

Special Religious Education (SRE) Special Education in Ethics (SEE) Voluntary Student Activity of a Religious Nature in Schools (VSA)

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Q1 What is Special Religious Education?

Special Religious Education (SRE) is education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion by authorised representatives of that persuasion. **[TOP]**

Q2 What is General Religious Education?

General Religious Education (GRE) 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. **[TOP]**

Q3 Is Special Religious Education the same as Scripture?

The traditional term for Special Religious Education (SRE) was 'Scripture'. We now only use 'SRE'. **[TOP]**

Q4 What is Special Education in Ethics?

Special Education in Ethics (SEE) is education in ethical decision making, action and reflection within a secular framework, based on a branch of philosophy.

SEE is an option for students who do not attend Special Religious Education (SRE), where this is practicable and requested by the parents/caregivers. SEE is currently available for students K-6.

If a school does not currently have SEE established, and a parent requests it, the principal is to provide the name and contact details for the approved provider, Primary Ethics: www.primaryethics.com.au. **[TOP]**

Q5 What is a Voluntary Student Activity of a Religious Nature in Schools?

Voluntary Student Activities of a Religious Nature in Schools (VSA) is any activity of a religious nature, including those provided by religious organisations.

VSA includes student and/or volunteer led prayer groups, breakfast or lunchtime clubs, and religious youth groups. VSA is not part of Special Religious Education (SRE) and is not part of the curriculum. **[TOP]**

Q6 Is a prayer group part of Voluntary Student Activity of a Religious Nature in School?

Yes. A prayer group is a Voluntary Student Activity of a Religious Nature in Schools (VSA). VSA includes student and/or volunteer led prayer groups. **[TOP]**

Q7 Are schools required to offer Voluntary Student Activities/Prayer Groups?

No. Principals may choose to allow Voluntary Student Activity of a Religious Nature in Schools (VSA) to operate within their school, when it aligns with local community expectations. **[TOP]**

Q8 What is 'Alternative Meaningful Activities', also known as 'non-SRE'?

'Alternative Meaningful Activities' or 'Non-SRE' neither compete with Special Religious Education (SRE) nor are they lessons in the curriculum. Suitable activities may include reading, private study, completing homework or other activities as considered to be appropriate by the school community.

Schools include their plan for Alternative Meaningful Activities in general information to parents/caregivers on their school website and in other forms of communication. **[TOP]**

Q9 Can I continue timetabled lessons and simply withdraw the students who participate in Special Religious Education/Special Education in Ethics?

No. Principals support Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) by ensuring that no academic instruction or formal school activities occur during time set aside for SRE/SEE. Such activities create conflict of choice for some parents and students attending SRE/SEE. **[TOP]**

Q10 Am I required to offer Special Religious Education/Special Education in Ethics?

Yes. Principals allow time for Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) where authorised representatives of approved providers are available.

Section 32 of the Education Act 1990 states 'In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion'.

Section 33A of the Education Act 1990 states 'Special education in ethics is allowed as a secular alternative to special religious education at government schools.'

SEE is currently available for students K-6. **[TOP]**

Q11 How often do I have to offer Special Religious Education/Special Education in Ethics?

Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) is organised by negotiation and agreement between the principal and the approved religious providers.

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

A flexible time schedule may be used, particularly in a high school depending on the length of the school's standard period. This time may vary, with a minimum of 30 minutes to a maximum of 60 minutes. **[TOP]**

Q12 Can schools host events which are linked to religious activities such as Diwali, Hanukah, Christmas, Eid, Easter, etc?

Yes. There are two ways this can occur.

- When a religious event is celebrated during Special Religious Education (SRE) time, students do not need further parental permission to attend. The usual arrangements are to remain in place for students who do not attend SRE.
- When an event is linked to a religious activity and supports local community expectations and it is celebrated outside of SRE time e.g. a whole school Christmas activity, parents/caregivers should be notified of the activity and reminded of their right to object to the inclusion of their children. Schools are to provide alternative activities in another area of the school for students who do not participate. **[TOP]**

Q13 How often should I meet with my Approved Providers?

Schools should have a meeting early in Term 4 with representatives of the approved providers to discuss Special Religious Education (SRE) & Special Education in Ethics (SEE) organisation for the following year. Any changes to SRE/SEE should be negotiated with and communicated to all approved providers at the school. **[TOP]**

Q14 What is the schools requirement around Working with Children Check Clearance for SRE/SEE?

Schools do not monitor the NSW Working with Children Check ("WWCC") Clearance of Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) teachers. Approved providers are required to give the school a list of the names and contact details of the SRE/SEE teachers and local representatives.

Approved Providers submit an annual assurance to the Department stating that they currently have in place processes that satisfy the requirements for teaching SRE/SEE in NSW Government schools. The provider must ensure that all SRE teachers are provided with a name badge that includes the name of the authorising approved provider. The name badge is to be worn at all times when on a school site.

The Annual Assurance includes the NSW Working with Children Check ("WWCC") Clearance for SRE teachers

and the Working with Children Declaration for the SEE teachers until they are phased to the WWCC on 31 March 2018. The Approved Provider list is updated annually, and as required, ensuring all approved providers on the list meet the criteria. **[TOP]**

Q15 What is the responsibility of the Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics Coordinator at the school?

Where appropriate, a member of staff is appointed as the school's Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) coordinator. The coordinator should read the SRE and SEE Policy and Implementation Procedures. Duties of the coordinator include:

- arranging meetings early in Term 4 between the school and representatives of the approved providers to discuss SRE/SEE organisation for the following year.
- liaising with SRE/SEE 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 SRE/SEE.
- maintaining SRE/SEE records, including an up-to-date list of the authorised SRE/SEE teachers from the approved providers, and a list of the names of students in each class for SRE/SEE teachers .
- advising parents/caregivers of arrangements for SRE/SEE classes for the next year and ongoing information about any changes as they occur. **[TOP]**

Q16 How do I know who is approved to deliver Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics at my school?

Only those who are on the **Approved Provider list** on the curriculum support website are approved to deliver Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) in NSW Government schools.

When you are approached by someone offering SRE/SEE, you must ask who they represent and who is the Approved Provider, then check against the Approved Provider list. **[TOP]**

Q17 What is an approved provider of Special Religious Education? How do they get approved?

Religious persuasions must have the approval of the Minister for Education to deliver Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW Government schools. Religious persuasions wishing to obtain approval should contact the SRE and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) Officer.

The typical process followed for applications to become an approved provider of SRE involves: careful analysis of the application; seeking further information from the applicant where necessary; obtaining further advice where necessary; and seeking advice from the SRE Consultative Committee where appropriate. Following the process a recommendation is made to the Minister for Education who makes the final decision to approve or not approve an application.

The length of time for an application to become an approved provider can vary and is dependent on several factors including the complexity of the application and the scheduling of the SRE Consultative Committee meetings. The SRE Consultative Committee usually meets four times a year. The average length to process an application is currently 165 calendar days.

The criteria for approval are based on the requirements under Section 32 of the Education Act 1990, Recommendations 36-72 from the Rawlinson Report: Religion in education in NSW Government schools and Recommendation 4 of the General Purpose Standing Committee No 2, Inquiry into the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011. **[TOP]**

Q18 Is the school required to request an Approved Provider?

No. If a parent/caregiver has requested a religious persuasion or Special Education in Ethics (SEE), which is not currently available at the school, the school is to provide them with the names and contact details of **Approved Providers**. It is the responsibility of the parent/caregiver to follow up with the Approved Provider.

It is the responsibility of Approved Providers to contact schools and to recruit, train, and authorise teachers of SRE/SEE. **[TOP]**

Q19 What information should the school receive from the Approved Providers at their school?

The Approved Provider must ensure that the school is informed of the names and contact details of its local representatives and authorised teachers.

The provider must ensure that all Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) teachers are provided with a name badge that includes the name of the authorising Approved Provider. The name badge is to be worn at all times when on a school site. **[TOP]**

Q20 What information should be on my school website?

Parents/caregivers have the right to general information about how Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special

Education in Ethics (SEE) will be organised each year and which organisations will deliver it. Schools should provide general information on the school website.

Schools can also use social media to communicate general information about SRE/SEE. All forms of communication can be used to regularly update the information and keep your community well informed. **[TOP]**

Q21 When should I update the information on my school website?

Schools are encouraged to provide information to parents/caregivers and the wider community regarding Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) and alternative meaningful activities offered at the school. Any changes to SRE/SEE, or alternative meaningful activities options should be communicated to the school community.

Information should be updated whenever a change or variation occurs to existing choices and programs provided by the school. **[TOP]**

Q22 What information should be in the school newsletter or other school communication resources?

Parents/caregivers have the right to general information about how Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) will be organised each year and which organisations will deliver it.

Any changes to SRE, SEE and/or alternative activities options should be communicated to the school community. **[TOP]**

Q23 What is a combined arrangement or 'board'?

Religious persuasions may decide to provide a combined arrangement or use a 'board' structure. If this occurs, each religious persuasion must be an approved provider of Special Religious Education (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. 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. **[TOP]**

Q24 Can a 'Multi-faith service' occur at my school?

Yes. 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 as the word 'worship' may create barriers to participation on such occasions. Individual religious groups are not expected to compromise their beliefs for the sake of holding such a service. **[TOP]**

Q25 Can I ask an Authorised Provider to use a covered outdoor learning area (COLA)?

Yes. Principals support Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) by making adequate facilities available for the provision of SRE/SEE, including timetable provisions and learning spaces. Consultation and regular communication will assist in equitably allocating learning spaces for the delivery of SRE/SEE. **[TOP]**

Q26 Can schools review materials/resources used in Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics at the school?

Yes. The principal and parent/caregiver can request information about the content of lessons from the Approved Provider.

The principal is not responsible for, and does not disseminate details of, lesson content for Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE), but will provide the name and contact details of the Approved Provider or their local representative when requested by a parent/caregiver. **[TOP]**

Q27 What information is the school required to provide to Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics teachers?

Schools must provide a site orientation, including what to do during an evacuation, lock down or lock out.

Student information is confidential and teachers of Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) are only to be given the names of the students in their class and any special information, such as disability or special needs, which might affect the health, behaviour or performance of particular students. **[TOP]**

Q28 What is Chaplaincy?

The National School Chaplaincy Programme (NSCP) does not fall within the religious education policy.

NSCP is a Commonwealth-funded initiative to support the emotional wellbeing of students and the school community through the provision of pastoral care. The New South Wales Government administers the Programme on behalf of the Commonwealth. For more information on the NSCP, please visit:

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studentwellbeing/chaplaincy-programme/index.php> **[TOP]**

Q29 Can I have a school prayer?

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. Section 33 of the Education Act 1990 states that 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. **[TOP]**

Q30 What are my obligations when approved providers request to use school resources?

It is at the principal's discretion to determine if he/she wants to support the requests made by approved providers in relation to the use of school-based resources, including interactive whiteboards. **[TOP]**

For more information contact

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