a school site.

The provider must ensure that all SRE teachers are provided with a name badge that must always be worn on a school site. The badge must include the name of the approved provider.

Approved providers are required to have in place a system of authorised initial training, regular ongoing training and support, including mentoring for their SRE teachers. The training is to include child protection, classroom management, and how to implement the approved provider's authorised curriculum sensitively and in an age-appropriate manner. This information is to be published on the approved provider's website.

Approved providers should conduct regular reviews of SRE teaching and use of approved curriculum. Approved providers are required to report the results of the review through the annual assurance process including efforts to address any identified issues.

### **4.3 Lesson content**

It is the responsibility of an approved provider to:

- authorise the materials and pedagogy used by SRE teachers, have a process in place to manage other materials, including internet resources, identified by the SRE teacher and return the annual assurance to the department as outlined in [section 4.1](#)
- make their curriculum scope and sequence(s) accessible on their website in sufficient detail for parents/caregivers and schools to be able to understand what is covered in SRE lessons
- provide the link to their website to the school so it can be placed on the school's website to be easily accessible to parents/caregivers
- provide information about the content of lessons when requested by parents/caregivers/principals
- organise any excursion with the consent of the principal and in accordance with the department's [Excursions policy](#).

### **4.4 Provider managed complaints**

Approved providers must make publicly available on their website their complaints procedures. Complaints must be resolved within a reasonable timeframe.

Where combined arrangements exist, the approved providers must clearly identify to the school which approved provider is responsible for handling complaints.

### **4.5 Combined arrangements**

Combined arrangements occur in some schools in the delivery of SRE. Religious persuasions may decide to provide a combined arrangement for several reasons, including human resource management. No religious persuasion should be compelled to participate in this form of organisation.

In combined arrangements, each religious persuasion must be an approved provider. The curriculum and the SRE teacher, must be authorised by at least one of the approved providers.

The approved providers must clearly identify to the school which approved provider is responsible for authorising the curriculum and the appropriate website link.

In a combined arrangement, only those students whose parents/caregivers have nominated one of the participating religious persuasions are to be included. A combined arrangement should be reviewed periodically by the school and the approved providers involved.