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 - 33Kb) for their child to participate or not participate in SRI. This is done initially at enrolment. Parents will be informed of the need to confirm their child’s participation at the start of each year.
- 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
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

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION
Religious instruction in Government schools is authorised under section 2.2.11 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 and can be given only where accredited and approved religious instructors are available.
In general, religious instruction in schools is provided through the non-denominational agreed Christian syllabus *Religion in Life®* which was developed and is regularly reviewed by ACCESS Ministries (formerly known as the Council for Christian Education in Schools). The agreed Christian syllabus is delivered by instructors drawn from the major churches including Anglican, Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal who are trained and accredited by ACCESS Ministries and approved by the Minister for Education.

The agreed Christian syllabus *Religion in Life®*
- complements lesson themes and current Departmental policy
- builds on the Victorian Essential Learning Standards as they relate to the physical, personal and social learning strand
- helps children explore their own lives for meaning and purpose
- introduces children to the religious life and ideas of their community
- provides some understanding of stories, festivals, worship and symbols of the Christian faith in the community
- respects children’s rights to uphold their own opinions while providing a broader understanding of this major influence on contemporary Australian culture.

Special religious instruction may also be provided separately for students in the Roman Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Bahá’í, Orthodox Christianity, Sikh and Hindu faiths or other recognised faiths where accredited religious instructors can be provided by the relevant faith community and are approved by the Minister for Education. Attendance at special religious instruction classes is not compulsory for students whose parents request that they do not attend.

PARENTAL ADVICE/RESPONSE
Where accredited and approved religious instructors are available, do you wish your child to receive special religious instruction in:
- ACCESS Ministries’ agreed Christian syllabus *Religion in Life®*_YES _NO
- Catholicism _YES _NO
- Judaism _YES _NO
- Islam _YES _NO
- Buddhism _YES _NO
- Bahá’í faith _YES _NO
- Orthodox Christianity _YES _NO
- Sikhism _YES _NO
- Hinduism _YES _NO
- Other (please indicate)………………………….. _YES _NO

Parent/Guardian’s Name _________________________
Signature
Date: / / 

NOTE: You may withdraw your child from classes at any time by notifying the school principal in writing. If confirmation is not received then the original consent at the time of enrolment will be activated.