

Guidelines for Joint-Denominational SRE Employment Boards

**Inter-Church Commission on Religious
Education in Schools (NSW) Inc**

**ICCOREIS (NSW) Inc
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Document History

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Purpose of these Guidelines

This document has been developed to offer churches an outline of the steps that need to be taken to set up an effective and enduring joint-denominational board for the employment of Special Religious Education (SRE) teachers in New South Wales government schools. It seeks to assist those who wish to engage with the issues involved in inter-church collaboration.

More than 80 employment boards have been established by combined church action in various parts of the state. This set of guidelines draws upon their experiences and presents the approaches and structures found by practitioners to be most effective.

These guidelines are simply signposts. Member churches should seek appropriate legal advice as to the articles of association and management structure of any proposed SRE employment board to ensure that all statutory requirements are met and that the board will suit the needs of the various participant churches. These steps are important to ensure harmonious working relations between churches, the establishment of tax-deductibility of contributions given for the employment of an SRE teacher as well as the protection of individual member's interests.

In negotiations for the establishment of boards it is important that fair access be provided to all religious persuasions to be involved and that there be joint agreement on the curriculum.

Further assistance may be obtained from denominational Education Officers and from the ICCOREIS Executive Officer. Contact details are available on the ICCOREIS website at www.iccoreis.asn.au.

Dr Alan Rice
Chairman
Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (NSW) Inc
(ICCOREIS)
March 2005

End of Chapter

2 Rationale for SRE Employment Boards

2.1 A Vision for Christian Education in Government Schools

Our Lord's final command to his followers was:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV)

One significant opportunity by which to fulfil this command lies in the access churches have to many of the 750,000 children in NSW government schools, under the *Education Act 1990*.

These students are at school for 11 to 13 years during which time they will develop their personal beliefs, worldview and values system. Each child may receive up to 500 SRE lessons during which Christian teachers will model and share their faith with them.

A recent survey in one major denomination found that two out of every three of its lay and clerical leaders had committed themselves to Christian discipleship before the age of 18. At a time when their lifelong patterns are being formed, the Christian church needs to present these students with the challenge of knowing and following Christ.

Over 90% of the 450,000 students in government infants and primary schools have regular SRE classes. The 300,000 secondary school students are less well served. Yet this is the time in their lives when many of the important beliefs, attitudes and choices are being formed. The churches have an opportunity to influence these in a way in which church-based children's and youth programs never will.

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?

Romans 10:14-15 (NRSV)

Joint-denominational SRE employment boards (also referred to in this document as 'SRE employment boards' or 'boards') allow churches to cooperate in the provision of a teacher for SRE, thus ensuring that a large number of students receive regular weekly instruction in the Christian faith. This document contains the rationale for SRE employment boards and outlines the implications of the approach in practice.

2.2 What is Special Religious Education?

There are two types of religious education possible in NSW government schools, as provided in the *Education Act 1990*: one is Special Religious Education (SRE, often called ‘Scripture’); the other is General Religious Education (GRE). GRE is taught through the Board of Studies syllabuses, and includes but is not confined to, the subject ‘Studies of Religion’. GRE can be relevant to a number of subjects.

How do these differ?

SRE - Special Religious Education	GRE - General Religious Education
Education in faith.	Education about major world faiths.
The responsibility of the local church or the persuasion approved by the Minister for Education and Training.	The responsibility of the State Government.
Optional - parents may withdraw their children.	Optional - parents may withdraw their children.
Taught when the local church or religious persuasion exercises its right to do so and negotiates an appropriate time with the school.	Taught to all students.
Taught by authorised visiting teachers who represent an approved religious persuasion.	Taught by Department of Education and Training (DET) teachers.
Curriculum is determined by the authorised religious persuasion.	Curriculum is determined by the NSW Board of Studies and the DET.

SRE is defined by the *Education Act 1990* as “the religious education, authorised and taught by members of the religious persuasion, which the parents have nominated for their child”. *Implementation of Religious Education Policy* recognises that religious persuasions may seek to work cooperatively in providing SRE.

The teacher employed by a local SRE employment board operates under the provisions for SRE.

More details about SRE may be found in the *ICCOREIS SRE Handbook*. The latest version of the handbook is available on the ICCOREIS website, www.iccoreis.asn.au or from the ICCOREIS Executive Officer.

2.3 Framework for Special Religious Education

The organisation of SRE in NSW government schools has entered an era of renewed opportunities. This is due to the framework for the effective operation of SRE provided by:

- *ICCOREIS*: established in 1972; represents all major churches; negotiates with the NSW Government and the DET with respect to religious education in public schools; networks and trains SRE teachers across the state.
- *Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools (1980)*: result of a government and church sponsored state-wide consultation. This showed that an overwhelming majority of parents wanted SRE for their children. In 1993, a Time-Morgan poll indicated a similarly convincing majority of parental endorsement.
- *Education Act 1990*: maintains the principles for SRE established in earlier legislation.
- *Religious Education Policy*: implemented July 2007, this DET policy covers the requirements and responsibilities for matters relating to GRE and SRE.
- *Implementation of Religious Education Policy*: this document outlines the rules and procedures for the implementation of the DET's religious education policy.
- *Director-General's Consultative Committee on SRE*: gives the churches and other religions access to the highest levels of the DET.

2.3.1 Objectives of a Special Religious Education Class

SRE should provide opportunities for learners to:

- develop an ability to interpret religious information within the traditions of their particular faith;
- gain an appreciation of the ways in which committed people apply their faith to life;
- be encouraged to join a local worshipping community to translate learning into active expression of faith;
- encounter, in a peer group learning context, religious teaching given by a person explicitly associated with the religious community;
- be aware of the availability of personal and group support in the area of religious need, as occasion demands.

SRE should be a genuine educational activity. Students attend SRE classes as a result of their parents' or caregivers' decision to nominate a religious persuasion at or subsequent to the time of enrolment. This nomination may be altered by the parents at any time.

It should be noted that "No child at a government school is to be required to receive any general religious teaching or special religious education if the parent of the child objects to the child's receiving that teaching or education" (*Education Act 1990* Section 33).

2.4 Why Work Cooperatively?

A survey of 219 government secondary schools in the greater Sydney region (bordered by Hawkesbury, Ulladulla, Lithgow and Moss Vale), conducted by Anglican Youthworks in 2003, revealed the following:

- 30% of secondary schools have no SRE in any form;
- 49% of those that do have SRE, do so only intermittently;
- 58% of Year 11 and 12 students receive no SRE;
- the schools with poorest SRE coverage are in the western area of Sydney;
- there is enormous diversity between regularity of classes, style of SRE, support for teachers and their qualifications, and the teaching material being used;
- secondary school SRE is often ecumenical in nature;
- current teachers express a strong desire for training and more curriculum resources.

Recent information indicates that it has also become more difficult to provide SRE to secondary schools in rural communities.

Collection of data on SRE programs, by Anglican Youthworks in 1995, revealed that:

- some individual churches provide teachers for several schools;
- many churches have been unable to sustain SRE in the long term, especially when other denominations have withdrawn;
- some churches do not have sufficient numbers in any one year of a school to be able to negotiate lessons for their children;
- school authorities are concerned about timetabling and supervision when a third or more of students are not receiving SRE lessons;
- school authorities are often opposed to withdrawal groups because of the unreasonable conflict with scheduled lessons;
- denominational differences sometimes act as a barrier to students' perceptions of the relevance of Christian teachings to their lives.

There are therefore sound reasons, based on the above information, for churches to consider collaboration through a specialist SRE teacher in the provision of SRE in the secondary school.

2.5 The Model for SRE Employment Boards

SRE has had a long history of commitment from the churches in NSW but there have been some difficulties in meeting this commitment in recent years. This has been due to the need for volunteer teachers to keep up with advances in teaching and learning methods in secondary schools and to deal with increasingly complex issues in the classroom. Clergy are also finding it more difficult to meet the regular demands of SRE within their communities because of their increased responsibilities in other areas. SRE provision in secondary schools has been affected over recent years by a shortage of SRE teachers, only offering one-off seminars in some situations and presenting a continuing struggle to find sufficient appropriate volunteers in others.

The provision of qualified and school-based SRE teachers has been identified as a way forward. Some years ago in NSW, groups of local churches decided that a new model was needed for SRE in secondary schools. Today, there are over 80 SRE employment boards with SRE teachers employed full or part-time in secondary schools around the state. These boards are made up of representatives from each local church from as many denominations as would like to participate. The Christian teachers who are selected by a board to teach SRE enable a higher standard of teaching and learning to be made available to students.

The teacher may supplement existing volunteer teachers and becomes as much a part of the school community as possible. Where a program is already in place, the additional employment of an SRE teacher must be done in a way that is collaborative and inclusive and which allows for open communication and negotiation.

Within the school, SRE teachers are identified with regular staff and are usually given a desk in a staffroom, perhaps their own dedicated SRE classroom, and teach students regularly each week. In practice, for example, a full-time SRE teacher in a school of around 1000 students might teach all of Years 7 to 10 for one 40 or 50 minute period each week. Within the context of the school, students are able to get to know the SRE teacher and see the Christian faith lived out on a daily basis.

There is opportunity for the teacher to form long-term relationships with students, and become a 'fixture' in the school. SRE teachers are then in a position to act, not only as SRE teachers, but as volunteers responsible to and supervised by the principal, to take on extra-curricular activities, invite local church youth ministers to lessons or events, attend camps and engage generally with school activities. Access to the school may become full-time rather than once per week.

SRE employment boards usually become incorporated bodies with the usual responsibilities of an employer. They are responsible for selection and authorisation of teachers, approving curriculum and resourcing the ministry. It should be noted that each denomination involved in the board must authorise the teacher(s) to teach their denomination's students.

Local congregations are encouraged to support SRE teaching at the school, through prayer, financial commitment, classroom assistance and any events they can organise. Churches are encouraged to own the ministry and are given regular updates on activities and progress, much like a mission organisation might provide.

Churches are encouraged to work together in unity for the good of the local community, to ensure that the students are taught in a way that can be stable, progressive and consistent. Employed SRE teachers may support the whole school community and are available for discussions far more often than a weekly visitor to the school.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17:20-23 (NRSV)

2.6 The Role of the SRE Employment Board

The establishment of an SRE employment board results from the passion and commitment of churches and individuals. Spreading the vision for SRE creates enthusiasm and generates support that is reflected in churches through collaboration in prayer, desire for representation on the organisation to be formed and offers of financial support. The board has an important role in sustaining this vision across its collaborating churches through regular prayer, excellence in communications, ongoing deputations and sensitive negotiations around key issues. The aim is to grow the vision and gain church assistance in as many ways as possible.

The board is responsible for negotiating arrangements with the school principal, both initial and ongoing, seeking assistance from other agencies when necessary. The board must also consider the presence of existing SRE providers in the school, both Christian and those from other faiths, when negotiating the arrangement for its representative SRE teacher to enter the school. A sound relationship with the principal, the SRE coordinator and other SRE providers will facilitate effective implementation in the school.

The board has an important management role. It is suggested that it be established as an incorporated body to satisfy the requirements of legislation, including the development of a constitution and setting up funding mechanisms to receive donations and make payments. It will be subject to the requirements of the Australian Taxation Office (ABN, DGR, GST exemption, Fringe Benefits) and will need to be registered as a charitable institution. It will need to make provision for insurance such as workers' compensation and public liability. It should meet regularly and establish structures and positions appropriate to its circumstances.

The board has an important role in the selection and authorisation of the teacher, as well as the ongoing mentoring and support of the teacher. It will need to agree upon and authorise the teaching program as well as establishing the basis for remuneration, and basic working conditions. Additional responsibilities approved for the SRE teacher by the school principal need to be known, considered and endorsed by the board. The board needs to ensure that SRE teachers are aware of the provisions of the *Education Act 1990* and its requirements as well as their role and responsibilities to enable them to operate appropriately within the policy framework.

2.7 Benefits from Cooperation

2.7.1 For School Students

As students try to make sense of their world, it is helpful for them to be able to understand that Christians are agreed on fundamental questions such as the existence of God, the meaning of life, the atoning death of Christ and the role of the church in the life of the believer. The statement of the agreed essential articles of the Christian religion is to be found in the Apostles' Creed. The historical reasons for the divisions between Christian denominations are of lesser importance to students than having role models of people who demonstrate Christian love and grace in action.

Under this model of SRE, teachers are usually required to be professionally trained school teachers, so the quality of lessons may be improved. SRE teachers are recognised by students for their willingness and availability to listen and have a high level of trust placed in them.

SRE becomes an accepted part of the school routine whilst SRE classes provide an opportunity for discussion and nurture irrespective of the students' abilities. SRE does not have to be academically assessed although some schools include SRE in the reporting system, enabling teachers to give positive feedback to students and parents on report cards.

2.7.2 For the School Community

This model offers continuity of provision of SRE, stability and professionalism. Fewer discipline problems are encountered and non-SRE numbers and absenteeism decreases as classes are timetabled throughout the school program.

Moral and spiritual dimensions of student development are seen to be taught, encouraged and reinforced in students. The school community can see an overlap between Special Religious Education and values education which is supported in the public system through the ministerial statement *Values in NSW Public Schools 2004*, syllabus documents and the Departmental policy. Extra welfare, support and attention may be provided for students, and an extra hand is always welcome, particularly for students at risk and those needing assistance with learning.

2.7.3 For Society

Christian witness in our pluralist society is more effective when Christians from a range of traditions can work cooperatively. Speaking with a united voice on major social issues and on values and attitude outcomes in education is more likely to persuade the community that the Christian perspective needs to be considered. Many opportunities exist within a relationship-based, structured SRE program to encourage students to participate in charitable events and exercise Christian service and outreach.

2.7.4 For Churches

The work of SRE in schools is strengthened by cooperative endeavour. The limited financial and human resources of any one denomination are increased. A whole-school approach means that more students are reached than would otherwise be the case. High quality, long-term outreach based on relationships becomes possible. The employment of paid SRE teachers provides an opportunity for those who cannot go into schools to contribute to this particular ministry. The ability to make contributions that are tax deductible may be an advantage.

Cooperative SRE in secondary schools offers a greater opportunity to take 'the church' to students. It also provides a much broader platform for the church to witness to and serve society. With properly managed bridging activities, it will expand church-based ministry to children and youth. SRE is given much greater credibility as part of the school program, and opportunities for links to extra-curricular activities become simple to arrange.

2.8 The Opportunities in Schools

The prime purpose of an employed SRE teacher is to teach the agreed SRE program. The *Education Act 1990* Section 32 allows up to 40 hours a year per student for Special Religious Education.

The DET permits a variety of contacts between properly authorised church representatives and students in NSW schools. Through negotiations with the school principal and the SRE employment board, the teacher may be approved for an increased role within the school. If the SRE teacher is invited to participate in other school activities, the teacher is a volunteer acting under the direction of the principal.

Schools have used employed SRE teachers in their personal development programs and in assisting in student welfare matters. In undertaking these roles SRE teachers are regarded as volunteers and are responsible to the principal. However, through these arrangements there is the opportunity for SRE teachers to meet with school staff and parents in a range of situations.

The DET sets out requirements for the operation of SRE programs and any new SRE employment board must be aware of them and operate within them. Information on the policy and principles underpinning SRE can be found in *Implementation of Religious Education Policy*.

2.8.1 Implications of the RE Policy for SRE Providers

There are important implications of the religious education policy for establishing an SRE employment board:

- Where churches agree to establish a board, positive relationships need to be made among all possible SRE providers. Fair access needs to be available to all approved religious providers, including minorities who have children represented in the school. Only when all groups consent should the establishment of a joint-denominational SRE employment board proceed. Degrees of involvement may vary, but agreement on syllabus and open communication are essential. Many creative models have been used to provide opportunities for access to students for specific denominational teaching.
- The more inclusive of all religious persuasions represented in the school, the more feasible it will be from the school's point of view. It should be noted that administrative convenience should not be the prime criterion in negotiations between the religious persuasions and the school.
- Schools having both a joint program and separate SRE for some religious persuasions will need to work through the timetabling issues involved if the separate classes cannot parallel the joint program.
- In some communities, negotiations may need to be undertaken with providers of other faiths. (In some cases Christian providers may be in the minority). In schools where there are significant numbers of children from non-Christian religions or with no religious affiliation, the principal will find it more difficult to accede to requests for a joint program to be fitted into the timetable.
- Parents retain the right of withdrawal under Section 33 of the *Education Act 1990*.
- In accordance with legislation and the policy of the DET, employed SRE teachers need to work with the school to ensure that churches and other religious persuasions that do not participate in the dominant SRE program still have adequate access to provide SRE.

End of Chapter

3 Establishing an SRE Employment Board

3.1 Major Tasks

In establishing an SRE employment board, the aim should be a robust constitution or memorandum and articles of association that have been ratified by the participating churches as well as an explicit agreement with the school regarding the role and duties of the SRE teacher. Supplementary tasks include development of procedures for the management of finance and fund raising, and employment issues relating to the recruitment, payment and support of a teacher.

A minimum of 13 months will be required, to allow for negotiations, drawing up a constitution, fundraising and the recruitment of a teacher. A more realistic time-frame would be 18 to 20 months.

The following steps have been found to be essential in setting up an SRE employment board. The key tasks are:

- initial development of the proposal by one or more churches and identification of the major issues to be resolved;
- consultation with current SRE providers in the school and with other churches within the local community;
- consultation with the heads of local churches concerning the contract, curriculum and proposal;
- consultation with currently operating boards;
- refining the proposal.

3.1.1 Timetable

Year 1

January-February	<p>Consult with authorising agents for all denominations represented in the school.</p> <p>Produce a heads of agreement document and appoint a representative working group to draw up a constitution and institute formal negotiations with the school. This group should be of moderate size (to allow ease of meetings) yet representative of the participating churches.</p> <p>Agree upon a statement of faith to be included in the constitution (ICCOREIS uses and recommends the Apostles' Creed), and pray together.</p>
March-April	<p>The working group to undertake important functions including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working through the issues in more detail • initiating preliminary negotiations with the school • drafting a constitution • understanding insurance and tax implications • calling a public meeting to set up the board • negotiating with school principal.

April-May	<p>Submit the draft constitution for legal advice.</p> <p>Investigate incorporation of the board.</p> <p>Negotiate the timetabling of SRE for the following year with the school principal. Address the issues arising from the number of classes and year groups to be involved.</p>
May-June	<p>Submit the constitution to all participating churches for ratification.</p> <p>Apply to the Australian Taxation Office for tax-deductible status for donations received for employment of an SRE teacher.</p>
June	<p>Elect the SRE employment board.</p> <p>Finalise timetabling and numbers of classes and other duties for the employed teacher (for further information, see Section 3.4).</p> <p>Make a presentation to the Parents and Citizens Committee.</p>
July	<p>Commence fundraising.</p> <p>Draw up a position description, terms and conditions of employment, contract and recruitment program for an employed SRE teacher.</p>
August	<p>Undertake curriculum development and resourcing.</p> <p>Promote the initiative through fundraising and deputations to participating churches.</p>
September	<p>Advertise the position.</p> <p>Continue fundraising and deputations.</p> <p>Investigate and arrange public liability and other forms of insurance.</p>
October	<p>Interview for the position.</p> <p>Confirm the appointment (as per the constitution) and publicise the appointment, or re-advertise if unsuccessful in the first round.</p> <p>Have the selected teacher sign a Prohibited Employment Declaration form and meet other government screening requirements. As a paid employee, this will include a police check in relation to working with young people.</p> <p>Continue fundraising.</p> <p>Notify member churches and school principal of progress.</p>
November	<p>Continue fundraising and deputation.</p>
December-January	<p>Attend to outstanding issues.</p> <p>Continue fundraising.</p> <p>Provide constant effective prayer and pastoral support for the employed teacher.</p>

Year 2

February	Commence operation of the program.
February-December	Continue fundraising. Provide support for the employed teacher.
August-September	Review progress and the future of the position. Negotiate extension or modification of the program with the school.

Annually

Plan the AGM of the board; undertake reporting and deputation to member churches.
Arrange a commissioning service.
Organise position review; modification or extension of the program.
Continue fundraising.

3.2 Relationships

3.2.1 Engaging with the School

If an SRE teacher is to be placed in a school to teach class groups across the timetable in a number of years, the following procedures should be helpful in avoiding unnecessary conflict at a later stage:

- 1) Obtain from the school a breakdown of the religious affiliation of students enrolled in each of the years to be taught (on the enrolment form). Most schools will be willing to provide this if they understand the purpose for which it is to be used.
- 2) Identify the size of the non-SRE and non-Christian SRE student population. If this is more than 25%, the school may have difficulties in meeting requests for whole classes across the timetable for SRE. Further limitations will be introduced if the scheme is not to include Orthodox, Catholic and/or children from other denominations. Experience from established SRE employment boards has shown, however, that 95% attendance is achievable. Liaison with local churches and gaining the confidence of parents and students will help to increase the level of participation.
- 3) The scope of the program needs to be determined on the basis of likely participants and the extent of available finance. Experience has shown that it is better to begin with weekly SRE for Years 7 and 8 and then expand it upwards by a year at a time as resources permit. This avoids an on/off/on again approach if resources are insufficient. It is also easier to gain acceptance of SRE among younger students than from those who may resent its incursion into their timetable or study periods. This may also ensure continuity of instruction from primary school.
- 4) Other denominations that will be affected by the introduction of a paid worker need to be consulted to gauge their interest in participating and their ability to contribute financially. A starting point would be to negotiate a pro-rata contribution according to student numbers, recognising that some local churches may be more able than others to contribute.
- 5) Invite established SRE teachers to come to speak in the churches, to inform people about this model of SRE.
- 6) Consideration needs to be given at an early stage to the expected duties the employed SRE teacher will perform and the structure and content of the agreed curriculum. This might include assigning responsibility for curriculum and program development and negotiation with the school principal of any duties outside the direct provision of SRE.
- 7) If general agreement on support for the scheme can be obtained from local churches and the needs of non-participants can be accommodated, a heads of agreement statement or draft constitution should be prepared before approaching the school.
- 8) Approach existing SRE employment boards for advice, ideas and publicity.
- 9) Establish a strong prayer support base. This will facilitate finance, negotiation and effectiveness better than any other form of planning. Through prayer we use liberally the resources of the God of mission.

3.2.2 Local Church Cooperation

The joint-denominational SRE program is an opportunity for the local church communities to cooperate in providing quality experiences for students. This cooperation between participating denominations will depend on:

- Respect for the integrity of religious traditions and sensitivity to their local meanings and expression (for example, Lenten practices).
- Open and frank answers to questions raised in the classroom of the theological and doctrinal differences between denominations as appropriate (for example, baptism, creation, the recognition of saints).
- Relating students to the religious tradition of their home and family and maximising contact with the child's respective local parish/church community (within the terms of the *Privacy Act*). This is increasingly difficult due to the secularisation of society as fewer than 2% of students have contact with a local church.
- Recognition on the part of the participating churches that the joint-denominational program fulfils the enrolling intentions of the parents (that is, only teachers and curricula authorised by the particular churches).
- The purpose of the program being to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of SRE and not purely for educational or administrative convenience.
- Commitment to, and knowledge of, the work of schools, teachers, and the needs of students in their educational context.
- Mutual understanding of the theological, educational and administrative motivations for adopting a joint-denominational employed-teacher approach. (It is important to make a written statement of the reasons for the decision.)
- Clear agreement that the decision to appoint a joint-denominational teacher is justified.

3.3 Negotiating with Other Churches

3.3.1 Negotiated Agreement

A successful and harmoniously operating SRE employment board requires that agreement between participants be carefully negotiated. Once basic agreement has been reached amongst the churches, there is then the need to negotiate with the principal of the school in which the employed teacher will work.

The two greatest sources of friction on SRE employment boards are finance and undue dominance by one or more denominational representatives. The former problem usually has its origins in an unrealistic approach to costs and fundraising; the latter generally originates from dominant personalities, from the tendency of the denomination which had the original vision wanting to control the board's operations, or from the unwillingness of major players to hear and address the concerns of minority members.

3.3.2 Issues and Planning

An understanding of the provisions in the *Education Act 1990* for the rights of other religions to provide for their students, careful and realistic appraisal and planning, and a sound constitution for the board can help overcome these potentially destructive forces. A starting point will be open and frank discussions where the following issues can be worked through. Suggested responses to these issues are provided:

- 1) Why should we be involved with this board?
 - Creates ongoing contact when an SRE teacher is part of the school staff.
 - Improves community commitment to secondary SRE.
 - Reduces issues related to changes and absenteeism in teachers.
 - Gives SRE a professional status in the school.
 - Enables flexibility in timetabling for SRE.
 - Provides stability when students are in class groupings.
 - Allows parish resources to be allocated across ministries in an equitable way.
- 2) How will our parish/church ministry be enhanced?
 - Offers SRE to more students than before.
 - Reduces the problem of finding many volunteer teachers each year.
 - Facilitates stewardship, by pooling resources.
 - Gives emphasis to professional implementation of curriculum.
 - Offers smaller church groups an opportunity to contribute more, for example, in curriculum planning.
 - Brings a professional level of Christian service to secondary SRE.
 - Creates an opportunity for more immediate pastoral care and follow-up, as well as the potential for better linkage of students with local churches as access can be improved.
 - Provides opportunities for unity and interaction amongst local churches.
 - Provides all parishioners the opportunity to be involved in this local mission.
- 3) What can we expect in terms of educational goals through this venture?
 - Agreed curriculum, developed with access to greater resources.
 - Continuity of curriculum across several years.
 - Relationship-enhanced learning, with access to regular reinforcement opportunities.
 - Thorough biblical grounding for students.
 - Improved quality of education methods.

- 4) To what extent can we come to an agreement with other participating churches?
Agreement is accepting the differences and working towards a common goal. Churches must be involved in an ongoing dialogue to develop an understanding and appreciation of each other's beliefs and customs if a working relationship is to be developed.
- 5) How can we make the most of this joint-denominational venture, so that no participating church is exploited in any way?
- Representatives must cooperate to ensure all churches are providing support.
 - Churches maintain active representation to have a voice in all decisions.
 - Relationships are built between board members, enhancing communication and understanding of needs.
 - Complex issues regarding denominational student numbers and financial contributions will need to be discussed.
- 6) How will churches contribute financially?
- Churches can contribute as they are able, so small churches are included as much as large. There is a need to be sensitive to socio-economic differences within the same area.
 - Tax-deductibility increases the amount people can give.
 - When the vision is sound, God's people love to give.
 - Churches can be united in prayer for God's resources.
- 7) How can students become involved with our local church?
Whilst the role is concerned with the implementation of an agreed teaching and learning program in SRE, there will be opportunities for the participating churches to provide visiting speakers on special occasions and to communicate with students of SRE about details of special church initiatives.
- 8) What if agreement proves difficult?
Keep talking. Many models of joint SRE delivery exist. Continue to search for different methods and work towards a model that is appropriate for your situation. The *Education Act 1990* allows for great flexibility of delivery. Prayer should surround every step of this process. It should also be remembered that individual churches may retain access on particular occasions and need not lose the special opportunities they desire.

3.4 Negotiating with the School

Once it is clear which churches will participate, the extent of the program that can be financed, and how churches and religious persuasions that choose to provide their own programs will be affected, it is time to seek a meeting with the school principal to discuss the implementation in detail. This should take place well before the end of second term in the year before the scheme would begin, as this is when timetabling is considered for the following year.

The principal will be concerned with the smooth running of the school, the concerns of parents and the welfare of students. It is worth considering the proposal from each of these perspectives to ensure that likely objections can be met. It is useful to know how a similar program is functioning successfully elsewhere so that the principal can be referred to their colleague at another school.

Principals are required to negotiate the provision of SRE. Administrative convenience should not be the prime determining factor in these negotiations. Be aware that schools run quite complex timetables which include six to ten day cycles and vertical integration across a number of years. This might create unforeseen difficulties for the SRE program. If the school has not had any SRE in the past, it is possible that staff have enjoyed using the SRE period for other school activities including faculty and staff meetings. The introduction of SRE can become an issue if not sensitively handled.

Representatives of the major churches involved in establishing the SRE employment board should conduct negotiations. It is advisable to include people with the following expertise:

- a clergyman known to the principal who can speak for all the participants;
- a parent who has some involvement in the school community and who will be able to put the case to parent bodies associated with the school;
- a person who understands timetabling issues in secondary schools to help facilitate a 'win-win' for both the school and SRE providers;
- a person with previous experience of SRE employment boards;
- a person with professional negotiation skills and a good understanding of the proposal.

Agreement needs to be reached with the school principal on the following:

- the number of classes and the years for which SRE will be provided
- which denominations are involved and which are not
- if a part-time appointment, which days the teacher will be employed
- what other duties will be expected or allowed
- what school accommodation and resources will be needed
- when the scheme is expected to commence operations
- at what points the scheme will be reviewed
- how parents will be informed.

Consideration should be given to what can be traded during negotiations and how important each issue is. For example, if the principal raises difficulties about including Year 7 because of the need for the SRE period for peer support or about the teacher working only from Tuesday to Thursday because of the cyclical six-day timetable, how flexible can those negotiating be? What concessions can be made and what concessions can be asked of the school?

Those participating in negotiations should familiarise themselves with the contents of the *SRE Handbook* **before** approaching the school.

3.5 Possible Duties for an Employed SRE Teacher

The prime purpose for the provision of an SRE teacher is to establish a dynamic and effective SRE program with secondary students. However, once the teacher is established there is the opportunity to negotiate additional roles under the supervision of the principal.

Along with maintaining communications with the SRE employment board, church congregations supporting the program and with colleagues teaching similar roles, there are a number of other areas through which it is possible to have Christian input into the lives of students.

Employed SRE teachers can influence the lives of students within secondary schools through each of the following:

- teaching SRE in the classroom
- leading SRE and Education Week assemblies
- developing relationships with students
- supporting school programs and activities
- referral to local churches upon request.

Part of the negotiation process will be to determine in which of these areas the employed school worker can be engaged. These broad areas will now be explored in more detail to reveal the range of possible duties.

3.5.1 Teaching Special Religious Education in the Classroom

The most important role for the SRE teacher is to provide classroom instruction on a regular basis, achieving consistency in instruction and continuity in curriculum and learning. Meeting with students for a lesson each week allows the teacher to contribute to the belief system and worldview these students are developing. This is an educative process and will enable students to become aware of Christian teachings and make decisions in their lives based on what they learn. This does not mean that all will profess Christian faith. It does mean that some will, others may do so later in life, and some will remain open to Christian influences.

Within modern western society there is the lack of a proper understanding of what Christians actually believe, about who Jesus is, who he claims to be and what he calls his hearers and followers to do. The SRE teacher has the opportunity to address this. The SRE teacher can build a safe environment for students to ask their questions, present apologetics, explore the values of their culture and relate their findings to those espoused by the Christian faith.

There is the need for effective classroom teachers who are models of what they profess and who are prepared to give their time and energy to helping young people understand the Christian faith. This in itself can create in students an openness to the gospel that might never otherwise have occurred.

In addition to teaching, the employed SRE teacher may also be responsible for coordinating voluntary SRE teachers and visiting speakers, and organising SRE seminar programs. For further information on organising a seminar, see the document *Guidelines for Christian SRE Seminars*, available via the Resources page of the ICCOREIS website.

3.5.2 Leading SRE and Education Week Assemblies

Employed SRE teachers may be involved in leading and organising special Christmas and Easter assemblies and Education Week presentations in the school. This opens the possibility of working closely with staff, students, parents and volunteer SRE teachers and is an opportunity to include other denominations.

For further information on organising an assembly, see the document *Guidelines for Christian SRE Assemblies*, available via the Resources page of the ICCOREIS website.

3.5.3 Developing Relationships with Students

By being part of the school community, the SRE teacher has the opportunity to develop caring relationships with students. However, these relationships are subject to the provisions of the school's student welfare policy and other relevant DET protocols and policies. SRE teachers should have a working knowledge of the child protection guidelines and of the Departmental policy on dealing with sensitive issues.

The range of activities might include meeting with students out of SRE lessons to provide advice and support through informal contact in the playground, through voluntary organisations or through being available for students to drop in to discuss matters of belief or personal need. From experience, students are very willing to approach a caring SRE teacher.

Opportunities may also arise to provide support for students with personal or family problems and there may be occasions to meet with parents and assist them with difficulties relating to their children. In undertaking these duties the SRE teacher must not seek to displace the school counsellor. In some situations the SRE teacher may be the first point of contact for a student, who can then be referred to the school counsellor. There should be a close relationship between the SRE teacher and the school counsellor to facilitate discussion of confidential student-related matters when necessary.

3.5.4 Supporting School Programs and Activities

Providing time is available, opportunities may be negotiated with the principal which enable the SRE teacher to volunteer and assist in school programs such as peer support, personal development courses and co-curricular activities including sport, debating and public speaking, drama and musicals, dance and rock festivals, excursions, school formals, clubs, Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and social activities.

There may be occasions for assisting those with special learning needs. An SRE teacher's expertise, personal gifts and interests can be applied in ways that can benefit students needing additional support in a school setting. All of these are valuable opportunities for relationship building with staff and students.

With the principal's approval, the teacher may also play a role within the school in conducting school-based charity programs that offer further opportunities to involve students in humanitarian causes including activities of the wider church.

There is also the possibility of participation in the Inter-School Christian Fellowship (ISCF) program. It should be noted that ISCF is the only recognised student Christian activity endorsed in schools and the school ISCF counsellor needs the approval of Scripture Union. The SRE teacher could support the school ISCF counsellor or where an ISCF does not exist discuss its establishment with Scripture Union. There is no provision for other lunch-time clubs run by churches or para-church organisations and forming such a club would be

discouraged by the DET due to its arrangement with Scripture Union for the operation of ISCF groups and would be entirely the responsibility of the principal. The SRE teacher's role in such activities would need to be negotiated with both the principal and the church responsible.

3.5.5 Referral to Local Churches

The SRE teacher is appointed to work with all students, so in dealing with student requests about local churches the teacher should be impartial in offering advice and support. The guiding principle is to respect the SRE in which the student is enrolled. The response would be to point the student towards the local church for which the parent has given approval.

3.5.6 Negotiating the Balance

After first ensuring that the prime responsibility of teaching SRE in the classroom is being satisfied, the SRE employment board may consider an appropriate balance between that and other broad areas for the school, taking into account what other church-school contacts exist or could be developed to complement the employed teacher's duties. In addition to school responsibilities, the SRE teacher may need to be available to the board's churches for deputation visits to inspire support and will also make reports to the board and the churches on the provision of SRE.

When planning these support roles within the school it should be acknowledged that informal interactions with staff and students make a valuable contribution to the work of the teacher as they allow interpersonal relationships to develop that may encourage a willingness to think through issues involved in Christian discipleship.

Decisions about roles and responsibilities will have bearing on the approach to curriculum design and on the teaching methods adopted by the employed SRE teacher. Generally, classroom instruction will be based on formal teaching in order to achieve an understanding of the content of Christian beliefs. Both the learning program and teaching methods must be understood and endorsed by each participating church. Discussing the approach to SRE with the principal can facilitate arrangements and prevent difficulties that could arise through misunderstanding.

It needs to be emphasised that, for their ongoing satisfaction and support, all participants must be comfortable with the decisions made about SRE provision. Each party should be an equal partner to the arrangements. It is wise not to enter into negotiation with a particular church if you are not prepared to employ an applicant from that denomination as the paid worker. It is unethical to pretend otherwise, and to do so would jeopardise the continuity of the board.

Additional consideration needs to be given to the restrictions that part-time appointments impose on the SRE program. A person holding a part-time position or with specific commitments (such as a part-time student or a person who has other church, school or family responsibilities) will be less flexible about availability. Conversely, in a large school, the sheer number of relationships that the SRE teacher must maintain can be exhausting and two part-time teachers job-sharing may give them both extra moral and physical support.

The pastoral care of SRE teachers is an issue that must not be overlooked. They become ministers to very large congregations, often alone in the school, and possibly facing hostility from within. SRE employment boards have the capacity to inspire, motivate and encourage SRE teachers and to support them through consistent and uplifting prayer.

3.6 Qualities of an Employed SRE Teacher

The ideal person will be enthusiastic, trained, mature, talented and relatively young and with a strong sense of commitment to Christian service through this approach to SRE in schools. It is also desirable that this person have experience in working with youth as well as the capacity to gain ready acceptance as a peer by those who work in the school.

It is unlikely that any one person applying for a position will meet the SRE employment board's expectations in all of these areas. It should also be appreciated that experience tends to come with a price, unless someone has a particular desire to serve without reward.

The basic biblical principle is:

the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel
1 Corinthians 9:14 NRSV

If the board intends to employ a trained and experienced teacher, then serious consideration needs to be given to remuneration in line with teachers' salaries. If the board intends to pay a stipend that is significantly below current rates for teachers, then the pool of potential applicants will be considerably smaller. This decision about remuneration needs to be made in conjunction with the level of experience and training expected of an appointee. Failure to do so or later failure to pay the person the agreed amount may lead to unhappiness, possible friction and reduced attention to duties.

Suggested minimum qualifications:

- A mature personal Christian faith and consistent lifestyle.
- Teaching skills and an awareness of current educational thought on the teaching/learning process, and in particular, current religious education pedagogy.
- Some training in biblical, theological or religious studies, preferably at diploma or degree level.
- Some training in youth ministry.
- Proven experience in church-based or school children's or youth ministries.
- The ability to work with and relate to teenagers and to assist them in their spiritual development and care for them pastorally.
- The ability to work as a member of a team and receive directions as well as to work independently.
- An understanding of the ethos of government schools and the ability to respect and work with members of staff.
- A self-starter with intrinsic motivation.
- Organisational, reporting and communication skills.
- The ability to develop strategies for linking responsive school students to church-based programs.
- The ability to liaise with denominations, to represent each one fairly within the school, including the referral of students seeking contact with church-based programs.
- The ability to work with people of different beliefs and values.

3.7 Recruiting an Employed SRE Teacher

3.7.1 Preparation

Before recruitment begins, the board must resolve the following issues:

- Whether the position is part or full-time; if part-time is there any possibility of later extension in the number of days worked.
- Whether the position will involve solely SRE teaching or incorporate a written job description including SRE coordination, other school-based activities or other church-focused duties.
- The essential and desirable criteria that will be expected of an applicant.
- The range of salary payable and the method of payment.
- What other non-pecuniary benefits and expense allowances will be provided.
- The nature of the employment contract.
- What arrangements are in place to cover insurance and other legal obligations.
- The code of conduct and practice that will apply to the teacher.
- The criteria for authorisation and who will take responsibility for organising authorisation and screening.
- How reporting and position reviews will occur.
- Who will provide pastoral care and support.
- Who has responsibility for curriculum design, teaching methods and approach, and how much flexibility is allowed.
- What conflict or dispute resolution procedures will apply when disagreements occur with the school or with churches.
- What professional development opportunities and obligations are to be provided/funded.
- How the employed SRE teacher will work with voluntary SRE personnel.
- What is to be the nature of the relationship between the employed SRE teacher and employed church workers.
- What is the role of the SRE teacher in relation to making referrals of students to member churches.
- How the advertising of the position will ensure that it meets anti-discrimination requirements; what procedures will be in place for obtaining further details or an information package on the position; what procedures will apply for re-advertising if no suitable person applies initially.
- Who will form the interview panel and who will make the appointment; how constitutional requirements for ratification by member churches will be met.
- What procedures will be followed if finances wane or the person proves unsatisfactory.

Decisions taken early in the process will be of assistance to the board when it reaches the stage of developing an employment contract and appointing a teacher.

3.7.2 Selection Committee

It is advisable to restrict the size of the selection committee to around five people, rather than having the whole board involved in the selection procedure. This committee should be appointed to ensure gender balance, equitable denominational representation and experience in personnel recruitment. It would be desirable to invite a school principal or their delegate onto the panel.

3.7.3 Advertising the Position

Ensure that the advertisement contains an accurate job description and is not misleading with respect to required duties, hours of employment (especially for part-time positions), salary and other details. Indicate that it is a child related position and that the provisions of the *Child Protection Act 1998* apply in relation to Prohibited Employment Declaration and the screening of paid workers.

Clear directions should be given as to the name and address for enquiries and the closing date for applications.

3.7.4 Arranging and Conducting Interviews

The interviewing committee will, in most cases, process applications into two groups: possibles and improbables. From the former, a short list of maybe three to five will be compiled. If possible, interview all applicants on the same day, to allow easier comparison. In most cases referees will only be consulted after the interview for the best applicant, to verify impressions and to seek more detailed information on past performance.

It is wise to have a second interview of the two (or three) most preferred candidates before the offer of appointment is made. This should involve the whole SRE employment board so that all members are able to participate in and own the final selection. It is most unwise to offer the position to a candidate before all the interviews have been conducted, even when it appears that the most suitable applicant has been found. To do so would lay the board open to action under Trade Practices and Anti-Discrimination legislation.

3.7.5 Non-SRE Responsibilities

In the case where the employed teacher has duties which come under the jurisdiction of the school principal (for example, participation in school activities, peer support, pastoral care under the school welfare policy, sporting teams, camping or excursion activities), the SRE employment board should be fully acquainted with the nature of such duties and be satisfied they are not in conflict with the aims and objectives for SRE and will not prove detrimental to the status and role of SRE teachers in the school.

A written agreement between the principal and the employed teacher clearly identifying such non-SRE duties and acknowledging the school's responsibility for the person's fulfilment of these duties should be subscribed to by the teacher and the board and lodged with the board. Care needs to be taken in making such agreements that the employed teacher is not exposed to actions for legal liability that are not covered by the board's insurance policy or by the DET.

3.8 Appointing an SRE Teacher

Proper procedures should be in place so that the employed teacher is required to sign an employment contract that includes a suitable code of conduct and professional practice and specifies how performance is to be evaluated and monitored. Appropriate cover for workers' compensation and other insurance should be taken out whilst arrangements should be made for child protection screening in accordance with the provisions for paid workers engaged with children.

The employed teacher should have a clear understanding of how and when their salary will be paid and of the required reporting procedures.

It is advisable to appoint a member of the SRE employment board to have the pastoral responsibility for the employed teacher. This person, who should have broad sympathies with the employed teacher, can exercise an advocacy function on the teacher's behalf at board level. It is normally advisable to have someone of the same sex but preferably not of the same denominational affiliation for this role. The latter overcomes the possibility of the board dividing along denominational lines if management of the teacher is disputed.

Position review and disciplinary measures are best assigned to a sub-committee of the board.

3.8.1 Terms and Conditions of Employment

The following must be decided:

- Whether the teacher will be appointed on a full-time, part-time or casual basis. If casual, whether provision for sick pay and holiday pay will be made in the budget.
- How the criteria for joint authorisation of the teacher by each of the participating churches will be determined.
- The duration of the appointment, and whether there will be a trial period.
- The salary scale, and whether it will be based on teacher qualifications and teaching load. How does this scale compare with DET equivalents?
- What will be considered in determining the teaching load? (For example, number of classes taught per week, preparation time, participation in school functions such as speech nights, church deputations, weekend programs, reporting to the board, follow-up activities, liaising with youth groups, pastoral care.)

What provision will be made for:

- sick leave
- holiday leave
- leave loading
- superannuation
- long service leave entitlement (commencing after five years service, provided for at the rate of two months leave on full pay, payable after 10 years service)
- travelling allowance
- reimbursement for resource materials, reference library, photocopying, telephone, and other expenses
- relief teachers?

3.8.2 Supervision

A number of decisions must be made regarding supervision of the teacher:

- What strategies will be developed for cooperative appraisal of the SRE teacher's performance?
- Will the SRE employment board delegate its supervisory responsibilities to a specific member who will have the duty of supporting the teacher and reporting regularly at board meetings?
- Will the board invite the school's SRE coordinator to report on the program at its meetings or liaise with the board's own supervisor?
- What strategies are proposed for regular review of the terms of appointment, conditions of employment, pastoral care and teacher performance? To what extent will the principal or their delegate contribute to the process?

3.8.3 Pastoral Support

What provisions are to be made for the pastoral care of the teacher through:

- regular prayer with a support group from the SRE employment board
- meeting with the board
- meeting with a curriculum sub-committee to clarify theological and doctrinal differences as they arise, to discuss pedagogical strategies and assist with organisational details
- provision of in-service opportunities and other professional development?

Use could be made of the relevant training and resources network available through various denominations and ICCOREIS. Catholic Education Offices also provide in-service courses on a range of issues including teaching strategies, classroom management and pastoral care.

3.8.4 Provisions for Relief Teachers

Appropriate strategies need to be developed for replacement of the employed SRE teacher in case of sickness or unavoidable absence. Casual teachers can be expensive and may not understand the SRE ethos. Local church youth ministers or casuals could be authorised at the beginning of each year.

3.8.5 Employment Options Available

There are a number of options for employment of the SRE teacher:

- 1) Through the SRE employment board as an incorporated body (the preferred option).
- 2) Through the establishment of a joint-board comprising a number of local SRE employment boards, to constitute the employing body.
- 3) Through a local church with an administrative structure capable of fulfilling the role of employer, noting that the teacher will work at the direction of the SRE employment board.
- 4) Through a denominational organisation with goals and tasks similar to the board that can act as employer, noting that the teacher will work at the direction of the SRE employment board.

If option (1) or (2) is chosen, the employment board or joint-board must decide whether it should be properly registered as an employing body (for example, registration as a Group Employer with the Australian Taxation Office). If so, have the initial costs involved in registration as an employing body been investigated?

If option (3) or (4) is chosen, the board must decide whether budgetary provision will be made for additional costs (other than wages) to be paid to the employing body. This includes items such as extra premium on workers' compensation, public liability and professional indemnity insurance and a fee to cover administrative charges.

Current SRE employment boards prefer incorporation, leading to the establishment of a constitution with rules/bylaws/standing orders as well as registration as a charitable institution (State requirement) and meeting the requirements of the Australian Taxation Office.

3.9 Employment Contracts

3.9.1 Contractual Arrangements with the Teacher

The teacher's employment contract must specify:

- the terms of appointment, conditions of employment and other responsibilities of the SRE employment board to the teacher (supervision, pastoral care, provision of relief teachers);
- the responsibilities and duties of the teacher;
- other matters that may be required of the teacher, including respect for the integrity of religious traditions and sensitivity to their local meaning and expression; open and frank discussion in the classroom of theological and doctrinal differences where appropriate; teaching the authorised curriculum; ensuring students are related with the religious tradition of the home and family; and maximising opportunities for contact with the local church/parish communities.

3.9.2 Contracts with the Employing Body

If the teacher is to be employed by a local church, denominational organisation, or joint-board, the SRE employment board's responsibilities in determining the teacher's day-to-day duties must be expressed in the formal agreement between the employing body and the teacher.

The formal agreement between the employing body and the SRE employment board must include the period of the contract between them, all financial consideration to be paid by the board to the employing body, as well as the responsibilities of each party, particularly in relation to the teacher.

3.9.3 Non-SRE Responsibilities

If the SRE teacher is invited by the school to fulfil some non-SRE responsibilities (for example, teaching GRE or other Board of Studies courses, playground duty or other supervisory tasks) the following steps are necessary:

- The SRE employment board should be fully acquainted with the nature of such duties and be satisfied that they are not in conflict with the aims and objectives of SRE and will not prove detrimental to the status and role of the SRE teachers in the school.
- A written agreement between the principal and the teacher, clearly identifying such non-SRE duties and acknowledging the school's responsibilities for the teacher's fulfilment of these duties, should be subscribed to by the teacher and the board. A copy of this agreement is registered with the board and, where the board is not the direct employer, with the employing body.

3.10 Fulfilling Legal Requirements

3.10.1 Authorising and Screening the Teacher

There are responsibilities for each denomination as well as for the employing body. It is the responsibility of the recognised authorising agent (pastor/clergy) of each denomination to authorise and screen any person teaching SRE in government schools in the name of their denomination.

The preferred applicant must sign an employment screening consent form as well as a Prohibited Employment Declaration form and undergo screening prior to appointment. The Prohibited Employment Declaration form is to be kept by the employer. An applicant may not work with children if they are not able to sign this form as stated under the *Child Protection Act*. All paid SRE teachers must also undergo a background check prior to engagement.

Details of the Working with Children Check can be found on the website of the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, www.kids.nsw.gov.au.

The DET has further guidelines, which give additional protection from people who are not allowed in the school. For further information, see the DET website, www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_serv/child_protection/index.shtml.

(Note that this is a secure site; if you are unable to access it directly from this document, copy the link and paste it into your web browser).

3.10.2 Authorising the Curriculum and Teaching Program

The degree of initiative the employed SRE teacher is allowed in devising the curriculum and selecting the teaching methods must be consistent with the requirement of the *Education Act 1990* that the content and methods be authorised by the religious persuasion with which a child is enrolled for SRE. It is therefore important that the respective roles of the clergy, parents, school and employed teacher are clearly defined so that the position of the SRE teacher is not undermined in the event of a dispute.

A sub-committee of the SRE employment board could be formed to check any curriculum and associated resources the teacher wishes to use. (Note: Close attention should also be paid to the classification of audiovisual material acceptable in NSW schools).

3.10.3 Notifying the School

The school is then notified using the appropriate letter for joint-denominational SRE programs. This permits all participating churches to authorise the teacher for teaching their children in that school.

For further details on setting up the SRE program, including authorisation and notifying the school, see Chapter 3 of the *SRE Handbook*.

A sample letter for cross authorisation can be found in Appendix B of the *SRE Handbook*.

3.11 Problems the Employed SRE Teacher Might Face

Employed teachers will experience difficulties from time to time. These might have their origin within the school, with the SRE employment board or with the member churches or parents. To be aware of these in advance allows a board to maintain an effective working environment for the employed teacher.

The following sections outline some of the problems identified by employed SRE teachers.

3.11.1 Churches' Expectations

SRE is first and foremost an educational activity. Through positive teaching some students demonstrate an interest in areas related to faith. The emphasis on converts is not in the spirit of the legislation. Where churches see this ministry as a pew-filling exercise they distort the function of the SRE teacher and create undue pressure on teachers and students alike. SRE classes must elicit interest in students to find out more. This will allow the SRE teacher to explain faith in more detail and encourage students' involvement in church activities. Furthermore, churches must own this ministry as their contribution to local mission. The link with the local churches and their youth groups is crucial for the discipleship of those demonstrating an interest in faith. Frequent deputation visits to each of the churches involved in the SRE employment board, a good prayer base, and involved youth workers will help support students in their growth in faith and relationship with God.

3.11.2 School Expectations

Schools need to be very clear with SRE employment boards as to the duties and responsibilities of employed SRE teachers (for example, sport, playground duty, roll call, staff meetings, carnivals and other 'extras'). These activities should only be allowed with the express permission of the school principal because the teacher is acting outside the provision of SRE and as such, must be covered by the school's insurance as a volunteer. School staff will however be won over by the generosity of SRE teachers as they contribute to the running and welfare of the school.

3.11.3 Wages, Conditions, Duties and Responsibilities

These should be worked out in detail beforehand and not in an ad-hoc fashion. Changes to wages and conditions should be negotiated prior to full board meetings and in an atmosphere where pressure is not brought to bear on the teacher to accept the cheapest alternative for the board's sake. Adequate prayer support will ensure that congregations catch the vision and resources abound for this vibrant godly work.

3.12 Maintaining the SRE Employment Board

Maintaining healthy relationships between members of the SRE employment board is most important for the ongoing success of the board. It is also essential that the mission of the board is not lost in the day-to-day management of its affairs.

To ensure the good health and effectiveness of the board, the following should be observed:

- No one denomination should dominate the executive of the board.
- Board members need to be people who have a vision for the work and who are committed to seeing it happen, not people who are just there because no-one else wants to be, or to gain members for their own denominations.
- Prayer should be a significant part of every board meeting, asking for unity and fellowship.
- Opportunity should be available for members of the board to exercise their own gifts and to contribute in a meaningful way to the accomplishment of the aims and goals of the board.
- Almost all problems can be resolved through good relationships and open discussion. Board members need to be aware of good communication and negotiation skills and exercise self-discipline of the tongue!
- If the conflict becomes unmanageable, seek outside help. ICCOREIS, senior pastors or objective mediators may be contacted.

Refer to the ICCOREIS website, www.iccoreis.asn.au for information about ICCOREIS and its programs and services and for the names of contact officers to assist with further enquiries.

3.13 Growing the Vision

There is a growing number of joint denominational SRE employment boards in New South Wales secondary schools. Boards have been operating now for more than 30 years and have steadily built an excellent reputation amongst school communities. The development of these boards and their growth indicate that this approach to the organisation of SRE is a workable solution in the secondary school context.

As boards gain experience and see the results of their programs, they communicate their enthusiasm to other congregations in their surrounding areas and encourage others to 'plant' new boards, offering advice and templates. Established SRE teachers as well as board members seek to share their commitment by mentoring new boards and SRE teachers and speaking at theological and training colleges about the effectiveness of this ministry.

Opportunities to support SRE are as boundless as the enthusiasm of the teenagers we serve. Of importance is the development of prayer cells with their requests that the message bear fruit amongst the students. Prayer for guidance and blessing will support and sustain those involved with SRE programs such as boards, SRE teachers and other teachers with whom contact is made within the school.

God bless you in your efforts.

3.14 What Students Have to Say...

The following comments are extracts from a survey of Year 11 students who had just completed four years of weekly SRE lessons with full-time board-employed SRE teachers.

“I am glad I have had the chance to learn about Christianity and about God - I would otherwise know practically nothing if I had not come to this class.”

“I liked games where we weren’t told of their purpose until after we’d finished. Gave us a chance to see how Christianity is involved in so many aspects of life.”

“my Christian Studies teachers treated us like people and you don’t use your authority to overpower us”

“I always have thought how can it be fair to let someone like Adolph Hitler commit such heinous crimes then think ‘oh crap I’m gonna go to hell’ then just ask for forgiveness then get away with those crimes. The movie “Dead Man Walking” broadened my thinking and helped me to see the other side.”

“when September 11 happened our Yr 10 class talked about it and I found it easier to understand”

“I think it has helped me, learning about God and listening to the truth. I would definitely find it easier now to turn to God as I understand things better.”

“I wouldn’t have known about him if we hadn’t been taught about him during school.”

“it’s certainly given me greater insight into a loving God as opposed to the vengeful, judgemental god my grandparents are so scared of”

“the lessons have sparked the interest to want to know more.”

“I think this subject has provided me with the opportunity to be accepted by God”

End of Chapter

4 Resources

4.1 The Apostles' Creed

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit;
the holy catholic church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.”

4.2 Websites

4.2.1 ICCOREIS

www.iccoreis.asn.au

4.2.2 Australian Taxation Office

Information for non-profit organisations: www.ato.gov.au/nonprofit/

Tax rulings: <http://law.ato.gov.au/atolaw/index.htm>

In particular, note ruling TR 92/17 - Income tax and fringe benefits tax: exemptions for 'religious institutions'.

4.2.3 NSW Commission for Children and Young People

Details of the Working with Children Check: www.kids.nsw.gov.au

4.3 Publications and Policies

4.3.1 Education Act 1990

The Education Act can be found on the NSW Government Legislation website, at www.legislation.nsw.gov.au, in the In Force database.

4.3.2 Implementation of Religious Education Policy

This document is available via the Religious Education page of the DET curriculum support website, at www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/policies/religion/index.htm.

4.3.3 Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools (1980)

This report was produced by the Rawlinson committee of enquiry into religious education in NSW government schools. Extracts from this document are included in Appendix C of the *SRE Handbook*.

4.3.4 SRE Handbook

The *SRE Handbook* has been prepared by ICCOREIS to provide an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all concerned with SRE in government schools. The handbook is available via the Publications page of the ICCOREIS website, or from the ICCOREIS Executive Officer.

4.3.5 Guidelines for SRE Assemblies and Seminars

The documents *Guidelines for Christian SRE Assemblies* and *Guidelines for Christian SRE Seminars* are available via the Resources page of the ICCOREIS website.

4.3.6 Sample Letters

Appendix B of the *SRE Handbook* contains a number of sample letters and documents, including:

SRE Teacher's Engagement Form,

Letter for Combined Arrangements using One or More Teachers Employed by a Board,

Letter for Combined Arrangements and Cross Authorisation.

End of Chapter