

Mr Grant Sparke  
Principal  
Greystanes High School  
Beresford Road  
Greystanes NSW 2145



Dear Mr Sparke

Complaint regarding the implementation of Special Religious Education at  
Greystanes High School

Fairness in Religions in School (FIRIS) is writing to lodge a formal complaint regarding information provided in the Years 7-11 student handbooks published by Greystanes High School (GHS) describing the enrolment process for Special Religious Education (SRE) in 2020 and the seeming failure of the school's website to provide information about SRE.

On page 28 of the *Student Handbook Year 7 2020* it states (see **Attachment 1**) –

*Scripture classes will be provided for **all** students in Years 7-11. Scripture classes will most likely take place on Tuesday for Year 7. An information note will be sent out to parents prior to Scripture class. (emphasis added)*

Please note that a copy of the SRE Participation Letter must be sent to the parents/carers of all enrolling Year 7 students –

- listing all of the names of the approved SRE provider(s) working at GHS.
  - NOTE: If a combined arrangement is in operation, the school needs to make it clear which approved providers are involved.
- providing parents/carers with the option to object to their child/ren's participation in SRE.

FIRIS notes that the same statements are made in the Year 8 (p. 28), Year 9 (p. 28), Year 10 (p. 28), and Year 11 (p. 30) student handbooks.

Therefore, the SRE Participation Letter must also be sent to the parents of any new students enrolling in those years at GHS.

FIRIS is specifically lodging a complaint about the following statement, also on page 28 of the *Student Handbook Year 7 2020* and on the pages identified above for the handbooks for Years 8-11 –

*Students who do not wish to attend scripture **must** bring a note signed by a caregiver to their class teacher. Alternative arrangements will be made for these students. (emphasis added)*

FIRIS is concerned that this statement indicates that there is a high likelihood that students are being placed in SRE without the informed and express consent of parents/carers. It is not the case that a note 'must' be submitted in order for a student to be placed in 'alternative meaningful activities'

The SRE and SEE Flowchart (see **Attachment 2**) states clearly –

*If the student starts school before the return of the participation letter, the student is to participate in alternative meaningful activities pending a response.*

<https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/8c236afd-66cb-4264-9547-380becc1b085/1/sre-see-flowchart.docx> - accessed 02.02.2020

This means that students cannot be placed in SRE classes without the written express consent of their parents/carers. This enables parents/carers to exercise their right to not declare their religion or belief, by choosing to not return the letter, without the violation of their child/ren's right not to be instructed in the religion or belief of others contrary to the wishes of their parents/carers.<sup>1</sup>

Please also note that based on information provided by the NSW Minister for Education, the Religious Education Implementation Procedures in place from July 2013 to January 2019 also required that students were to be placed in 'alternative meaningful activities' in the absence of written express consent from parents. This consent was in the form of a declaration on the enrolment form or in a returned SRE Participation Letter consenting to their child's participation in SRE.

FIRIS informed GHS of the information provided by the Minister in a letter dated 23 July 2018 attached to an email addressed to the principal of GHS dated 24 July 2018 (see **Attachments 3 & 4**).

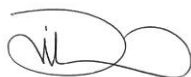
FIRIS is also lodging a complaint that the school's website does not seem to provide the information regarding SRE required by the Special Religious Education Procedures and its supporting documents.

In consideration of the above, FIRIS requests that you –

- ensure the SRE Participation Letter is completed in agreement with the Special Religious Education Procedures and its supporting documents and that it is sent to the parents/carers of all enrolling Year 7 students and new students in Years 8-11
- amend the second statement quoted from the Handbook above to reflect the information above and inform parents/carers that this has occurred
- ensure that all enrolling Year 7 students and new students in Years 8-11 are enrolled in either SRE or 'alternative meaningful activities' in accordance with the Special Religious Education Implementation Procedures and all of its supporting documents
- ensure that only students with the written consent of their parents/carers to attend SRE on file are enrolled in SRE
- ensure that parents/carers are provided with information regarding SRE on the school's website in accordance the Special Religious Education Procedures and its supporting documents.

FIRIS looks forward to your response

Yours sincerely



Dr Darrin Morgan (on behalf of FIRIS)

03 February 2020

---

<sup>1</sup> Article 3 of the United Nations' General Comment 22 states that, in accordance with articles 18(2) and 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 'no one can be compelled to reveal his thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief'.

Section 5(2) of the United Nations' *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief* states that a child has the right to not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians.