

2 SRE Framework

2.1 Place of SRE in Public Schools

2.1.1 Legal Basis for SRE (see Appendix C)

The place of Special Religious Education (SRE) in public schools is governed and/or influenced by the following in NSW:

- a) *Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools (1980) – “the Rawlinson Report”*
- b) *Education Act 1990, Section 32*
- c) *Education Act 1990 Section 33A (Amendment 2010)*
- d) Recommendations of the *Final Report from the Inquiry into Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011*, published in June 2012.
- e) NSW Dept of Education and Communities Response to recommendations of the General Standing Committee No 2 report Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill (Inquiry), December 2012
- f) *Religious Education Policy (2013)*, NSW Department of Education and Communities
- g) *Religious Education Implementation Procedures (2013)*, NSW Department of Education and Communities.

This *SRE Handbook* seeks to bring together the relevant sections of these documents to explain how the partners in SRE can most effectively fulfil their respective roles and responsibilities. The focus is on Christian SRE provided by churches. (The legislation refers to religious persuasions and not churches because it covers both Christian and other faiths.)

SRE has had an integral place in public education in NSW since the *Public Instruction Act 1880*. Its place is presently governed by the *Education Act 1990*.

2.1.2 Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools

During the period 1970-1980, every Australian state undertook a major review of the place of religion in government schools. In 1975, the NSW Minister for Education established a committee of enquiry to consider religious education in NSW government schools. ICCOREIS was invited to appoint three members to represent all the churches. Representatives were also drawn from the Jewish Board of Deputies, parent and teacher organisations, school principals, universities, colleges of advanced education and the Department of School Education. ICCOREIS provided significant submissions to this committee of enquiry, chaired by Ralph Rawlinson. Draft documentation was referred to denominational and diocesan authorities before each decision was finalised. As these submissions were received by the committee of enquiry, ideas from them were incorporated into its report.

The report of the committee of enquiry, *Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools (1980)*, made recommendations in the areas of General Religious Education (GRE) and Special Religious Education (SRE). In February 1986, the SRE recommendations were endorsed by the NSW government. The *Education Act 1990* was framed taking into account the recommendations of the report. The procedures contained in *Religious Education Implementation Procedures 2013* are also based on these recommendations.

2.1.3 Education Act 1990

The *Education Act 1990* makes the following provisions for religious education of children in NSW government schools:

“Secular instruction”

30 In government schools, the education is to consist of strictly non-sectarian and secular instruction. The words secular instruction are to be taken to include general religious education as distinct from dogmatic or polemical theology.

Special religious education

- 32 (1) In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion, but the total number of hours so allowed in a year is not to exceed, for each child, the number of school weeks in the year.
- (2) The religious education to be given to children of any religious persuasion is to be given by a member of the clergy or other religious teacher of that persuasion authorised by the religious body to which the member of the clergy or other religious teacher belongs.
- (3) The religious education to be given is in every case to be the religious education authorised by the religious body to which the member of the clergy or other religious teacher belongs.
- (4) The times at which religious education is to be given to children of a particular religious persuasion are to be fixed by agreement between the Principal of the school and the local member of the clergy or other religious teacher of that persuasion.
- (5) Children attending a religious education class are to be separated from other children at the school while the class is held.
- (6) If the relevant member of the clergy or religious teacher fails to attend the school at the appointed time, the children are to be appropriately cared for at the school during the period set aside for religious education.

Objection to religious education

33 No child at a government school is to be required to receive any general religious education or special religious education if the parent of the child objects to the child’s receiving that education.

33A Special education in ethics as secular alternative to special religious education

- (1) Special education in ethics is allowed as a secular alternative to special religious education at government schools.
- (2) If the parent of a child objects to the child receiving special religious education, the child is entitled to receive special education in ethics, but only if:
- (a) it is reasonably practicable for special education in ethics to be made available to the child at the government school, and
- (b) the parent requests that the child receive special education in ethics.
- (3) A government school cannot be directed (by the Minister or otherwise) not to make special education in ethics available at the school.”

2.2 Department of Education and Communities Consultative Committee on Special Religious Education

In 1983, the Hon R Mulock, the then Minister for Education, implemented Recommendation 70 of the Report, *Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools (1980)*, and established what has now become the Department of Education and Communities Consultative Committee on Special Religious Education. This committee represents the major religious groups in the community and includes nominees from teacher and parent organisations, as well as the Department of Education and Communities.

At present the Committee comprises two Departmental officials and the SRE and SEE Officer, two representatives of the Primary and Secondary Principals' Councils, one representative of the Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Uniting and Greek Orthodox churches, one representative of ICCOREIS: the Chairperson with the Executive Officer as an observer, two representatives of the Anglican diocese of Sydney, three representatives of the Catholic church, one from each of the Baha'i, Buddhist and Hindu persuasions, one from the Jewish Board of Education, the Islamic Council, Parents & Citizens Federation of School and Community Organisations, and the NSW Teachers Federation.

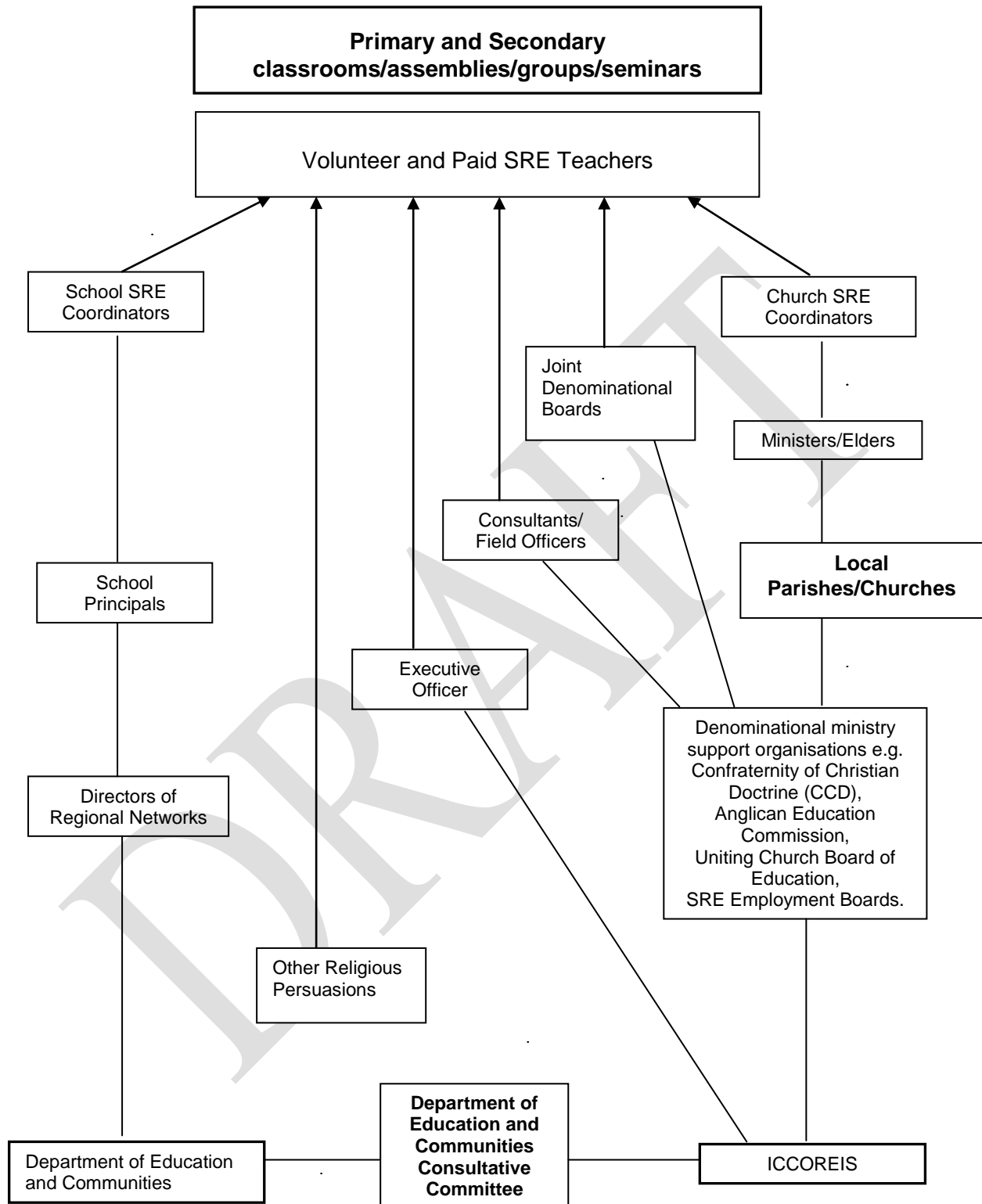
The Consultative Committee's task is to provide the DEC with information and advice on the implementation and operation of SRE, to act as a forum for new ideas and innovations and where members are able to report breaches and share concerns.

2.3 Introduction of Special Education in Ethics

The trialling and subsequent introduction of classes in philosophical ethics from 2010 – 2012 led to an amendment of the Education Act and a government inquiry into Special Education in Ethics (SEE) in 2012. The ensuing report made 14 recommendations, a number of them for both SEE and SRE.

See Appendix C

2.4 How Does SRE Work?



2.5 Approved Religious Persuasions for SRE

2.5.1 Who Grants Approval to a Religious Persuasion to Teach SRE?

The Minister for Education gives approval to a religious persuasion to teach SRE in public schools and become an “approved provider”. The Department’s website lists the religious persuasions that are currently approved <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/policies/religion/index.htm>, see “Approved providers”.

Persuasions wishing to obtain approval should contact the Executive Officer of the NSW Department of Education and Communities Consultative Committee for Special Religious Education at srecontacts@det.nsw.edu.au.

2.5.2 Criteria for Approving a Religious Persuasion to Teach SRE (NB these criteria are currently being reviewed by the DEC)

In order to provide a basis for making recommendations to the Minister for Education about the approval of religious persuasions to teach SRE, the Legal Services Branch of the Department of Education and Communities developed the following checklist of information, based on the *Education Act 1990*, to be provided by, for example, a church:

- a) a copy of your constitution or organisational documentation if any exists,
- b) a statement of your church’s doctrine or beliefs,
- c) details of the general organisation and conduct of your church’s business,
- d) details regarding the appointment of clergy and the role they perform,
- e) details of the number of members and adherents your church has,
- f) details of the places at which your church conducts its business and services,
- g) confirmation that your church is independent and not a member of a wider ‘umbrella’ organisation. (If the latter, please provide details of such organisation and your status within it),
- h) confirmation that your church is not subject to the direction or control of any other organisation or body,
- i) details of who would provide the religious instruction in schools, if approval was granted,
- j) an assurance that your church has implemented the requirements of the *Child Protection (Working with children) Act 2012* and has established a procedure so that no teacher is authorised who has a criminal conviction for violence, sexual assault, providing prohibited drugs, or a crime against a minor.

2.5.3 Contact Officer for Applications from Religious Persuasions

All member churches of ICCOREIS are currently approved providers. Applications from religious persuasions not yet approved to teach SRE in government schools should be addressed to:

SRE and SEE Officer
Learning and Leadership
Public Schools NSW
Level 3, 1 Oxford Street, Sydney 2010
Locked Bag 53 Darlinghurst NSW 1300
T: (02) 9244 5607
E: srecontacts@det.nsw.edu.au

The application should include the information noted in the previous section (2.5.2).

2.6 Coordinators

2.6.1 School SRE Coordinator

Normally each school designates a member of staff to be the School SRE Coordinator. This may be a school executive, or the principal. This is the person who deals with the churches and other religious persuasions.

2.6.2 Church SRE Coordinator

Local churches designate someone as the Church SRE Coordinator. The Church SRE Coordinator might be responsible for coordinating SRE in one or more local public schools. Where a particular church provides SRE at more than one school, it is possible for a church to have separate Church SRE Coordinators for each of the schools.

Because a number of Christian denominations might be providing SRE at a school, there could be more than one Church SRE Coordinator representing the churches that are involved. These Coordinators should get to know each other and establish effective liaison.

Chapter 5 in this handbook deals in detail with the role of the Church SRE Coordinator.

2.7 Essentials for Successful Christian SRE in Schools

The following items are essential for successful Christian SRE:

- Prayer.
- Consultation, cooperation and flexibility between local churches and schools in providing training.
- The expression of parental wishes on the school enrolment form or by written request.
- The use of approved curriculum resources and pedagogy relevant to the needs and developmental stages of the students in years K-12 in public schools.
- Adherence to the relevant current NSW legislation, policy and procedures related to SRE delivery in public schools, see 2.1.
- The leadership of denominational personnel in encouraging and assisting parishes and churches to participate in SRE programs in their local schools.
- The provision of an adequate number of suitably gifted and trained SRE personnel by the churches.
- The ongoing authorisation and training of SRE teachers by the appropriate church authorities.

End of Chapter

Role of the Church: Setting

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