

5 Church SRE Coordinator

5.1 Overview of Church SRE Coordinator's Role

Church SRE Coordinators can operate at a school, church, inter-school and inter-church level. When operating at an inter-church level, the participating churches and congregations must support the appointment. The Church SRE Coordinator's role consists of:

1. Liaising

- School Executive
 - Principal
 - School SRE Coordinator
 - Staff
- Parents
- Participating denominations
- Other providers: other religious persuasions, Special Education in Ethics providers.

2. Consulting

- Ministers' colleges/associations
- Church SRE representatives
- Inter Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (ICCOREIS NSW)

3. Communicating

- SRE Teachers
- Local church community
- Other churches represented in SRE
- School SRE Coordinator

4. Coordinating

- SRE teachers
- Recruiting of SRE personnel
- Other churches represented in SRE
- SRE in the school community

5. Supporting

- SRE teachers.

These tasks will be covered separately in this chapter but in practice some of the processes may occur simultaneously, hence there will be some overlap in the presentation of material.

5.2 Liaising

Liaising is taken to mean the initial and perhaps informal contact that needs to be made with key stakeholders. It provides a basis for the other processes of consulting, communicating, coordinating and supporting.

5.2.1 Liaising to Set Up a New SRE Program

In most regions of NSW there has been a long tradition of SRE in government primary schools. In some schools SRE has been discontinued or, in fact, never established. This situation is more evident in government secondary schools, where in many cases there is little or no SRE activity. If a church or a group of churches is planning to start a new program, the following advice is provided:

- 1) The local church or group of churches needs to appoint a Church SRE Coordinator to lead and coordinate the planning required of SRE providers.
- 2) It is advisable for the newly appointed Church SRE Coordinator and others to benefit from experience gained elsewhere. The following could be contacted:
 - a) the ICCOREIS Executive Officer,
 - b) a key person(s) responsible for SRE in NSW (or in a region of NSW) within one of the churches that constitute ICCOREIS. (See Chapter 8 of this handbook for resource information.)
- 3) The people mentioned above will be able to identify all the essential resources required, including the following:
 - a) ICCOREIS: *Special Religious Education Handbook*
 - b) ICCOREIS: *Directory*
 - c) Department of Education and Communities: *Implementation of Religious Education Policy*
 - d) Office of The Childrens Guardian: *Working with Children Check*
 - e) A set of the curriculum materials that the church or religious denomination normally uses in NSW
 - f) Options for approved curriculum materials.
 - g) ICCOREIS website
 - h) Training options for SRE teachers.
- 4) If the aim is to establish a board and employ SRE teachers to work in secondary schools, it is advisable to visit a few boards that are operating successful programs. Generate Ministries should also be contacted.

5.2.2 Liaising to Maintain an Existing SRE Program

In the ongoing maintenance of an established SRE program the Church SRE Coordinator should endeavour to:

- a) Keep in touch with the person(s) in their own denomination responsible for SRE in NSW or a region of NSW.
- b) Keep in touch with the ICCOREIS Executive Officer.
- c) Put forward recommendations to ICCOREIS, in consultation with their own church representatives, for changes to arrangements for SRE. (ICCOREIS is well represented on the Department of Education and Communities Consultative Committee on Special Religious Education where issues associated with the implementation of SRE can be discussed and solutions sought.)
- d) Try to keep in touch with other Church SRE Coordinators to share experiences.

5.3 Consulting

Consulting involves going beyond initial and ongoing liaison to negotiate outcomes, arrangements and agreements.

5.3.1 Consulting with Other Church SRE Coordinators or Representatives of Other Religious Persuasions

Although a particular church may be providing its own SRE program in one or more schools, other Church SRE Coordinators or representatives of other religious persuasions may need to be consulted when:

- a) organising classes and teaching programs,
- b) organising special events,
- c) dealing with other issues that affect the organisation of SRE in schools.

Each approved church or religious persuasion has equal entitlement (under the *Education Act 1990*) in the provision of SRE in government schools. This right should be respected in all consultations between churches, religious persuasions and government schools.

Since the introduction of Special Education in Ethics Classes (SEE) in 2012, schools have had to ensure that consultation and communication occurs with SEE teachers as well. Consultation should occur initially with SRE providers.

Importantly, because SEE classes are to be offered to students who have opted out of SRE classes in time set aside for SRE, the provision of SRE remains the key factor in any consultation with the school and SRE providers in the organisation of SRE.

5.3.2 Consulting with Ministers' Associations

In joint-denominational programs, the agreement of all the participating clergy or their representatives is essential. Agreement definitely needs to be reached on each of the following matters by:

- a) agreeing on arrangements for authorising teachers and letting the schools know the names of authorised teachers;
- b) consulting with clergy or approved authorising persons of all participating denominations to select an agreed curriculum;
- c) ensuring that sufficient quantities of teachers' manuals, student workbooks and teaching aids have been ordered for each term/semester/year;
- d) negotiating, where necessary, any changes in the curriculum, bearing in mind the educational impact the changes will have;
- e) consulting with any fundraising committees to ensure funds are provided and all accounts are paid promptly each semester.
- f) accepting a code of practice for operating in a joint program. Consider using the ICCOREIS *Policy for Cooperative Special Religious Education (SRE) in Schools (NSW) and Code of Practice*. (See Appendix C of this handbook.)

If there is a breakdown in relationships among the clergy, the Church SRE Coordinators or the SRE teachers in such a program, it may be necessary to contact the ICCOREIS Executive Officer for assistance.

5.3.3 Consulting with the School SRE Coordinator and Principal

The Church SRE Coordinator needs to:

- 1) Determine arrangements for SRE and general school procedures for each school year:
 - a) Note the day, time, rooms and numbers of students in classes;
 - b) Obtain class lists of student names and details of students with special needs;
 - c) Investigate the school discipline/rewards system, which SRE teachers can use;
 - d) Be aware of school safety procedures and procedures for student supervision and communicate these to the SRE teachers.
- 2) Deal with problems:
 - a) Listen to the SRE teacher(s) involved and ensure the facts are clearly understood;
 - b) Report to either the authorising clergy or to the School SRE Coordinator as appropriate;
 - c) Seek assistance from denominational SRE consultants/field officers or the ICCOREIS Executive Officer when necessary.
- 3) Handle issues related to school support for SRE. Attempt to address these issues initially through negotiation with the Principal and School SRE Coordinator. If this does not achieve the required outcome, it may be necessary to:
 - a) Contact the denominational SRE consultant/field officer (if coordinating for a single denomination) or the local Ministers' Association (if coordinating for a number of denominations); or
 - b) Contact the Regional Director for the area in which the school is located. This should only be used as a last resort when relationships with the school have broken down.

5.4 Communicating

Communicating involves letting all stakeholders know about the outcomes of consultation, and keeping them informed on a regular basis. It is all too easy to assume that people know what is happening or should be happening. The Church SRE Coordinator may need to establish networks of communication with all partners in SRE.

5.4.1 Communicating with the SRE Teachers

- 1) SRE teachers must be kept well informed of relevant information provided by the school, particularly:
 - a) the school's Student Welfare Policy and advice on how to implement it,
 - b) Child Protection procedures,
 - c) temporary and permanent timetable and class changes,
 - d) changes in SRE policy,
 - e) meetings that have an impact on SRE or require SRE providers to provide input,
 - f) training courses.
- 2) Regular briefings for SRE teachers should emphasise routine procedures such as:
 - a) being prompt for lessons,
 - b) giving sufficient notice to the school and Church SRE Coordinator if unable to attend,
 - c) signing the attendance book on arrival at the school,
 - d) wearing approved identification and carrying an authorisation card from an SRE provider
 - e) marking the roll each lesson (where this is a school requirement) and reporting absences to the class teacher,
 - f) never leaving a class unsupervised, including at the end of a lesson,
 - g) what to do if a child has to be sent from class (follow school procedures),
 - h) what to do if a child has an accident.
- 3) SRE newsletters from ICCOREIS and participating denominations should be distributed to SRE teachers.

5.4.2 Communicating with the Local Church Community

Awareness of SRE and its importance to local churches can be emphasised by providing:

- a) constant updates on the provision of SRE in local schools,
- b) information on approved curricula taught in SRE,
- c) information on the location of SRE classes,
- d) appropriate forms of recognition of SRE teachers within the church community,
- e) drawing faith communities into the work of SRE teachers including praying for them on a regular basis.

5.4.3 Communicating with Other Churches involved in SRE

A critical part of communication is providing information and support across denominations. This communication and support should include:

- a) professional development and training opportunities,
- b) finance - appropriate contributions are to be determined for each member in combined programs/activities,

- c) invitations to special events,
- d) special event planning.

5.4.4 Communicating with the School SRE Coordinator and Principal

The School SRE Coordinator must be informed promptly of:

- a) any significant behavioural problems experienced by a teacher,
- b) any accident or injury, safety or child protection matter involving a student,
- c) any accident or injury or safety issue involving an SRE teacher.

The Principal must be informed of:

- a) any suspected cases of child physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or child neglect.
(Great discretion needs to be adopted in such instances as outlined in Child Protection/Safe Church training courses offered by SRE providers. Voluntary SRE teachers are not mandatory reporters, but there exists a moral responsibility to respond to cases of where there is a suspected risk of significant harm to the child. Employed SRE teachers, including members of the clergy who teach SRE classes, are mandatory reporters. They are required to follow child protection reporting procedures)
- b) any matters of significance in SRE where commonsense suggests that the Principal should be informed.
- c) plans for special events and commemorations which may involve invitations to students and/or parents.

5.4.5 Communicating with Parents/caregivers

The Church SRE Coordinator may have little direct contact with parents, except at church and in other church activities. However, there are at least three ways in which the Church SRE Coordinator can liaise with parents:

- 1) Arranging to attend meetings of the Parents and Citizens Association and/or the School Council to inform parents about what is happening in SRE.
- 2) Provision of information to parents, with school Principal approval, on matters such as the content of the SRE program, special teaching arrangements, joint-denominational classes, and any special events, activities and celebrations. This may take the form of a regular newsletter (annually, once a semester or once a term) and/or attending parent curriculum information sessions.
- 3) Promoting SRE to prospective parents and providing information/brochures at the pre kindergarten information session each year.

5.5 Coordinating

Coordinating involves actions that are needed to maintain SRE after agreements have been determined and put in place. Throughout the year, decisions have to be made and key stakeholders need to be involved in the decision-making processes. The Church SRE Coordinator may need to facilitate interaction between partners in SRE.

5.5.1 Coordinating Activities with the School Community

SRE can be made more effective in the school community if the different stakeholders are brought together and some activities are coordinated. For example:

- a) Bringing school staff and SRE teachers together to encourage harmonious relationships and foster school support for the SRE program (for example, providing a morning tea, attending a joint professional development activity).
- b) Arranging for opportunities to display student work as part of Education Week.
- c) Arranging for SRE teacher participation in special Easter, Education Week and Christmas assemblies.
- d) Arranging, where appropriate, for the participation of SRE teachers in professional development activities in the school.
- e) Suggesting to the SRE teachers that, if they choose, they may take a more active role in the school community as volunteers outside their SRE duties (for example, assisting with reading, computer studies and the school canteen).

5.5.2 Coordinating Activities with SRE Teachers

At the start of each year, SRE teachers would benefit from a briefing session covering relevant aspects of the school organisation and policies. This could be provided by the Principal/Deputy or School SRE Coordinator. The Religious Education Implementation Procedures provide schools with an understanding of the sort of things that schools should brief SRE volunteers on to ensure that SRE providers are able to comply with school rules, policies and processes.

Each SRE teacher is to be provided with details of:

- a) the dates on which SRE will commence and finish for each term,
- b) the day of the week and time of day of the classes the teacher will take,
- c) the room or teaching area allocated to that teacher,
- d) student names (when these are provided by the school),
- e) students with special needs and the support available for them,
- f) school discipline/awards system which SRE teachers can utilise,
- g) SRE assemblies,
- h) days on which school activities will prevent SRE,
- i) procedures to be followed in cases of an accident sustained on school premises by students and/or SRE teachers,
- j) procedures to be followed in the case of suspected child abuse or neglect. Refer to Child Protection Procedures. (3.2.2)

5.5.3 Coordinating Work with the Local Church Community

The Church SRE Coordinator needs to ensure that ongoing recruiting programs operate in the church community. Suggested recruitment activities and general advice on recruitment are available from ICCOREIS through the Executive Officer and Christian SRE support materials developed by ICCOREIS can be supplied to support this process. A variety of resources is listed in Chapter 8 of this handbook and on the website www.iccoreis.asn.au/resources

5.5.4 Coordinating Work with Other Churches Represented in SRE

Facilitating meetings of SRE teachers from different denominational backgrounds may involve:

- a) a morning tea prior to/after SRE,
- b) a combined prayer meeting at regular intervals,
- c) bringing SRE teachers/ providers together for opportunities to update and enhance training (eg Child Protection and classroom management),
- d) a luncheon once a term, each time in the home of a different SRE teacher.

5.6 Supporting

Supporting deals with the practical help that needs to be given to SRE teachers, the need for prayer, and the need to affirm the work of SRE teachers in the life of the local church.

5.6.1 Supporting a Team Approach to SRE

It is a good idea to organise regular meetings of SRE teachers and SRE Coordinators to provide time for:

- a) personal sharing with the group, prayer and worship
- b) swapping ideas and resources such as audio and visual aids
- c) preparing ahead by working on programs for lessons, themes, or topics for the following term. (In a limited time this would, of course, be a preliminary overview and not a detailed preparation)
- d) the Church SRE Coordinator to get to know the SRE teachers
- e) developing resource materials that support the curriculum.

5.6.2 Supporting the Development of Educational Skills

Educational skills among the SRE teachers can be developed by:

- a) providing information about training courses and encouraging SRE teachers to attend;
- b) developing and facilitating training courses catering for the specific needs of the SRE teachers;
- c) establishing a mentoring relationship by encouraging experienced teachers to work with new recruits.
- d) developing systems of non-threatening self and peer assessment of SRE teachers.

5.6.3 Supporting Pastoral Work

SRE teachers can be supported through:

- 1) Providing a back-up team of relief teachers;
- 2) Providing a back-up team of babysitters, technology assistants, helpers and prayer supporters;
- 3) Developing transport options via church volunteers who support SRE teachers finding it difficult to get to different schools.
- 4) Ensuring that all the SRE teachers have the Church SRE Coordinator's contact details and that they are encouraged to contact the coordinator as required;
- 5) Consulting SRE teachers in local decision-making processes so that they feel part of the team;
- 6) Complimenting an SRE teacher personally and, where appropriate, publicly;
- 7) Providing opportunities for presenting service awards at a local church level for volunteer SRE teachers.
- 8) Advising and supporting teachers when they have consistent difficulty with a child by:
 - a) providing classroom management advice and assisting the teacher to analyse and cope with the child's behaviour;
 - b) following the matter up with the School SRE Coordinator if the problem behaviour persists.
- 9) Correcting an SRE teacher if need be. Any correction should be constructive and offered privately. If correction is not accepted, the teacher's problems should be discussed with the authorising person. The authorisation of that teacher may need to be revoked. Conflict situations should be dealt with privately and constructively.

It is important not to confuse the need to support an SRE teacher with the need to discipline an SRE teacher if there is a serious breach of the acceptable code of conduct. Child abuse incidents call for immediate suspension by the authorising agent of the local church and adoption of the correct reporting procedures.

5.6.4 Supporting Prayer for SRE

Prayer support from the local church community encourages SRE teachers. The Church SRE Coordinator is responsible for organising this support. This can be provided in a variety of forms, for example:

- a) A specific prayer supporter, who is a volunteer from the church community, can be asked to pray for the SRE teacher and the children in the class by name.
- b) A prayer support partner, who accompanies the SRE teacher to class, can pray silently in the class. (The prayer support partner will require full authorisation before entering the school.)
- c) SRE teachers can be added to the prayer diary of the church.

End of Chapter