

## 4 Role of the Church: Supporting SRE Teachers

### 4.1 Support and Recognition

#### 4.1.1 Appointing a Church SRE Coordinator

It is important that a capable person coordinates the work of SRE in order that proper liaison, consultation, communication, coordination and support for SRE occur. (See Chapter 5 of this handbook for more detail on the role of the Church SRE Coordinator.) The diagram in Section 2.3 of this handbook highlights the importance of the coordinator's role in the SRE framework. A Church SRE Coordinator is usually the key person to liaise with a teacher in the school who is designated the School SRE Coordinator.

The Church SRE Coordinator is responsible for the supervision of voluntary SRE teachers, and liaison with the local schools, clergy, other churches and, if required, other religious persuasions.

The support and pastoral care of SRE teachers is an important function of the Church SRE Coordinator. This can be very limited when conducted by the clergy due to the pressures of other pastoral needs within their congregations. The appointment of a layperson as the Church SRE Coordinator for one or a group of schools is an effective method of responding to the need of providing pastoral care for teachers.

In the appointment of a Church SRE Coordinator the following factors should be considered:

- a) the number of schools for which the church is responsible
- b) the number of SRE teachers requiring supervision
- c) local considerations such as access to schools and distance between schools being serviced.

#### 4.1.2 Providing Training for SRE Teachers

To ensure that SRE is a genuinely educational activity which is adequately staffed and competently taught, it is highly recommended that all SRE teachers be required to complete Basic SRE Training. *The Department of Education and Communities (DEC) requires that all SRE providers have in place a system of initial and ongoing training in the areas of child protection and classroom management for SRE teachers.*

ICCORIES has developed a Basic Training Standard which has been endorsed by the Heads of Christian Churches across NSW.

Most approved SRE providers now have mandatory basic training requirements. Each SRE teacher should check with his/her authorising church body what training he/she is required to complete.

Once they have completed this, teachers should be encouraged to keep their training up to date, by completing further training courses. Some denominations have specific requirements for on-going training. (See Section 4.2 for details on training.)

Information on training can be obtained from denominational SRE consultants/field officers, the ICCOREIS Executive Officer or the ICCOREIS website ([www.iccoreis.asn.au](http://www.iccoreis.asn.au)).

### 4.1.3 Resolving Problems in SRE

Experience has shown that many of the problems arising in SRE could have been overcome by more careful attention to consultation and communication between churches and schools.

Problems usually take one or more of the following forms:

- a) Inadequate consultation over the timetabling of SRE or the provision of accommodation.  
*Remedy:* Negotiations with the school must commence no later than the start of Term 4 of the year prior to that in which changes are to be made. Flexibility is essential.
- b) Inadequate staffing of SRE classes.  
*Remedy:* Close liaison between the Church SRE Coordinator and the school will alert the churches to potential problems. Inability to staff classes should be addressed in advance so that a different pattern of SRE can be considered.
- c) Poor relations between denominations in joint SRE programs.  
*Remedy:* Competent coordination, clear communication and proper authorisation of teachers and curriculum will help to avoid this.
- d) Poor classroom management by SRE teachers.  
*Remedy:* Careful selection of SRE teachers, proper pre-service training, confidence building by assigning a mentor, ability to observe classroom teachers in action and ongoing in-service training are all important factors in ensuring sound educational practice.
- e) Lack of strategic planning for the coming year or for new school development.  
*Remedy:* Attention to community development, consultation with the Department of Education and Communities staff, and developing a church's vision for SRE ministry are important. Cooperative approaches with other denominations or with other churches within a denomination can produce a stronger SRE presence in schools.
- f) Loss of commitment for SRE and other children's and youth work in a church.  
*Remedy:* A strategy is needed to develop a new vision among the church's leaders. If assistance is needed from outside denominational structures, the ICCOREIS Executive Officer might be able to assist by informing leaders of what is happening elsewhere.

Assistance in addressing these problems can be obtained by contacting the denomination's education personnel. (See Chapter 8 of this handbook.)

### 4.1.4 Support from Department of Education and Communities

The NSW Department of Education and Communities Consultative Committee on Special Religious Education meets quarterly to discuss issues and policy with the Department. Church SRE Coordinators can expect support from the SRE Coordinator and Principal at the local school level.

### 4.1.5 Recognising the Importance of SRE

Weekly SRE classes taken year after year are very demanding on a person's energy, time and spiritual resources. It is important that the work of SRE teachers is:

- a) central to the mission/vision of the church
- b) well organised
- c) given a high level of recognition by the church
- d) supported by providing sufficient resources
- e) linked to the church-based children's and youth ministries.

### 4.1.6 Affirming the Work of SRE Teachers

In churches where the provision of SRE is effective, the work of the SRE teachers is usually affirmed on a regular basis. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- a) An annual commissioning service for SRE teachers can be held at the start of the new school year. Additional commissioning services can be held for new teachers who start during the year.
- b) The names of the SRE teachers should be published with others involved in church ministry.
- c) Short articles about the SRE teachers or their school activities can be included in the church bulletin.
- d) Posters made at school can be used for Sunday services.
- e) SRE teachers could give a brief informal report to the congregation from time to time.

### 4.1.7 Providing Support to SRE Teachers

- a) Church members can be recruited to pray specifically and regularly for SRE teachers and their classes.
- b) SRE teachers may need assistance with transport, or baby-sitting for those with young children.
- c) Gifted people in the church could help SRE teachers with specific skills in fields such as drama and music. Note that anyone who accompanies an SRE teacher into a school is regarded as an SRE teacher and must be appropriately authorised.
- d) Assistance can be given in preparing material for lessons.
- e) Church facilities can be made available for training days and meetings of the SRE team that are essential for providing assistance and encouragement.
- f) The church could finance teachers' curriculum materials: children's workbooks, course fees for teacher development and the like.
- g) Resources for children's ministry and other church equipment could be made available for use in an SRE class.
- h) The church bulletin should regularly include prayer points for SRE.
- i) In addition to the SRE teachers who staff classes on a regular basis, it is important to have a number of relief SRE teachers available to substitute for them when necessary.

### **4.1.8 Building SRE Bridges between the School and the Local Church**

A visit from the clergy to each SRE class during the year will help to connect the classes with the local church.

Out of school activities may be conducted for children from individual religious persuasions. These activities come under the auspices of the particular church and are not classified as Special Religious Education. Invitations to participate in these church activities can be given during SRE classes. It is advisable, however, to inform the school. (See Chapter 7 of this handbook for the policy of the Department of Education and Communities.) This can also include family activities.

Care needs to be taken if out of school activities are organised for children from joint-denominational classes. The agreement of all participating churches is needed before an activity is organised and invitations are extended to children, especially if the activity is based in a particular church. The legal implications of out of school activities need to be carefully addressed. When these activities are organised by a church, appropriate insurance cover should be held by that church.

Education Week provides another opportunity for community involvement. Many churches have a special service.

### **4.1.9 Building Bridges between SRE and Christian Organisations**

In some schools there are Christian organisations or clubs that have the support of local churches. For example, a particular local church might encourage children from its SRE classes to attend an ISCF group in a secondary school. If this occurs, it is important to note that ISCF is not SRE. Legally, they are different activities.

Where joint-denominational SRE classes are held, it is important to ensure that all participating churches agree on any encouragement that is given to students to participate in another Christian organisation.

Where joint-denominational SRE is conducted, approval for the above bridge-building exercises would need to be sought from the participating churches.

## 4.2 Training

### 4.2.1 Importance of Training

*Religious Education in NSW Government Schools (1980)* recommended the following:

- “6.65 Each religious group, at all levels of its administration, should give SRE in government schools its official support and commitment, making every effort to ensure that, as SRE takes place within the school buildings and in school hours, it is conducted as a genuinely educational activity which is adequately staffed and competently taught. The authorising authority of each religious faith should therefore ensure that its teachers possess knowledge of the relevant doctrine and possess adequate levels of teaching competence.
- 6.66 Each religious group should aim to establish a reserve of appropriately trained teachers and support personnel.
- 6.80 At the denominational, state, regional or diocesan level, churches and other religious bodies have responsibility for:
- (a) ensuring that adequate training opportunities and appropriate resources are available for their teachers;
  - (e) developing for the SRE representatives accreditation procedures suited to their particular religious tradition.
- 6.95 **Teacher Preparation**  
The Committee is of the firm view that the churches and other religious groups must accept responsibility for ensuring that SRE teachers entering government schools are appropriately prepared.”

SRE teachers, therefore, should avail themselves of initial and ongoing training opportunities.

These statements formed the basis of recommendations which were accepted and endorsed by the then Minister for Education in February 1986. Since that time, each of the Christian churches has developed training programs to fulfil these requirements and set up minimum standards of training and accomplishment to qualify for basic authorisation. In addition, joint-denominational programs have been developed by local ICCOREIS affiliates.

In 2012 the member churches of ICCOREIS agreed on the *Basic SRE Training Standard* which was subsequently endorsed by the Heads of Churches (<http://www.iccoreis.asn.au/about-us/sre-policy/>).

### 4.2.2 Basic SRE Training Standard (see Appendix 3.7)

The ICCOREIS standard is intended to be an introductory course designed to achieve a minimum standard of competence in classroom method, teaching skills, the implementation procedures and doctrinal understanding.

In NSW, the Department of Education and Communities requests that each Approved Provider (Church) be responsible for the initial and ongoing training of the SRE teachers it authorises.

Beyond the minimum standard each church sets its own training and formation requirements and can either develop its own courses or recognise those of other training organisations. Upon completion of the course the training organisation accredits the volunteer.

### **4.2.3 Accreditation and Authorisation**

SRE Accreditation is usually linked to the authorisation of church volunteers. So whether it is a training organisation or a church that accredits the training it is only ever the Approved SRE Provider (Church) which authorises teachers.

### **4.2.4 Responsibilities of Clergy and Church SRE Coordinators**

Clergy and Church SRE Coordinators should themselves complete the training requirements whilst encouraging all SRE teachers to do the same.

Training courses offered for SRE teachers by the various denominations are practical and deal with relevant issues to support and equip teachers. No particular level of prior education is necessary to enrol. Training courses benefit both the SRE teacher and the children taught. Benefits include improved class behaviour, enhanced teaching skills and enhanced teacher-student relationships.

### **4.2.5 Ongoing Training by Groups Affiliated with ICCOREIS**

These opportunities are usually arranged by local committees and support groups affiliated with ICCOREIS. They are advertised through the local churches and/or school. These courses are recognised by most denominations and can contribute toward training requirements.

The ICCOREIS Executive Officer has details of the ICCOREIS contacts for specific areas. The local affiliated ICCOREIS committee or support group will have details of local training events which meet local training needs.

**End of Chapter**

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