

Special Religious Education in Schools

Guidelines for Religious Educators Teaching Students with Special Needs

School Protocols

- Meet with the school Principal or their nominee on your first visit to the school.
- Meet the teacher in the school who is directly responsible for Religious Education and find out how the classes you teach are organised eg. into age/stage groups, inclusive of students with special needs.
- Meet the classroom teacher and discuss the classroom rules and expectations that are already in place. The students will know these rules and will be familiar with their consequences.
- There may be a School Learning Support Officer allocated to the class or to a student in your class. They will be of assistance to you as they know the students and may assist in any management issue.
- Check with the classroom teacher to determine which students in the class have special needs so that you can be prepared for their level of need.
- Find out the strengths and weaknesses of students who have been identified as having special needs.
- Become familiar with procedures you need to know in case of an emergency situation, such as a school evacuation, a student who becomes ill in your lesson, a student whose behaviour is dangerous or a student who needs to be removed from your room for inappropriate behaviour. Make sure you know how students with special needs will be assisted in any emergency.

Classroom organisation

- Know the class seating plan. Seating plans usually exist for a reason. Follow the teacher's seating plan for the class until you know the students and feel confident that you can relocate them for your lesson.
- Students may be seated with a 'buddy' to either support their learning needs or support their behaviour needs.
- The class rules and expectations will usually be displayed in the classroom. Reinforce the rules and expectations with the students in the class so they are aware of your expectations of behaviour in the classroom.
- Be firm and consistent with the established structure and routines in the classroom as the students will be familiar with this and respond accordingly.
- Keep classroom management instructions simple, clear and repeat them.
- Use age appropriate simple language.
- Remember to "catch" students being good or doing the right thing and praise them
- Know whether a particular student is overly sensitive to light, sound, movement around the class which may distract them from their learning.
- Know what you are able to do if a student repeatedly disrupts the lesson, eg. move student to a different seat, management support from the School Learning Support Officer or class teacher, send for assistance if you are on your own in the class.
- It is important to never leave the class unattended. Send a responsible student for assistance if it is required for any reason.

Lesson Preparation

- Discuss with class teacher strategies that work best for the class/student.
- Be prepared for each lesson by planning what you want the students to learn and how you want them to learn it.
- Being over-prepared with resource material is better than being under-prepared and having to fill in time which may lead to students being disruptive.
- Simple lessons that have only one or two concepts to learn, but using a variety of tasks to reinforce these concepts, are most appropriate for students with special needs.
- Information to be presented to students should be age appropriate. Students with special needs have age appropriate interests.

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- Make sure the layout of worksheets is clear and uncluttered.
- Use meaningful graphics on worksheets to make them appealing to students and use a large font (14 pt).
- If there is a student with a visual impairment in your class check with the teacher or the School Learning Support Officer who may be able to assist you with large print or Braille material.
- If you need to use equipment such as DVD players, CD players, Interactive Whiteboards, check with the class teacher or the School Learning Support Officer the week before you need the equipment, so that they can ensure it is available for you.

Lesson Delivery

Presentation

- Present information in small chunks and question to check for understanding.
- Ensure that reading to the students is limited to 10 minutes and include questioning to determine understanding.
- Break instructions into steps and deliver one instruction at a time.
- Use visual prompts to support instructions. Many students with disabilities, learning difficulties and/or challenging behaviours will already be familiar with visual prompts to trigger a certain response.
- Demonstrate how each task is to be completed.
- Present the lesson and information visually and orally.
- Highlight key vocabulary.
- Read material to student if necessary.
- Vary the pace of tasks e.g. an active task followed by a more passive task.

Student Responses

- Does the student require one-on-one instruction to be able to respond?
- Use a variety of tasks to support your lesson e.g. brainstorming, worksheets, diagrams, questions and answer, discussion, board work, role plays, audio-visual resources.
- Worksheets that are to be filled in by the student will usually require your assistance as independent work is often difficult.
- Answers to worksheet questions may be discussed by class after a short period of independent work time with group answers written on board for students to copy.
- Provide a copy of written work for a student who has difficulty copying from the board.
- Allow the student to give non-verbal answers such as pointing to the correct answer or choice.
- If you keep students active with meaningful and related work they are more likely to stay on task throughout the lesson.

What behaviours will indicate student engagement in the lesson?

Students:

- Answer questions
- Ask questions
- Listen
- Participate in a range of activities
- Complete tasks or attempt to complete tasks (some students may only be able to complete parts of the task)
- Assist classmate/s to complete work
- Behave appropriately and follow instructions
- Ask about next week's lesson
- Are enthusiastic.