

Special Religious Instruction

Purpose of this policy

To ensure schools comply with legislation and policy for providing special religious instruction.

Legislation

The provision of special religious instruction in Victorian government schools is legislated in Section 2.2.11 of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (the *Act*).

The *Act* makes the following distinctions. It defines:

- general religious education as ‘education about major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world
- special religious instruction (SRI) as ‘instruction provided by churches and other religious groups and based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs.’

Conditions

Based on the provision in the *Act* the following conditions apply for the provision of SRI:

- Any SRI delivered in a school should be provided during the hours set aside for the instruction of students.
- Persons providing SRI must be accredited representatives of churches or religious groups and who are approved by the Minister for the purpose.
- SRI must be given on the basis of the normal class organisation of the school except where the Minister authorises some other basis to be observed.
- Attendance at SRI is not to be compulsory for any student whose parents desire that he or she be excused from attending.

Additional advice

Principals must:

- obtain parental advice via the prescribed [GC 566 form\(PDF - 40Kb\)](#) for their child to participate or not participate in SRI
- arrange for the provision of SRI where an accredited and approved instructor is available
- ensure that attendance at SRI classes is not compulsory for any student whose parents request that he/she be excused from attending
- schedule SRI in the school timetable (usually 30 minutes per week) when accredited and approved instructors are available
- ensure appropriate supervision for students who attend SRI
- ensure that students who do not attend SRI are appropriately supervised by teachers, and engaged in positive, independent learning such as self-study, including revision or other activities, for example, community service, peer mentoring, participation in clubs or instruction in areas outside the core curriculum
- ensure core curriculum is not delivered to non-attendees during the period of SRI
- ensure students do not leave the school premises for SRI held elsewhere except where the Minister authorises some other basis to be observed
- request and retain a copy of the instructor’s formal accreditation in the school’s records
- ensure compliance with the school council’s volunteer policy see: [Volunteer Checks](#).

Accredited and approved instructors

Only accredited instructors, approved by the Minister for Education may deliver SRI in Victorian government schools.

Accreditation includes a Working with Children Check, registration, training, minimum suitability standards for persons who work or volunteer with children, and Ministerial approval.

The Department engages two major organisations to administer the accreditation and approval of religious instructors. They are (1) ACCESS Ministries, and (2) World Conference of Religions for Peace.

ACCESS Ministries' religious instructors deliver *Religion in Life*® Christian Religious Education, which is an agreed syllabus representing 12 Christian denominations. Students receiving such instruction are not to be grouped for SRI according to denomination, but taught in their usual classes.

The World Conference of Religions for Peace (a non-government organisation associated with the United Nations to interface with the world's faith communities), currently administers the accreditation and approval process for religious instructors in other recognised faiths including Bahá'í, Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism and Orthodox Christianity.

The Catholic Education Office/Diocese and United Jewish Education Board also accredit religious instructors in their respective faiths.

Note: When parents request SRI in a faith that is not available at the school, the principal should advise them that such instruction can only be scheduled if the particular religious group provides an accredited instructor who is approved by the Minister for Education.

Parents may withdraw consent for their child's participation in SRI by notifying the principal in writing. It is not necessary to renew or withdraw consent each year.

At the start of each year ACCESS Ministries provides schools with the names of accredited instructors allocated to them. Schools are also informed of changes to instructors during the year. This information should be retained on file at the school.

Related policies

- [Duty of Care](#)
- [Supervision](#)
- [Volunteer Checks](#)

Department resources

For more information:

- see: [Fact Sheet – Principle of Secular Education](#); or
 - contact: Student Wellbeing Division (03) 9637 2481.
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