

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell MLC
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001



Dear Minister for Education

Concerns regarding the content of NSW Special Religious Education lessons

Fairness in Religions in School (FIRIS) is writing to you regarding a statement made by ChristianSRE on its Facebook page on 20 August 2019. The post is located here –

<https://www.facebook.com/ChristianSREnsw/photos/a.1440433666035372/2372977109447685/?type=3&theater>

- and see Attachments 1 and 2 for screenshots and the text of the post.

In that post ChristianSRE make the following statement in relation to a report regarding Special Religious Education (SRE) written by Professor Zehavit Gross and Professor Emerita Suzanne Rutland –

The report highlighted the recent mass shootings in New Zealand, suicide bombings in Sri Lanka and the San Diego synagogue shooting as potential topics of discussion among students.

FIRIS would also like to draw your attention to an earlier post on the ChristianSRE Facebook page (dated 17 June 2019) which stated –

Christian SRE remains a safe place for students to share their feelings and ideas and a valued refuge when tragic incidents occur of the kind that regularly dominate our media.

<https://www.facebook.com/ChristianSREnsw/photos/a.1155585634520178/2262555687156495/?type=3&theater> – accessed 21.08.2019

Please see Attachment 3 for a screenshot of this post.

In addition, FIRIS would like to draw your attention to the *Annual Assurance of Providers of Special Religious Education 2019* by which SRE providers declare –

*That an outline of the authorised age appropriate curriculum scope and sequence used in schools is provided to the public via a website, **and the special religious education teachers are teaching the curriculum with sensitivity and in an age appropriate manner.** (emphasis added)*

See Attachment 4.

FIRIS is asking you to confirm whether it is appropriate for SRE instructors to discuss mass shootings and suicide bombings in SRE classrooms.

FIRIS is also asking that you confirm, given the nature of SRE, the role of SRE instructors and the high likelihood of a lack of professional qualifications in counselling and teaching amongst SRE instructors, whether SRE classrooms are ‘safe places’ for students ‘to share their feelings and ideas’ about traumatic events such as the recent mass shooting in New Zealand.

Furthermore, FIRIS would like to draw your attention to correspondence with the former NSW Minister for Education, Mr Rob Stokes, regarding the anti-Islamic messages and beliefs promoted by the approved SRE provider, Liberty Baptist Church.

Please see Attachments 5 and 6. Please also note that the attached document has been 'censored' due to the distressing nature of some of the original images.

FIRIS is asking you to reconsider the previous Minister's determination that Liberty Baptist Church should remain as an approved provider of SRE in NSW Government schools.

FIRIS looks forward to your response.

With regards



Dr Darrin Morgan
on behalf of FIRIS

21 August 2019

CC:

Ms (Prue) Prudence Ann Car, MP

Mr David Shoebridge, MLC

Senator Mehreen Faruqi

Attachment 1

ChristianSRE
@ChristianSREnsw

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ChristianSRE
18 hrs

Religious Education in schools can strengthen multi-culturalism and reduce extremism in our wider communities, according to a new report. The report found schools offering Special Religious Education (SRE), Religious Instruction (RI) and General Religious Education (GRE) were ideal settings "for children to develop an understanding of peace and tolerance".

"The goal of teaching students how to live harmoniously with others in a contemporary and diverse society is a pillar of modern education," said the report, *How in-faith religious education strengthens social cohesion in multicultural Australia*.

"Multicultural education is a key instrument in achieving this.

"Segregated religious education classes can provide a safe place for children from different religious backgrounds to discuss topics affecting their own religious group."

The report was written by world-renowned academics Professor Zehavi Gross (the UNESCO/Burg Chair in Education in Human Values, Tolerance and Peace at Bar-Ilan University, Israel) and Professor Emerita Suzanne Rutland, of the University of Sydney.

Professor Gross and Professor Rutland will today (August 20) be presenting a lecture on the findings at Parliament House in Sydney.

The report highlighted the recent mass shootings in New Zealand, suicide bombings in Sri Lanka and the San Diego synagogue shooting as potential topics of discussion among students.

"(For example), religious education teachers could discuss the fear and concern which affected Muslim, Christian and Jewish students in Australia," the report found.

"Removing in-faith education from government schools detracts from the government's multicultural aims by denying students a crucial avenue to explore their own religious identity and heritage."

The report found SRE and GRE played a key role in "dismantling stereotypes and strengthening social cohesion".

Professor Gross said the belief that religion is irrelevant in a postmodern world is a myth.

"Religion continues to play a major role in our public life and acknowledges the legitimate spiritual needs of each individual.

10:36 AM
21/08/2019

ChristianSRE
@ChristianSREnsw

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"Religion continues to play a major role in our public life and acknowledges the legitimate spiritual needs of each individual.

Professor Rutland said religious belief and spirituality provide students with an anchor for their individual identities and contribute meaning to their lives.

"A strong grounding in one's individual identity, combined with knowledge of other religions, helps to combat extremism by teaching respect for diversity."

Christian SRE CEO Murray Norman said it was vital students were provided with a "safe place" to explore their religious identities.

ChristianSRE
Religious Organization
18 Comments 74 Shares

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10:40 AM
21/08/2019

Attachment 2

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Christian SRE CEO Murray Norman said it was vital students were provided with a “safe place” to explore their religious identities. (emphasis added)

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Attachment 3

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 **ChristianSRE**
June 17 · 🌐

Christian SRE remains a safe place for students to share their feelings and ideas and a valued refuge when tragic incidents occur of the kind that regularly dominate our media.

"Pain is never permanent."
St Teresa of Avila

CHRISTIAN SRE
QUESTION. EXPLORE. DISCOVER.

61 1 Comment 3 Shares

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<https://www.facebook.com/ChristianSREnsw/photos/a.1155585634520178/2262555687156495/?type=3&theater> – accessed 21.08.2019

Annual Assurance of Providers of Special Religious Education 2019

**This form is to be returned by 29 January 2019 to:
Special Religious Education & Special Education in Ethics Officer
EMAIL: SREcontact@det.nsw.edu.au**

On behalf of the named provider below, I declare to the Department of Education as follows:

1. That all special religious education teachers engaged by this provider have obtained Working with Children Check Clearance numbers and evidence including verification of clearance is kept on record. If under 18, special religious education teachers have undertaken the appropriate declaration to the effect that they are not disqualified persons within the meaning of section 18 of the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012* and that copies of the declarations are kept on record.
2. That the provider has in place a system of authorised initial and ongoing training for their teachers that includes training in classroom management and child protection. The ongoing training should also include efforts to address the findings identified in the review of special religious education teaching.
3. That an outline of the authorised age appropriate curriculum scope and sequence used in schools is provided to the public via a website, and the special religious education teachers are teaching the curriculum with sensitivity and in an age appropriate manner.

I warrant to the Department of Education that I am authorised to make this declaration on behalf of _____ (Name of Provider), and I acknowledge that the department will rely on both the information I have provided and this warranty.	
Provider Website home page:	
Direct link(s) to where on the providers page the authorised curriculum scope and sequence(s), initial and ongoing training which includes the process to authorise an SRE teacher, and the providers complaints handling procedures:	
Name:	Position:
Signature:	Date:
Telephone:	Email:
Address of organisation:	

*Please note the section above in grey is public information and will be provided on request.