



INFORMATION SHEET

DEECD SCHOOL POLICY FOR SRI - CHANGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Is SRI 'opt-in' or 'opt-out'?

DEECD policy changed in 2011 so that SRI is now 'opt-in'. This was emphasised at a recent court hearing where lawyers acting for DEECD stated several times that DEECD policy is now 'opt-in'. The policy change has not been clearly communicated by DEECD to schools.

Schools were previously required to offer SRI on an 'opt-out' basis. In the old 'opt-out' system, children were included in SRI classes unless their parent specifically requested that they be excluded.

In the current 'opt-in' system, children are ONLY included in SRI classes where the school has obtained parental advice via the prescribed GC 566 form stating that they want their child to receive SRI.

Families were given a form seeking parental advice about SRI when they started at the school. Do we have to circulate the new form to everyone or just to new students?

Schools must circulate the new GC 566 form to ALL families to comply with the new DEECD policy.

The prescribed form used to state, "If a response is not received within 14 days, your child will receive special religious instruction in accordance with ACCESS Ministries' agreed Christian syllabus". Children who are currently participating in SRI classes may have been included because their family did not return a parental advice form on enrolment. This now contravenes DEECD policy.

Children should ONLY be included in SRI classes where the school has obtained parental advice via the prescribed GC 566 form stating that they want their child to receive SRI.

Do parents have to return a form saying 'no' to ensure their children do not participate in SRI?

NO. Children should ONLY be included in SRI classes where the school has obtained parental advice via the prescribed GC 566 form stating that they want their child to receive SRI. If a family has not returned a GC 566 form, the child CANNOT be included in an SRI class.

What should a school do if a family has not returned the GC 566 form after it has been circulated?

The school DOES NOT have to follow up with the family and request that a form indicating 'no' be returned to the school.

The school must not include the child in SRI classes.

Can schools rely on what is indicated on a student's enrolment form to determine whether they should participate in SRI?

NO. DEECD policy states that children should ONLY be included in SRI classes where the school has obtained parental advice via the prescribed GC 566 form. Relying on what is indicated on a student's enrolment form to determine whether they participate in SRI contravenes DEECD policy.

What should a school do if children say they do not want to participate in SRI classes?

Where the school has obtained parental advice via the prescribed GC 566 form stating that they want their child to receive SRI, the child should be included in the SRI class. The school principal will need written advice from the family before withdrawing the child. Written advice withdrawing a child from SRI does not need to be on a GC 566 form. Written advice may also be in the form of an email.

What do schools do if families have paid for SRI materials (for example, as part of a booklist package) but has not returned a GC 566 form?

If a family has not returned a GC 566 form, the child CANNOT be included in an SRI class. The school may choose to forward any SRI materials that have been paid for to the family.

What activities can be offered to children who do not participate in SRI while SRI classes take place?

Children who do not participate in SRI must be engaged in positive, independent learning. This can include revision or other activities, for example, community service, peer mentoring, participation in clubs or instruction in areas outside the core curriculum.

Can the children who do not participate in SRI stay in the classroom while SRI classes take place?

NO. If families have asked that their children not participate in SRI, they can reasonably assume that their child will not remain in the room while SRI is taking place.

Can children who do not participate in SRI be left on their own or be left under the supervision of office or other non-teaching staff while SRI classes take place?

NO. Schools must ensure that students not attending SRI are appropriately supervised by TEACHERS.

Children not participating in SRI should not be placed in areas that are normally used for students who have been misbehaving or being disruptive as this could be misinterpreted to mean they have done something wrong by not attending.

Can schools survey families about Special Religious Instruction?

Some schools have been advised that they cannot survey their school community about SRI.

The School Council, as the elected governing body of the school, must take all reasonable steps to ensure that it is representing the local community when making decisions in regard to the school and the students at the school. The School Council may draft a survey and request that it be circulated, with responses returned to the President or Committee Chair for analysis and reporting to the whole School Council.

FIRIS can provide schools with a sample survey. Contact details: religionsinschool@gmail.com

The Association of School Councils in Victoria (ASCIV) can provide advice on this. Contact details: 9808 2499, info@asciv.org.au

Can schools provide additional information about the alternatives offered to children when circulating the GC 566 form?

YES. As long as parental advice regarding SRI is sought on the prescribed form, there is nothing preventing schools providing additional information to ensure that families are able to make an informed choice.

Parents should be made aware of the alternatives offered if their child does not participate in SRI.

A sample cover letter for schools to use when circulating the new GC 566 form is shown below.

To all families,

At ### Primary School we offer Special Religious Instruction (SRI) in accordance with the Education and Training Reform Act. The school is obliged to provide SRI if approached by an accredited and approved religious instructor.

According to Department of Education and Early Childhood Development policy, principals must obtain parental advice on the prescribed form (see over) for their child to participate or not participate in SRI. Generally, this form is completed on enrolment or when SRI is introduced into the school, but as the prescribed form has recently changed, the new form is being circulated to all families.

SRI is now offered on an 'opt-in' basis. This means that if you do not indicate that you want your child to participate, they will not attend the class.

SRI is 'instruction provided by churches and other religious groups and based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs'. This is different to General Religious Education, which is 'education about major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world'.

At ### Primary School, the only SRI currently available is ACCESS Ministries' agreed Christian syllabus Religion in Life® (### amend as required ###). SRI is not delivered by teachers, it is delivered by volunteers. Classes run for 30 minutes each week and take place during school hours.

Children who do not participate in SRI classes participate in a range of teacher-led activities, including ###.

The activities offered depend on the number of students that are not participating in SRI classes. The school and teachers also do their best to ensure that children who do not participate in the SRI classes are not made to feel that they are doing anything wrong or are missing out.

Please complete and return the form over if you wish for your child to participate in SRI.

You may withdraw your child from SRI classes at any time by notifying the school principal in writing.

Yours sincerely,

Signed The Principal

Note from DEECD: SRI is not regarded as core curriculum.
The Act permits SRI to be given in Government schools during school hours.
The Act does not prescribe a teaching qualification for approved and accredited representatives of churches or other religious groups.
Principals should make every effort to ensure that a response is obtained from parents in regard to participation or non-participation of their children in SRI.
The CASES21 Enrolment Form asks a specific question about SRI and not about 'general religious instruction'.
Principals and school councils do not have discretion concerning the provision of SRI. Schools are required ensure parental wishes have been sought and arrange for SRI provision, as necessary, if and when approached by persons who are accredited representatives of churches or other religious groups and who are approved by the Minister for the purpose.