

7 Patterns of Special Religious Education Organisation

This chapter is based on *Religious Education Implementation Procedures Appendix A*. Supplementary material is provided as each pattern is considered from a Christian SRE perspective.

School Policy:

A range of patterns is used to organise SRE in schools. Care is taken not to adopt any form of organisation which could be of more benefit to some providers than to others.

Any pattern of providing SRE must be equivalent to at least 30 minutes per week and no more than one hour per week.¹

7.1 Patterns Based on Class Groups

7.1.1 Weekly Groups

In many schools, especially at the infants, primary and junior secondary levels, class-based organisation is workable and supports regular contact, planned and systematic teaching, and the opportunity for close interpersonal relationships.

- a) This is the most frequently used model in primary schools.
- b) Students get to know their teacher and relationships can be built up over the year.
- c) An approved denominational or joint denominational curriculum ensures systematic teaching. Some excellent curricula are available. (See Chapter 8 of this handbook for resources produced by the member churches of ICCOREIS.)
- d) Students like the stability and routine, responding well to having a regular contact with the SRE teacher.
- e) A child's regular classroom teacher or other experienced SRE teachers may be able to suggest strategies for classroom management. SRE teachers can seek help from the classroom teacher or School SRE coordinator if there are behaviour issues.
- f) In denominational based classes, composite groups of different ages sometimes have to be formed to make a class. This can present a challenge, particularly in a small school, for the SRE teacher who may be using curriculum materials designed for a particular age range.

7.1.2 One Term/Semester a Year

School policy:

When there are a limited number of SRE teachers, students in one year group could have SRE once a week for one term/semester. SRE could be provided for a different term/semester for each year group. eg. Primary classes receive SRE in first semester, and Infants classes in second semester.

This is another variation on the first model described in Section 7.1.1. It is not an ideal model because it limits the amount of SRE each child receives.

¹ Religious Education Implementation Procedures, *Appendix A*, page 12.

7.1.3 Rotation of Classes

School policy:

The SRE lessons for a class or year could be timetabled to alternate with some other features of the curriculum, such as tutorial groups, special assemblies or year meetings on a fortnightly, month by month, or full term basis.

- a) This model depends heavily on the organisation of the local school and would best suit high schools. The organisation of many schools will not permit the introduction of the model.
- b) On a rotational basis, students could encounter a number of different SRE teachers. While there are advantages in having different role models, there are disadvantages if the teaching does not follow a systematic pattern.
- c) The model does not lend itself to relationship building.

7.1.4 Seminars and One-day Programs

School policy:

This approach may be incorporated in a regular program of seminars, conferences and other learning experiences. These arrangements are most suited to the senior secondary years but could be used with Years 9-10 and, in special circumstances, with junior secondary or primary years. This pattern provides an opportunity for specialised personnel, equipment and resources to be used. Only approved religious persuasions with students enrolled for their SRE may organise such programs. When time is allocated for these programs, then the school must ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all persuasions to organise similar programs.

- a) In secondary schools it is often difficult to find a pattern for SRE that suits the timetable. Special intensive programs, such as advocated in this model, offer one solution to the problem.
- b) Secondary students are often familiar with seminars during which topics can be examined in some depth.
- c) The model lends itself well to the examination of issues that are of concern to secondary students. For example, a series of seminars could be organised with a common theme: A Christian Response to Genetics, A Christian Approach to the Environment, if these are part of the approved curriculum. This model provides opportunities for extended music, drama and video input, lending itself to more performance-based material.

7.2 Patterns Based on Grouping Persuasions/Combined Arrangements

School policy:

Religious persuasions may decide to provide a combined arrangement. If this occurs, all religious persuasions authorise the persons who teach and authorise the curriculum content. No religious persuasion is compelled to participate in this form of organisation. A combined arrangement is reviewed often by the school and the religious persuasions. In a combined arrangement only those students who have nominated one of the participating religious persuasions on their enrolment form should be involved.²

Combined arrangements are common in many schools.

The ICCOREIS *Policy for Cooperative Special Religious Education (SRE) in Schools (New South Wales) and Code of Practice* should be consulted.³

Appendix B of this handbook contains a sample letter for obtaining the authorisation of SRE teachers in a combined arrangement by each of the participating churches.

7.2.1 Combined Groups

SRE teachers are assigned to classes with students from participating denominations. This format is used where there is inter-church cooperation for providing Christian SRE in a school. It may include:

- weekly classes
- one term per year arrangements and
- a teacher appointed by one or more religious persuasions who operates across the timetable.

Where these formats are implemented, the following criteria must be met:

- i) Local members of the clergy or other religious teachers of approved religious persuasions are to agree on the format, approve the content of the religious teaching (curriculum) and authorise the SRE teachers.
- ii) The organisation for persuasions that are not part of these arrangements should be separately negotiated.
- iii) No religious persuasion may be compelled to participate in such arrangements and care should be taken to overcome any disadvantage to non-participating persuasions as a result of this organisation.
- iv) Parents/caregivers have the right to know how SRE will be organised each year and which religious organisations will deliver it. The persuasions should, if requested by parents/caregivers, make available an outline of the content of the religious teaching to assist parents/caregivers to make a decision regarding their child's attendance.
- v) Students who are registered as belonging to a persuasion other than those that have authorised the teacher(s) may attend such classes only with the specific approval of their parents/caregivers.
- vi) Schools are to provide appropriate care for students not attending SRE classes under these arrangements.
- vii) These arrangements may be supplemented with opportunities for specific denominational religious teaching.

² Religious Education Implementation Procedures, *Appendix A, page 12.*

³ See Appendix C of this handbook.

7.2.2 Seminars, Conferences and One-day Programs

School policy:

Only approved religious persuasions with students enrolled for their SRE may organise such programs. When organised jointly, the relevant religious persuasions have to agree to the format, authorise the teacher(s) and approve the religious teaching.

- a) The ICCOREIS *Policy for Cooperative Special Religious Education (SRE) in Schools (New South Wales) and Code of Practice* should be consulted.⁴
- b) It is extremely important that curricula for seminars, conferences and one-day programs be approved by each participating church. Seminars are opportunities to explore the different views which may be held by participating churches on topical issues. This is particularly true if a panel question time is held.

7.2.3 Assemblies

School policy:

*Schools may wish to hold an event that contains religious elements such as school commemorations, religious observances and multi-faith services.... When schools consider a multi-faith service, religious groups and individuals should not be pressured to compromise their faith for the sake of holding the service.*⁵

- a) Easter and Christmas lend themselves well to special assemblies. When only the SRE students from Christian churches are involved, there should be relatively few problems if care is taken to ensure that all participating churches agree on the content and format.
- b) Some schools hold a Christian service in Education Week. The form of the service should be acceptable to all participating denominations. ICCOREIS can provide a form of service.

If different religious persuasions and other faiths, are involved in celebrating Education Week, agreement must be reached by the school and all participating faiths on the nature of the celebration.⁶

Assemblies provide opportunities for the use of specialised personnel, resource materials and equipment.

- Care needs to be taken to select an SRE teacher or member of the clergy who has the ability to conduct an effective assembly. Leadership of assemblies can be shared amongst denominations so that no one group carries the whole burden of preparation. This allows students to experience a diversity of religious styles and approaches.
- If a form of service is followed, children should be invited to participate by reading prayers, reading the scriptures and the like.
- Drama can sometimes be effectively incorporated into an event for a large group. It is better avoided if it is not done well.
- ICCOREIS has developed Guidelines for Assemblies to assist with planning and preparation.⁷

⁴ See Appendix C of this handbook.

⁵ Religious Education Implementation Procedures, *pages 10 and 11.*

⁶ Religious Education Implementation Procedures, *page 11.*

⁷ See www.iccoreis.asn.au/resources

7.2.4 Employed SRE Teachers in Secondary Schools

7.2.4.1 Popularity of the Model

The model is popular in secondary schools for a number of reasons. It fits in well with school organisation because 'Christian Studies' (or SRE) can be timetabled throughout the week/cycle as a subject in the curriculum. With parental approval, students can participate in the program which is seen to make a major contribution to the tone of the school. The SRE teachers are regarded as teachers by both other teachers and students. With the Principal's approval, they may participate as volunteers in other school activities.

Despite its strengths and popularity, the model creates almost insurmountable problems for Christian churches and other religious persuasions that do not want to participate in the program. If they wish to provide SRE, often to relatively small numbers of students, they find it almost impossible to find a time in the week. They cannot provide voluntary SRE teachers to match the timetabling of the dominant SRE program.

In accordance with legislation and the policy of the Department of Education and Communities, 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.

7.2.4.2 Employment Boards

Any group of churches that is planning to employ SRE teachers and deploy them in local secondary schools will need to set up an employment board with all the legal requirements. The best advice that can be offered is to contact a well established board and obtain assistance. It may be possible to modify a constitution rather than trying to develop one from scratch. ICCOREIS has a set of guidelines for the formation of a new Employment Board.⁸

Generate Ministries is also another source of advice. (See Chapter 8 of this handbook for contact details.)

Fund raising is a key responsibility for employment boards. Some of the programs can cost many thousands of dollars per annum. The money is largely obtained by donations from local churches and individuals, but other fund raising strategies are also used.

7.2.4.3 Employed SRE Teachers

Employed SRE teachers are regarded as SRE teachers when they are teaching SRE. They are not SRE teachers when they participate in other school activities as volunteers. These lines of demarcation need to be clearly established in the school.

Likewise, SRE teachers may participate in other Christian activities in the school, such as an ISCF group. When so doing, they are not SRE teachers.

All employed SRE teachers need to be screened, including a working with Children Check clearance, before they are authorised. They must then be authorised by every participating church in the joint arrangement.

Employed SRE teachers are mandatory reporters under Child Protection legislation.

⁸ www.iccoreis.asn.au/resources

7.3 Excursions or Visits

7.3.1 During Time Allocated for SRE

School policy:

The Principal will take into account the time provision of the nominating provider and the capacity of the personnel to carry out that activity within the principal's duty of care.⁹

- a) It is extremely important to establish where the legal responsibility lies when excursions and visits are planned. The school and the local church need to do this. SRE teachers should always check to see whether the public liability cover held by the local church covers the activities they plan to undertake.
- b) Transportation to and from the venue is an issue to be negotiated with the school, especially if there is a cost involved.
- c) A possible disadvantage is that children who do not return their permission notes will miss out on the event or visit.
- d) Child protection issues should be addressed.
- e) Insurance issues should be examined and finalised before embarking. It is advisable to get them in writing.
- f) Moral responsibilities and their legal implications should be considered. Staff should not be negligent in their duty of care.

7.3.2 Extra Curricular Activities

School policy:

Any activities offered over and above the allocated time for SRE are extra-curricular activities and are to be treated as such. Principals ensure parents/caregivers are clear that these activities are not school activities. Schools have no involvement in such activities.¹⁰

- a) Out of school activities are not officially school activities. Public liability cover is therefore a key issue and needs to be clarified before these activities are undertaken.
- b) The organisers of out of school activities must provide adequate supervision at all times, and ensure that any equipment that is used is in good condition. If specialised equipment is being used, the equipment must be in good condition and there must be a qualified supervisor or instructor. The churches that participate in out of school activities must not be guilty of negligence.
- c) Organisers of these sorts of events should be well aware of their responsibilities under child protection legislation.
- d) If the legal requirements for out of school activities are handled appropriately, these activities can be very effective. Children and young people can gain insights into the Christian gospel that are difficult to achieve in traditional SRE arrangements.

End of Chapter

⁹ Religious Education Implementation Procedures, Appendix A, page 12.

¹⁰ Religious Education Implementation Procedures, Appendix A, page 12.

