



# SRE Update

## Christian Volunteers take SRE to Schools

Australians all know the value of a good volunteer. Our history is full of stories of heroic citizens lending a hand in times of difficulty. The Hunter is no exception: volunteers protect swimmers at the beach, provide meals to the homeless, and fight bushfires.

In the primary schools of the Hunter, over 15,000 students receive SRE lessons from an army of over 650 volunteer SRE teachers. All of these teachers give generously of their time and talents to ensure that this generation of Christians and the next are supported in their faith. These church-based volunteers prepare for and make their weekly visits, motivated by a love of God and a love for the young.

While most churches and faiths have the right to present faith education to their children, not every church has the capacity to exercise this right. Churches of various denominations often join together to support this great effort: by training and supporting volunteers, developing engaging lessons, and preparing exciting assembly presentations for special seasons such as Easter and Christmas.

Like most volunteers, 'scripture teachers' (as they are often known), love what they do. Pat McCabe of Charlestown is one of many volunteers who goes about her generous and joyous work year after year. Pat recently retired after 35 years of service to the students of Charlestown East and Hillsborough public schools. Then there's Dorothy Daley from Cessnock, an over-80-year-old with the loveliest smile, who has

been teaching SRE for 50 years and is still going!

Few have been publicly recognised for their service, but June Eggert from the Central Coast has actually received an Excellence in Teaching award conferred by the Department of Education and Training for her contribution as an SRE teacher over more than three decades. This year Brian Andrews was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for 40 years of volunteer services including SRE teaching and coordinating in Kurri Kurri.

At a time when the powers that be are debating the merits of ethics and values education and controversy rages over who is entitled to offer what form of education to the students in government schools, volunteers like Pat, Dorothy, June and Brian have continued to offer interesting and life changing lessons to the students in their charge.

Local schools have welcomed and acknowledged the contribution of SRE Teachers for around 50 years and despite frequent changes in government, policy, social

agenda and technology over the years, scripture teachers continue to make a positive contribution to the lives of families in the Hunter and across the state.

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[www.cmahunter.com.au](http://www.cmahunter.com.au)



Photography by David Vagg

## Why Should Parents Choose SRE for their Children?

Here are some ideas to help you answer that question:

- Humans are spiritual beings. SRE helps children explore their spiritual questions - questions that parents and classroom teachers often feel ill-equipped to answer.
- SRE teachers are generally passionate volunteers, motivated out of deep conviction and foundational values. That's something worth modelling to children!
- SRE gives children a chance to explore the Christian values and ethos on which much of Australian society was built.
- A knowledge of Bible stories enriches the ability to understand the English language and literature.
- The words of the Bible are heard at Anzac Day services, funerals and weddings. They bring comfort and challenge. SRE is one of the few places outside of church that children systematically encounter the Bible.
- SRE teachers are often older and bring a valuable perspective on life for children who have little contact with the older generation.

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Sally Smith

## Ethics Classes in Schools

Those who have followed the debate thus far will be aware of the complexity of this issue, but let's try to make it simple.

### The Announcement

On 25<sup>th</sup> November 2009 the then Premier, Nathan Rees, and Education Minister, Verity Firth, announced that a pilot of an ethics program would be delivered to NSW primary school students who wished to participate and did not attend Special Religious Education. This was due to the efforts of the Federation of Parents and Citizens (P&C) which passed a motion to that effect in July 2009 at its AGM, and the St James Ethics Centre (SJEC). President of the P&C, Dianne Giblin, stated, "The introduction of an alternative to scripture classes gives parents and students an alternative choice to scripture which not only is reflective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century schools in Australia but also recognises the diversity of public schools across NSW."

### The Schools

The ten week trial, to commence in second semester 2010, will involve year 5 and year 6 students at ten government primary schools. The Department of Education and Training (DET) has not officially announced the names of the schools but according to the SJEC website they include: Baulkham Hills North Public, Bungendore Public, Darlinghurst Public, Ferncourt Public (South Marrickville), Hurstville Public, Neutral Bay Public and Rozelle Public. It is anticipated that if the pilot is successful the course will be offered in all NSW government primary schools.

### The Course

The curriculum is being developed by Professor Phillip Cam in conjunction with the DET and the NSW Board of Studies, if required. A monitoring committee including members of the P&C will oversee the trial. Course content would be made available to all interested parties, including faith-based groups.

### Ethics and SRE

For ICCOREIS' response on behalf of the churches and for other reports, please see the SRE Policy page of our website: [www.iccoreis.asn.au/srepolicy.htm](http://www.iccoreis.asn.au/srepolicy.htm). Often there are reports in the general media and on the websites of the SJEC and the P&C.

### Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Will SRE be replaced by ethics lessons in the classroom?

A: No, the ethics lessons will take place at the same time as SRE and be provided only for children who do not attend SRE but whose parents choose the ethics option.

Q: Who will teach the ethics lessons?

Q: Will the course require approval from the Board of Studies?

Q: How will the pilot be funded?

There are many areas about which little is known. Provision of teaching spaces and supervision of students who don't choose either SRE or the ethics course are school management issues. We will have to await answers to these questions.

## Special Christmas Play

The Principal of Tamworth Public School Mr Lee Preston said, "The students at Tamworth Public School were treated to a thespian delight on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November, when our dedicated and talented Scripture teachers presented a special Christmas play. The play was all about the true meaning of Christmas but presented with lots of fun and audience participation. This was the culmination of another successful year at TPS with the Special Religious Education Program. We certainly appreciate the time and effort given by our Scripture teachers in ensuring the spiritual needs of our students are being met. It was great to be able to finish the year with a wonderful performance and then a special morning tea to show our appreciation."



SRE Coordinator at Tamworth Public School, Margo Hobson, has been teaching scripture for over thirty years and said it is a privilege and an honour to come into the school to share God's love each week. Margo taught scripture to Belinda Gonsalves when Belinda was in kindergarten. Belinda now teaches scripture at Tamworth Public and Oxley High schools. Margo said, "If we can get some message to one or two kids in a lifetime, it's worthwhile."

Father Roel finished the morning by teaching the children the 'wow clap', which they were very excited about, and each received a Christmas bookmark to take home.

*Story and photograph by Suzanne Holloway  
Published in Tamworth City News*

# Investigating SRE Teacher Training and Support

December 2009 Progress Report

Researcher: Mary Smith

Mary Smith's research involved working with denominations across the state and listening to SRE providers. It is a year since the last report for this special project on SRE teacher training and support was submitted to ICCOREIS and many of the recommendations have already been implemented. Several exciting developments deserve to be brought to your attention.

## Easier Access to SRE Information

Child protection training, other training requirements and contact details of many denominations and dioceses are now on the ICCOREIS website. This is a great advancement as a huge amount of specialised information which was kept in denominational offices has now been collated and can be found on one webpage.

## SRE Training and Accreditation page ([www.iccoreis.asn.au/accreditation.htm](http://www.iccoreis.asn.au/accreditation.htm))

The SRE Training and Accreditation page is valuable for:

- volunteers seeking information
- trainers offering joint denominational workshops.

The information on this page demonstrates a commitment to safe working practices and professional standards for SRE volunteers.



## Child Protection

Although many churches had policies regarding child protection training, others had no requirements. This has changed for the better over the last year and the policies of member churches regarding child protection, training requirements and updates can be found on the SRE Training and Accreditation page. The Safe Church Training Agreement ([www.churchsafe.org.au/churchsafe/content.asp?pid=9178](http://www.churchsafe.org.au/churchsafe/content.asp?pid=9178)) has assisted by developing recognised training in child protection offered across the state.

## Accessibility of Training

One of the concerns raised in the research was lack of access to training for a range of reasons. The findings in the report revealed that not all denominations have the resources to provide training, especially to volunteers outside the metropolitan area. Improved communication amongst training providers has helped alleviate this in some geographical areas.

## Areas for Further Development

Those living in isolated areas frequently still lack access to basic training, ongoing support and professional development. Possible remedies to this could be:

- the provision of flexible delivery (online courses)
- the sharing of resources
- the availability of personnel able to travel to isolated areas.

## Clergy and Coordinator Training

The report also revealed a lack of understanding of the role of coordination of SRE, cross-authorisation and joint denominational cooperation. Sometimes clergy and coordinators took on the role of coordination and support with



little background knowledge of the role or legal requirements. The researcher suggested that regional in-service opportunities be available for clergy and coordinators or an interactive 'e-workshop' could be developed based on information in the ICCOREIS SRE Handbook and current requirements.

ICCOREIS is grateful that Mary's work has been a catalyst for the changes that have recently taken place to improve communication, support, training and the ongoing professional development of SRE volunteer teachers.

Mary Smith and Sue Sneddon

# Resources

## Easter for Kids



*Easter for Kids* focuses attention on Jesus, His death and resurrection. It is suitable for camps, church, clubs, school and family settings. The book is packed with drama ideas, Bible reading suggestions, art and craft, music and games. For SRE teachers there are assembly ideas, photocopiable activity sheets, puzzles and pictures. The bonus CD contains 'Best Easter Songs' from CEP and a set of full colour Easter

visual aid posters suitable for PowerPoint presentations or colour printing.

Cost: \$25.00 from Christian bookshops.

## Dave the Donkey

This storybook tells of the lead up to Easter from the viewpoint of Dave the donkey. Part of the Lost Sheep series, it has an Australian flavour and bright and interesting pictures which can be easily seen in most classrooms. Titles in this series are also available as a storytelling kit: a downloadable PowerPoint presentation with accompanying reader's notes - excellent for assemblies or Smartboards.

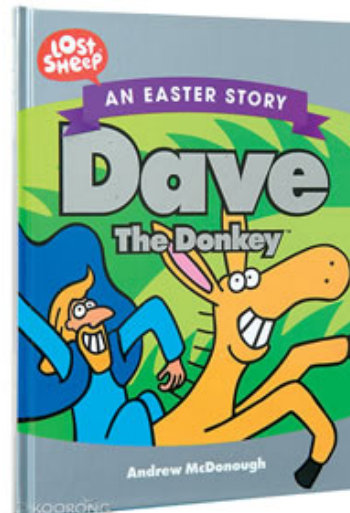
Cost:

Book: \$8.00

Storytelling kit: \$10

from

[www.lostsheep.com.au](http://www.lostsheep.com.au)  
or Christian bookshops.



## Updates to ICCOREIS Website

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#### Have you visited our website recently? Have you noticed the latest additions?

As noted on page 3 of this *SRE Update*, training and accreditation information from various denominations has been included on the ICCOREIS website, on the SRE Training and Accreditation page. Denominational requirements for SRE teacher authorisation have also been added, on the SRE Authorisation page. Both of these pages are available via the SRE Policy page and also the relevant sections of the FAQs page.

The new SRE Policy page is designed to be a central point of access to information on all matters relating to SRE policy. So far this comprises the training, accreditation and authorisation details and ICCOREIS' responses to the ethics course debate.

A Site Map has been added, accessible via the navigation menu at the bottom of the Home page.

Materials from the *Valuing Volunteers* forum are now available from the Resources page.

If you have any comments on the website or suggestions for further additions, please contact Robyn on [webmaster@iccoreis.asn.au](mailto:webmaster@iccoreis.asn.au).

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