



ICCOREIS

Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (NSW) Inc

SRE UPDATE

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SRE NUMBERS IN 2016

Anecdotally there has been some reduction in SRE numbers this year. This was expected given last year's enrolment form questions about participation in either SRE or SEE. Now the Department of Education has done two things to correct the unintended consequences of the enrolment form:

- Introduced a new enrolment form question that simply asks for the student's religion.
- Used an *SRE & SEE Fact sheet* to instruct principals to send a preference letter to parents/carers of only new enrolments to give their children opportunity to participate in SRE.

Where schools follow the *Fact Sheet* instructions, SRE Coordinators can expect reductions in Kindergarten and Year 7. Other years should substantially remain the same. If there are significant reductions in other years, then SRE Coordinators or chairs of SRE Boards ought to make an appointment with the principal to find out what has happened.

The most common cause of significant reductions in other years is that the school administration has sent home the preference letter to all parents. This is contrary to the *SRE & SEE Fact sheet*, which is quite explicit that the preference letter is only to be sent to parents/carers of new enrolments, typically those in Kindergarten and Year 7.

The *Fact Sheet* has two important consequences for SRE Coordinators as first term draws to a close:

- Enrolments for Kindergarten and Year 7 2017 will begin in Term 2. Parents and carers need to know that the Christian SRE program at a school is both active and educationally sound. This means they need to hear from SRE providers at enrolment information sessions and other opportunities.
- A preference letter is to be sent home when the Religion box is not completed or the religion doesn't match the SRE provided at the school. For this reason, the Christian SRE providers need to make sure they are all listed on the preference letter. This is particularly important in a combined arrangement, where multiple providers join together. Only when all providers are listed as participating is a fair representation of the program provided.

It is a parent/carer's right to be able to choose SRE knowing all the facts about the program. It can no longer be assumed that the word 'scripture' conveys anything meaningful about the program and its educational benefits. Where Coordinators are experiencing a significant reduction in numbers or suspect that this may be the case, they are invited to contact ICCOREIS for assistance.

Peter Adamson, Deputy Chair ICCOREIS

RECRUITMENT IDEA: ADDING VALUE TO THE POSTER

Last year, Wendy Cox has plastered an invitation to volunteer over the Christian SRE poster and added some tear off contact strips (with her name and phone number) at the bottom. She says: "It is encouraging to see some of the contact slips torn off the bottom of the posters. While I didn't have anyone contact me directly as a result of seeing the posters I'm sure they had the effect of prompting people over time, since several approached me through the nine months following the display of the posters. I have put the plain posters in the schools advertising SRE, but find they don't stay up long, whereas church notice boards are not cleared so frequently, and the 'teachers needed' message continues to shine out!"

Order your poster by emailing: execofficer@iccoreis.asn.au, advising the number required and a postal address.



THERE IS NOW A CALENDAR OF TRAINING EVENTS ON THE ICCOREIS WEBSITE

Go to <http://www.iccoreis.asn.au/coming-events/> for Basic SRE Training that fits the ICCOREIS framework.

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SRE: A FAMILY AFFAIR

Family One

Whilst presenting Module 1 in Lismore, I was introduced to a family which has three generations of SRE teachers. All these lovely ladies were attending a training day provided by the Far North Coast training group. The matriarch of the group was Jane who had been teaching SRE since 1992. Jane had always wanted to become a missionary but marriage and a family took her in a different direction. Later she found that SRE offered her an opportunity to share her love of God. She loves teaching SRE and has only recently reduced her classes from eight to one.



Her passion for SRE has passed to her daughter, Barbara, who has taught in many places, including Casino and Meadowbank. Now Jane's grand-daughter Rhonda has been inspired to become involved and is presently undertaking the training stage.



Family Two

At a recent SRE training event in Belmont (Lake Macquarie), three members with the same surname were in attendance.

Upon querying this unusual occurrence it turns out that Wendy Sarich has been the catalyst for her family's involvement in SRE. Wendy has been teaching SRE for over 35 years but her husband, David, only came on board when he retired. As the number of students increased in Wendy's classes and the available teachers decreased, the Sarich family took on assembly style SRE. This required a technical assistant: enter daughter-in-law, Ruth, who responded to this need and joined the team. Recently her niece, Rochelle, has attended training and extended the family involvement.

It only goes to show that taking the gospel to the wider community through SRE can be a family affair and can involve all generations!
Sue Sneddon, Executive Officer

CELEBRATING PAUL'S CONTRIBUTION TO SRE

Paul Worthington became an advisor to ICCOREIS in 2004, and a full member of the Commission in 2005. He faithfully represented the Catholic Church up to 2008, and during that time famously led an in-depth study of the Rawlinson Report.

Paul, a former primary school Principal, was appointed Director of the CCD in the Diocese of Parramatta on 8 July 2002 where he served until December 2015.

Under Paul's leadership and guidance, the number of SRE teachers increased, with 191 out of 199 Primary Schools and 24 secondary schools receiving SRE.

Paul said there was a need to encourage more young people to become catechists. "The days of having catechists teach for 40 or 50 years is changing. We need more young people to become catechists," he said. One of Paul's innovations was to invite senior students from Catholic High schools in his diocese to teach SRE in public schools. By 2015, there were 510 students from 19 Catholic Colleges teaching SRE in 190 public primary schools.

Paul also worked collaboratively with Broken Bay & Wollongong Dioceses to develop teaching units for secondary

SRE teachers to use with an emphasis on curriculum supported by contemporary media.



Paul's family, catechists, clergy and the faithful gathered in St Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta on 9 December last year to farewell Paul from his role in the CCD.

There is an unconfirmed whisper that Paul may be continuing his support of SRE in his 'semi retirement'. We look forward to hearing more...

VISITING THE FAR NORTH

On February 7, my husband and I drove over 600kms to Lismore to deliver Module One: *Understanding our Ministry Context*, at the invitation of the North Coast group. On the journey we collected 10 boxes of Christian SRE brochures and about the same number of boxes of Bible Society bibles to be used in SRE classes from Rory Armstrong, one of the SRE teachers in Grafton. Lynda Mulder, former Chair of ICCOREIS, joined us and talked enthusiastically about the latest training she had provided in the Coffs Harbour/Grafton area.

Sixty people attended the training in Lismore, many of whom had driven over an hour to the venue. It was an excellent morning and Rev Roy Cowin, Acting Chair and organizer of the

day, has made the feedback available. It was most encouraging that about 6 of the attendees were young people who were new to SRE.

Here is some of the feedback collected:

- ◇ *Helped me know how I go about being appropriately authorised.*
- ◇ *To be reminded that churches started school in Australia was an eye opener.*
- ◇ *Beneficial to know the framework and legislation in which we operate.*

(cont'd page 4)

SRE TEACHERS CELEBRATING TOGETHER

Southlakes Christian Education Association held a wonderful interdenominational service in early November in one of the local churches to highlight the work of the SRE teachers in local schools. About 60-70 people representing most of the local congregations, including 19 of their 27 SRE primary teachers and the high school SRE teacher, attended. Some were interviewed and all came forward to be prayed over and to be given a small token of appreciation in recognition of their ministry during the year. The offering taken went into the SRE fund.

The group normally holds two or three such services a year, hosted by a different denomination in turn. The format is similar - giving thanks for God's blessing on SRE that year,

hearing encouraging stories from the teachers, and praying for the 27 volunteer teachers, some singing and a short message from Scripture. Food is always involved, and has been (on various occasions) either before, during or after the service, depending on the creativity of the church organising the evening.

The service is always advertised well in advance in all the church bulletins and is promoted by teachers in their own churches. Beside the Lakeside pastor who delivered the Bible message, pastors/ministers from three other local denominations attended. There was a warm feeling of community shared over the supper.

Wendy Cox (Coordinator in Morisset)



TO TREAT OR NOT TO TREAT?

Some SRE teachers have asked whether it's OK to give out rewards in class...

Let's face it, some Department-employed teachers use lollies to manage behaviour; others run a system of point earning with which students can 'buy' items at the end of term. Some motivate by offering material rewards like canteen vouchers or posters. Others give computer time or 'early marks' for effort or achievement. Because SRE teachers only have a short time, tapping into any reward system the students are already used to is generally helpful.

First, think through *why* you might want to give rewards. Does it help to focus the students on the lesson material? Will it

help them learn? Does it help your class understand what God is like? Does it encourage divisiveness or cooperation?

Would parents think it's a good idea? (Parents may be unhappy with sweets being given to their children.)

Would the principal approve?

Would your authorising body endorse it?

If you've worked through these questions and decide that rewards or treats will be good for the class, it's important that you discuss it with the classroom teacher at the start of the year, even if it's something that you've done previously.

Sally Smith

VISITING THE FAR NORTH (cont'd)

(Cont'd from page 3)

- ◇ Reaffirmation of our ministry and the support available.
- ◇ Challenged to re-evaluate my goals/purpose in teaching SRE.
- ◇ Clarified what we should and shouldn't be teaching in SRE.
- ◇ Helped me reflect on my role in the larger context.
- ◇ We shared lots of information and encouragement in our group.
- ◇ A new teacher was able to ask questions of more experienced teachers
- ◇ My first time. I look forward to more of this.
- ◇ Helpful to discuss all we had heard and add our struggles and strategies.

On the return trip, we were able to share lunch with Lois Drummond, the coordinator for the Coffs Coast group. There were piles of SRE manuals and workbooks in her living room and her husband told me she coordinates 24 schools and 25

different churches. Lois said "We have over 70 volunteer primary teachers and two paid high school teachers, one full-time and one part-time. It is a lot of work, but I've been pleased to be able to do it. As an old minister friend of ours used to say, 'You don't retire from being a Christian.' "

She is one of the many people in SRE for whom we should be praising God.



REVIEW UPDATE

Many of you may be wondering about the results of the Review into SRE and SEE that was performed during 2015.

ARTD Consultants completed the review findings in December 2015 and provided the draft report. Following review of the draft report by the Department of Education, feedback was

provided to the review team. Feedback was focussed on ensuring accuracy, clarity of messages, especially statistical references, and consistency of language. The final report is due soon and will be released at the Minister's discretion.

Sue

RESOURCES

Check out the Advocate for Children and Young People website.

This government organisation represents those voices often not heard in the public arena: the voices of children and young people. They state:

The more organisations effectively seek children and young people's participation, the more they will be able to make accurate and relevant decisions.

There are 4 videos on the website which examine real life situations where children and young people were integrated into:

- the design of a playground;
- the operating system of a child care centre;
- youth parliament;
- innovative projects for a remote high school.



Also featured are some thought provoking videos on bullying. www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/participation



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