



Religious Education Provision and Special Religious Instruction (SRI) Policy

(Ratified by School Council: May 2017)

PURPOSE:

1. To outline educational provision as Secular. The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (the Act) provides that government school education must be secular. Every person employed or engaged in a government school must have regard to this overriding principle of secularity. The only exception to secular education in government schools is *Special Religious Instruction (SRI)* which is made available in a government school but must meet obligations outlined in the Guidelines and Implementation of this policy. Students and teachers have the rights to freedom of religion and belief, freedom of expression and freedom of association under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.
2. To clearly outline the requirements regarding the provision of Special Religious Instruction with which schools must comply from 27th January 2016 under Ministerial Direction MD45 and Ministerial Direction MD145.

GUIDELINES:

A secular education still includes education about world faiths and secular belief structures, as this knowledge assists students to understand the world around them and act with tolerance and respect towards people from all cultures. The Act provides for the inclusion of this general religious education in the curriculum of a government school to foster “education about major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world.” New Victorian Curriculum available from Term One 2016, recognises the importance of world histories, global cultures, ethics and traditions. The curriculum is designed to help ensure Victoria remains a successful multicultural society and strengthen our diversity and the capacity of our young people to understand others, including other world views, and to act with tolerance and respect. As part of the General Religious Education Curriculum provided by government school teachers, students may be taught about, and acknowledge, religious celebrations or festivals. This may include recognition of, and educational activities relating to, key religious celebrations such as Christmas, Eid al-Adha, or Holi. General religious education classes or events may include one-off guest speakers who are representatives of a particular faith to explain the workings and belief structures of their religion, however they must not provide instruction in their religion or promote the religion.

All education providers must ensure that their programs are delivered in a manner that supports and promotes the principles and practice of Australian democracy, including a commitment to freedom of religion, speech and association. Government school teachers must not provide teaching in religion other than general religious education.

The principle of secularity does not prevent school councils from hiring and licensing school facilities where they are not required for ordinary school purposes, and are to be used for recreational, sporting or cultural activities outside of school hours which are not part of the school program.

The only exception to students receiving a secular education in government schools is non-compulsory Special Religious Instruction (SRI) (section 2.2.11 of the Act). SRI is “instruction provided by churches and other religious groups and based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs.”

Any group seeking to facilitate, lead or provide instruction in programs that are based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs, either during lunch time or out-of-school hours (where this is provided by the school and supervised by school staff), must satisfy the requirements set out in MD 145 and in this policy.

IMPLEMENTATION:

The content of any SRI program must meet the following implementation guidelines;

- Students in government schools may only attend SRI for a maximum of 30 minutes per week, during lunchtime, or in the hour before or after school.
- Attendance must not be compulsory for any student.
- The program must operate as an ‘opt-in’ extra-curricular activity that students may only attend with their parents’ informed consent, which must be obtained using the prescribed consent form - CFMD145.
- Parental consent may be withdrawn at any time.
- All program activities must be supervised by at least one school teacher.
- SRI can only be provided by accredited instructors who are approved by the Minister for Education.
- The only program materials that can be used as part of SRI are those that are approved by the instructor’s accredited provider and that are available for parents to access online.
- SRI instructors are visitors to schools and must comply with the Department’s policies on Volunteer Workers, Visitors in Schools our Working With Children Policy and our Visitors and Volunteers Policy.
- Students who attend SRI must not be offered any enticement or other benefit of a tangible nature.
- SRI instructors must not attempt to convert students to a particular religion or invite students to attend activities outside of SRI.

Ministerial Direction 145 gives the Principal the decision-making responsibilities around SRI provision within the school. The Principal may decide to offer, or not to offer SRI. In making the decision, the Principal may consider some or all of the following:

(a) level of demand by parents for SRI to be delivered at the school

- (b) availability of teaching staff to appropriately supervise the delivery of the program
- (c) availability of an accredited and approved instructor to deliver the program
- (d) availability of school funds to employ casual relief teachers, if required, to provide supervision
- (e) availability of an appropriate space in which SRI may be delivered at the times an instructor is available
- (f) timetabling of any other extra-curricular activities
- (g) views of the School Council
- (h) views of the school community, and
- (i) any other matters the principal considers relevant in the particular circumstances.

The following providers are able to accredit instructors to deliver SRI:

Religion	Accrediting Provider
Christianity	ACCESS Ministries
Islam	Arkan Toledo/Islamic Council of Victoria
Judaism	United Jewish Education Board
Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Orthodox Christianity, Bahá'í faith	Religions for Peace Australia (RfP)

Instructors may charge a fee to participating students. This fee can include the cost of materials or program. This fee cannot be charged prior to consent to participate having been sought from parents. The school may assist instructors in collecting this fee, but will not meet the costs of SRI materials and recoup the cost from parents.

SUPERVISION:

The Principal must ensure;

- that SRI is adequately supervised by at least one teacher and must ensure that students are not removed from school
- the instructor is not a government school teacher
- instructors are accredited by an approved provider

- a copy of the instructor's formal accreditation (including WWCC details) is retained on the school's records
- instructors do not continue to instruct if their WWCC card has expired
- instructors comply with the school's volunteer and visitors to schools policies
- instructors are supervised by a school teacher at all times
- any instructor conduct that does not meet the requirements of the Code of Conduct or this policy is reported to the Department's central Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division as soon as practicable upon discovery of failure to meet these requirements.

RELATED LEGISLATION:

Ministerial Direction 45 & 141 – Special Religious Instruction in Government Schools
SRI Parent Consent form (CFMD141) (pdf - 88.59kb)
Education and Training Reform Act 2006
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

RELATED POLICIES:

Working with Children Policy
Visitors & Volunteers Policy

POLICY EVALUATION:

Evaluation will be conducted by Policy Review (Education) Subcommittee.

DUE DATE FOR REVIEW:

Due for review in May 2019.