

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT RYDE SECONDARY COLLEGE

In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion", under the Education Act 1990 Section 32. The times for such education "are to be fixed by agreement between the principal of the school and the local member of the clergy or other religious teacher of that persuasion". The "local member" refers to the person nominated by the religious group to authorise special religious education teachers, courses and materials.

Religious persuasions, on approval by the Minister, provide Special Religious Education (SRE) for students in Government schools. Schools are to provide SRE where authorised representatives of approved providers are available. A range of options for provision are allowed including weekly class groups or seminars.

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 mainly through the school curriculum. Special religious education (SRE) is education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion by authorised representatives of that persuasion.

PARENTS/CAREGIVERS RIGHTS

In accordance with Section 33 of the Education Act, no child is required to receive any general religious education or special religious education if the parents/caregivers object. There is no impact of not undertaking religious education for the award of the Higher School Certificate.

Section 26 of the Act provides for students to be exempt from attending classes at the request of parents/caregivers who conscientiously object on religious grounds to a particular part of a course of study. Parents may also request involvement in SRE later, where previously exemption was requested.

Objections should be made in writing to the principal of the school, and can be made at any time.

Students who are exempted will be supervised in the library by classroom teachers.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOLS

SRE is an integral part of school activities, taking place in school hours and under the jurisdiction of the school. SRE is organised for fixed times by negotiation and agreement between the principal of the school and the authorised religious persuasions which will provide the teachers. No formal lessons or scheduled school activities may occur during time set aside for SRE. On average, not more than one hour per week is allocated for SRE. Flexible time schedules may be used, subject to the agreement of the parties concerned, provided that the time allocated in any one year does not exceed, for each student, an average of one hour per school week

Arrangements are reviewed annually with the representatives of the religious persuasions

At enrolment, we record a specific religion or “No religion” on the enrolment record, which forms the basis for the withdrawal of students for SRE, unless parents have completed an exemption form. Parents may nominate an alternative persuasion, where SRE is not offered for students of a particular religious persuasion or for other reasons.

Parents/caregivers are advised annually of the organisation of SRE classes, and the religious persuasions that will be providing SRE for particular class or year groups. Only those persons authorised by approved religious persuasions provide SRE.

Appropriate care and supervision at school is provided for students not attending SRE. This may involve students in other activities such as completing homework, reading and private study in the library or with their classroom teacher. These activities do not compete with SRE nor are alternative lessons in the subjects within the curriculum or other areas, such as, ethics, values, civics or general religious education. When insufficient teachers or accommodation are available, the school’s policy on minimal supervision will operate.

Complaints concerning alleged teaching inefficiency or distortion of religious doctrine should be referred to the representative of the approved persuasion who authorises the teacher, the SRE Coordinator, Ms Ashley Moerman.

Class teachers are not required to attend SRE classes, but may, with the agreement of the SRE teacher, assist or remain in the classroom.

Ryde Secondary College reserves the right to intervene in cases where it is necessary to maintain good order and conduct when an unreasonable disruption occurs to the school.

The College is not responsible for and should not disseminate details of lesson content for SRE, but will forward any concerns to the SRE Coordinator Ms Ashley Moerman or the Deputy Principal, Mr Americo Chisari.

Student information is confidential and teachers of SRE are provided with only the names of the students in their class and any special information, such as disability or special need, which might affect the behaviour or performance of particular students.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PROVIDERS

It is the responsibility of each persuasion to:

- provide sufficient SRE teachers.
- inform the principal when SRE teachers are unavailable.
- authorise representatives to teach SRE. All representatives must have signed a prohibited employment declaration and not have a criminal conviction for crimes related to a minor, violence, sexual assault or drugs.
- authorise materials and pedagogy used by SRE teachers
- ensure that the school is informed of the names and contact details of authorised SRE teachers.
- provide information about the content of lessons when requested by parents/caregivers.
- In the case of paid employees of religious persuasions, working with children checks are required. Every approved religious persuasion must provide, annually to the

Department, a written assurance that they have procedures in place to ensure compliance with this requirement.

SCHOOL ORGANISATION

Ms Ashley Moerman is the SRE co-ordinator at Ryde Secondary College. She can be contacted on: 98094894 on Wednesdays to Fridays. Mr Chisari is the Deputy Principal overseeing SRE at the school. The SRE Coordinator arranges consultations by the middle of Term 4 between the school and representatives of the approved religious persuasions to determine the SRE organisation for the ensuing year.

Additional roles include induction of SRE teachers, maintaining SRE records including records of authorised SRE teachers, class lists, and preparing advice for parents/caregivers on the organisation and composition of SRE classes and informing them of any changes.

At Ryde Secondary College a number of religious persuasions have agreed to combine to provide SRE, due to a lack of sufficient SRE teachers to staff denominational class groups. The C3 church at Ryde Secondary College represents a number of Christian denominations. The common format for SRE at Ryde Secondary College is withdrawal from classes in years 7, 8 and 9 for up to one period a week. Seminars are offered in year 10.

SRE TEACHERS AS VOLUNTEERS IN SCHOOLS

In relation to the *Commonwealth National School Chaplaincy Programme*, schools may engage this program as outlined in the Commonwealth guidelines. The programme does not require the use of the term “chaplain” to describe the position. At Ryde Secondary College, this position is held by Aggie Palu, who is employed under this program as a qualified Youth Worker.

COMMEMORATIONS, RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AND MULTI-FAITH SERVICES IN SCHOOLS

Commemorations, such as Education Week, Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and school centenaries often contain religious elements. These commemorations should be the product of consultation with the school community and parents/caregivers should be notified of the nature of the ceremony, and reminded of their right to object to the inclusion of their child in these observances. Ryde Secondary College will provide alternative activities for students not participating.

VOLUNTARY STUDENT ACTIVITIES OF A RELIGIOUS NATURE IN SCHOOLS

Voluntary religious activities and prayer groups of any approved persuasion are not part of SRE, but may operate under the auspices and supervision of the principal. Scripture Union (NSW) is recognized as a coordinator of Interschool Christian Fellowship (ISCF) groups in secondary schools.

At Ryde Secondary College, the Oxygen program is available to interested students of all denominations every Friday in the Human Movement Studio. Volunteers all must complete a Working with Children check and are supervised by our Youth Worker, Ms Palu. A number of teachers attend this group from time to time.

SRE Coordinator: A. Moerman. Supervisor of SRE: A. Chisari

Action Required	Date	Who responsible	Expected outcome
Contact made with providers to determine provision of SRE following year	July	SRE Coordinator consults with SRE supervising teacher	Plan developed for SRE following year with all involved available
Timetabling planning	August	HT Secondary Studies with SRE Coordinator, SRE supervising teacher	Issues considered requirements met
Meeting with Combined providers team	December	SRE Coordinator to organise for Principal	Discussion of any issues from year
Presentation of SRE Plan	Annual, February, P and C meeting	Principal, with SRE supervising teacher	Parents consulted
Enrolment Folders include SRE Policy - general	Orientation Day Dec 4/5	SRE Coordinator SRE supervising teacher	All new parents informed of policy
Website information updated	First week of school	SRE Coordinator/Office	Policy for year updated Exemption note included
Letter to all parents regarding SRE arrangements for year and exemption form	First week of school	SRE Coordinator/J Thorn Supervised by SRE supervising teacher	All parents provided with information required
All SRE presenters compliant with checks required	Ongoing	SRE Coordinator	All compliant
Seminar letters all checked to ensure exemption available	Ongoing	SRE Coordinator and SRE supervising teacher	All letters compliant
All parent enquiries about course material etc managed	Ongoing	SRE Coordinator SRE supervising teacher	All issues addressed
Complaints/Major concerns about SRE	As required	Principal in consultation with SRE supervising teacher	Issues evaluated and action initiated
Youth worker issues related to chaplaincy funding including separation of duties from SRE, Oxygen	As required	Deputy Principal Americo Chisari	Compliance with DEC policies, supervision of volunteers

Features of school organisation

1. School SRE co-ordinator at Ryde Secondary College

Duties of the co-ordinator include:

- a. arranging consultations by the middle of Term 4 between the school and representatives of the approved religious persuasions to determine the SRE organisation for the ensuing year
- b. liaising with SRE teachers to:
 - i) familiarise them with the procedures and operations of the school, especially at the beginning of the year
 - ii) advise them of any variations of school routine affecting SRE
- c. maintaining SRE records, including:
 - i) obtaining an up-to-date list of the authorised SRE teachers from the approved religious persuasions
 - ii) ensuring that SRE teachers are given a list of the names of students in their class
- d. preparing advice for parents/caregivers on the organisation and composition of SRE classes and informing them of any changes

Supervisor of SRE at Ryde Secondary College

- Duties of the supervisor include:
- Providing information to parents and the school community as required.
- Providing information to the SRE coordinator on variations to school routine affecting SRE.
- Supervision of the SRE co-ordinator to ensure all policies are fully implemented.
- Supervision of the SRE co-ordinator to ensure compliance with DEC requirements including authorisation of all SRE coordinators.
- Ensuring SRE Coordinator is briefed on updates to DEC policy or practices impacting on SRE.
- Briefing College executive on issues or relevant matters related to SRE
- Liaison with timetablers as required to ensure compliance with DEC SRE guidelines.

2. Patterns of SRE organisation

The following patterns are some possible ways of organising SRE in schools. Care should be taken not to adopt any form of organisation which could be of more benefit to some persuasions than to others.

(a) **Patterns based on class groups**

- i. **Weekly class groups:** In many schools, especially at the infants, primary and junior secondary levels, class-based organisation will support SRE because it features regular contact, planned and systematic teaching, and the opportunity for close interpersonal relationships.
- ii. **Block teaching:** Instead of a weekly period, SRE lessons can be timetabled to occupy blocks of time approximately equivalent to a year of weekly lessons. Lessons might occur on consecutive days, for one week twice a term, or for two weeks in succession. Other variations include half-day blocks taught three times during a term.

- iii. **One term a year:** When there are a limited number of SRE teachers, students in one year group could have SRE once a week for one term. SRE could be provided for a different term for each year group.
- iv. **Rotation of classes:** The SRE lessons for a class or year could be timetabled to alternate with some other features of the curriculum, such as tutorial groups, special assemblies or year meetings on a fortnightly, month by month, or full term basis.
- v. **Seminars, conferences and one-day programs:** This approach may be incorporated in a regular program of seminars, conferences and other learning experiences organised for Years 11 and 12. These arrangements are most suited to the senior secondary years but could be used with Years 9-10 and, in special circumstances, with junior secondary or primary years. This pattern provides an opportunity for specialised personnel, equipment and resources to be used. Only approved religious persuasions with students enrolled for their SRE may organise such programs. When time is allocated for these programs, then the school must ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all persuasions to organise similar programs.
- vi. **Small group dialogue:** Students may be organised into small groups for lessons with a member of the clergy or other religious teacher. This approach is often used as an adjunct to other systems, such as seminars and conferences.
- vii. **Assemblies:** While not normally a desirable method for regular SRE, special denominational assemblies provide an opportunity for religious participation, especially in relation to major festivals. They also facilitate the use of specialised personnel, resource materials and equipment.

(b) Patterns based on grouping persuasions

When a number of religious persuasions agree to combine to provide SRE, these religious persuasions have to authorise the persons who teach and authorise the content of the religious teaching. No religious persuasion can be compelled to participate in these patterns of organisation. These patterns should be periodically reviewed and evaluated jointly by the school and the religious persuasions. No religious persuasion should feel compelled to continue to be included in any particular pattern.

i. Combined groups

SRE teachers are assigned to classes with students from participating denominations. This format is generally used when there are insufficient SRE teachers to staff denominational class groups. This form of organisation may include:

- weekly class meetings
- block teaching
- one term per year arrangements and
- a teacher appointed by one or more religious persuasions who operates across the timetable.

Where these formats are implemented the following criteria must be met:

1. Local members of the clergy or other religious teachers of approved religious persuasions are to agree on the format, approve the content of the religious teaching and authorise the SRE teachers.

2. The organisation for persuasions not part of these arrangements should be separately negotiated.
3. No religious persuasion may be compelled to participate in such arrangements and care should be taken to overcome any disadvantage to non-participating persuasions as a result of this organisation
4. Parents/caregivers are to be informed of both the nature of the particular format to be adopted and the religious persuasions which have agreed to participate. The persuasions should, if requested by parents/caregivers, make available an outline of the content of the religious teaching to assist parents/caregivers to make a decision regarding their child's attendance.
5. Students who are registered as belonging to a persuasion other than those that have authorised the teacher(s) may attend such classes only with the specific approval of their parents/caregivers.
6. Schools are to provide appropriate care for students not attending SRE classes under these arrangements.
7. These arrangements may be supplemented with opportunities for specific denominational religious teaching.
8. SRE teachers are not to interfere with the operation of the school.

ii. Seminars, conferences and one-day programs

Only approved religious persuasions with students enrolled for their SRE may organise such programs. When organised jointly, the relevant religious persuasions have to agree to the format, authorise the teacher(s) and approve the religious teaching.

iii. Assemblies

SRE assemblies, organised by one or more of the religious persuasions for a particular religious festival, provide an opportunity for religious persuasions to make use of the time allowed for SRE.

(c) Other patterns

Where SRE is provided by other means, these arrangements need to be negotiated with the school principal and could include:

i. Individual or group research and assignment

This method has been employed by some SRE teachers in association with contract-type teaching or in open class situations in primary schools. It may be suitable for use on a private study basis, especially for students for whom face-to-face teaching is not available. It may be useful for interested post-compulsory students who do not attend their school at the times when SRE is offered.

ii. Distance education

SRE is now available to some isolated students receiving distance education. Enquiries regarding the availability of material should state the religious persuasion and be directed to the Executive Officer of the Director-General's Consultative Committee on Special Religious Education, Private Bag 3, Ryde, NSW, 2112

(d) Supporting patterns

In agreeing to any supporting arrangements the principal is to take into account the overall provision of SRE for the nominating persuasion and the

capacity of the personnel to carry out that activity within the principal's duty of care.

i. Excursions and visits

Visits to certain places or events can be planned to provide some specific learning experience, often associated with a particular religious festival. Such excursions on a school day are the responsibility of the religious persuasion, which will negotiate the time with the principal, organise the excursion, seek parental approval and provide supervision. The nature of the excursion must be explained by the participating persuasions to parents/caregivers, a permission note for the parents/caregivers' is to be approved by the Principal and the completed permission notes returned to the school.

ii. Camps and out of school contact

These are extra-curricular in nature and additional to SRE programs operating within schools. Where possible, principals should make sure that parents/caregivers are clear that these activities are not school activities. Schools should have no involvement in such activities. It should be made quite clear that these are organised by the relevant religious persuasions and are not school activities as such.

iii. Support personnel

By arrangement between the principal and the approved provider, SRE teachers may be provided with accommodation to conduct interviews of a religious nature with students of their own persuasion, in the lunch hour or other agreed-upon times. These contacts, including any of an informal nature, should have due regard to school organisation and requirements and parental wishes.

Where an SRE teacher assists the school in a voluntary capacity for school activities other than SRE, then that person is classified as a volunteer and has the same responsibilities and rights as all other volunteers. Principals and these volunteers should ensure that, in all interactions with students, they respect the religious or non-religious beliefs of students.

If the school has a person under *the Commonwealth National School Chaplaincy Programme*, this person could teach SRE in addition to their work under this program, but not as part of it. In relation to their SRE work they would come under the provisions for SRE.