

## **Module 1**

### **Teaching SRE in NSW Government Schools.**

- **Content**

Competencies, Outcomes and Processes\_

#### **Introduction**

This Module is to help you understand the NSW public education system and SRE.

It covers

- the history of SRE
- different models of delivery
- the relevant laws and Department of Education (DoE) procedures
- the DoE's Code of Conduct and Core values which volunteers work under
- how to be authorised and who can authorise you

We'll consider

- our motives,
- the privileges and responsibilities attached to SRE teaching
- the value that SRE adds to public education, including recent research on the value of SRE to NSW society, and
- our sources of support as we carry out this role

- **History of SRE in NSW**

Outcome 1: To appreciate the place of SRE in NSW Public Education throughout time. E.G The nature of SRE

***Use a powerpoint or handout sheet to convey the following history***

Early 1800s All formal schooling by the Anglican church

1806 First Catholic school

1820 State assistance to set up and maintain church schools

1848 Board of National Education set up to establish a public education system. Subsidies to church schools continues.

1880 Education officially becomes a government responsibility. Catholic schools continued.

Former church school buildings and staff absorbed into the state system.

In exchange clergy had access to 'their' students up to an hour a day.

Two types of religious education \*General (learning about religions) and

\*Special (teaching of a particular religious faith).

1980 Rawlinson Report states SRE must be a 'genuinely educational activity'.

1990 Education Act 1990

2010 Amendment to Act to allow Special Education in Ethics in SRE time.

2015 The NSW Government undertook a Review of Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics. This review found that overall, SRE was well done and that the majority of parents still had their children engage with SRE.

2019 Implementation Procedures reflecting the findings of this review came into effect.

***ACTIVITY Reflect on what you learn from or what impacts you from this history.***

Since the Public Instruction Act 1880, SRE has had an integral place in public education in NSW. Initially, SRE was for one hour per day, however its place is now governed by the Education Act 1990.

During the period 1970-1980 a major review of the place of religion in government schools was undertaken by every Australian state. In 1975, the NSW Minister for Education established a committee of enquiry to consider religious education in NSW government schools. The report of the Rawlinson committee of enquiry, Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools (1980), made recommendations in the areas of General Religious Education (GRE) and Special Religious Education (SRE) and in February 1986, the SRE recommendations were endorsed by the NSW Government. The Education Act 1990 was framed taking into account the recommendations of the Rawlinson report.

Additionally, in 2010, provision was made for Special Education in Ethics (SEE) and after a parliamentary enquiry in 2011, SEE will continue to be offered in government schools.

- **Current practice of SRE in NSW, including facts and figures.**

**Outcome 2: To describe the relationship between the schools and the church's SRE coordinators**

Schools will generally appoint an SRE coordinator. Their role is to work with the representatives of all SRE providers informing them of classes, rooms, timetables and any changes to SRE due to school events or special SRE celebrations (eg Easter) They will be able to provide student rolls, inform you of any special needs you should be aware of, and clarify with you school discipline policy and rewards systems. They can inform you of any equipment you can use, and emergency procedures.

Churches will generally appoint an SRE co-ordinator. They may work with one school, or a number of schools to liaise with, and inform SRE teachers they are responsible for, of the information that the school SRE coordinator provides them with. This allows the school to liaise with just one or two people to convey all necessary information to the SRE teachers. Church SRE coordinators may work across denominational groups. Effective communication and good administrative skills are key in this role.

- SRE teachers should communicate well in advance if unable to attend a class, either to their church SRE co-ordinator, or to the school directly.
- SRE teachers need to be faithful and honouring of other denominations and the opinions, beliefs and values of parents.
- SRE teachers may sometimes wish to send home information about the SRE program or church events. This must have the approval of the school principal. When serving with other denominations, each church must also give permission to promote activities of one church before approaching the school principal for approval.
- All SRE teachers working in a joint denominational situation, must be entered on the Christian SRE Cross Authorisation Letter which is to be given to the Principal before teaching commences for the year.

### Outcome 3: To identify five different models of SRE

SRE may be offered by individual Christian approved providers, or, more commonly these days, as Christian SRE (Combined) where a number of approved providers enter into joint arrangements. Combined SRE is often preferred by schools as it reduces the complexity of timetabling and room allocation.

Schools should inform parents of the SRE provided in their school. Christian SRE (Combined) needs to be made clear to parents, providing them with a list of denominations covered and the churches involved in the SRE teaching. SRE may be classroom teaching, or taught in the large group assembly style, if insufficient SRE teachers are available, or if this is preferred by the providers of SRE and the school.

Generally SRE is taught weekly in regular 30 minute lessons, however, there is provision within the education act for SRE to be taught in intensive blocks, or as day long seminars as long as the number of hours of SRE do not exceed that legislated. In some cases churches combine to employ a teacher.

### Outcome 4: To be able to differentiate between Denominational and Joint Denominational types of SRE.

When a child is enrolled they will receive a Participation Letter from the school listing the SRE that is available. SRE is either

**Denominational** in which one denomination teaches their faith to children who nominate that faith, or

**Christian SRE** a combined program in which different denominations are involved in authorising the teacher(s) and the curriculum.

- **Legislation, Policy and Procedures.**

Outcome 5: To become familiar with the DoE SRE Procedures for SRE including relevant legislation and relevant laws.

***Use powerpoint or handout sheet for participants to read this excerpt from the Education Act 1990.***

From the Education Act 1990 Special Religious Education

1. In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion, but the total number of hours so allowed in a year is not to exceed, for each child, the number of school weeks in the year.
2. The religious education to be given to children of any religious persuasion is to be given by a member of the clergy or other religious teacher of that persuasion authorised by the religious body to which the member of the clergy or other religious teacher belongs.
3. The religious education to be given is in every case to be the religious education authorised by the religious body to which the member of the clergy or other religious teacher belongs.
4. The times at which religious education is to be given to children of a particular religious persuasion are to be fixed by agreement between the principal of the school and the local member of the clergy or other religious teacher of that persuasion.
5. Children attending a religious education class are to be separated from other children at the school while the class is held.
6. If the relevant member of the clergy or other religious teacher fails to attend the school at the appointed time, the children are to be appropriately cared for at the school during the period set aside for religious education.
7. Where combined arrangement occur only those children whose parents/caregivers have nominated one of the participating religious persuasions are to be included.

#### Objection to religious education

No child at a government school is to be required to receive any general religious education or special religious education if the parent of the child objects to the child's receiving that education.

Amendment in 2010 Special education in ethics is allowed as a secular alternative to special religious education at government schools.

If the parent of a child objects to the child receiving special religious education, the child is entitled to receive special education in ethics, but only if (a) it is reasonably practicable for special education in ethics to be made available to the child at the government school, and (b) the parent requests that the child receive special education in ethics.

A government school cannot be directed (by the Minister or otherwise) not to make special education in ethics available at the school.

***DISCUSS Is there anything in this that surprises you? Should there be any changes in your situation?***

Forty years on, the way the Education Act is to be implemented is set out in the 2019 Implementation Procedures.

**Give out copies of the 2019 Implementation Procedures.**

**ACTIVITY Display the following Questions and challenge participants In small groups to find the answers from their Procedures document to familiarise themselves with them. Briefly affirm the answers. Then discuss any issues raised.**

1. In the Department procedure document what is meant by “Approved Religious Persuasion”?

(The organisations on the Approved Provider List)

2. Who are the ‘authorised representatives of an approved religious persuasion’? (SRE teachers)

3. Find the part where teachers need to have training after their basic training.(4.2 Page 7)

4. Find the part where parents have a right to know what is covered in SRE lessons.(4.3)

5. Where does it say who has the duty for student care during SRE?(3.2 bottom of page 5)

6. Find where principals need to provide adequate learning facilities for SRE. (3.2 mid page)

7. Find where your date of birth must be provided to the school you teach at.(4.2 para 1 page 7)

8. Find where it says SRE teachers are to be given a class list and any necessary information which may affect the behaviour or performance of students.(3.4 Page 6)

9. Find where the school must provide adequate information to parents.(3.1 page 4 - also on blue dept fact sheet)

10. Find where it says the organisation that authorises you determines what you teach and how you teach it.(4.3 page 8 ‘materials and pedagogy’)

**Outcome 6: to understand the Department of Education’s Code of Conduct and Core Values.**

**Ask:** *What is a CORE VALUE?* (A belief or principle that a person or organisation views as being of central importance.)

What do you think might be the core values of the Department of Education?

(Hear some suggestions)

The Department list their core values as

Integrity,

Fairness,

Responsibility,  
Respect,  
Excellence,  
Cooperation,  
Participation,  
Care,  
Democracy  
(Policy PD/2005/0131/V01)

Volunteers including SRE teachers need to be aware of these and work within them.

(Note: The National Framework: Nine Values for Australian Schooling lists Care and Compassion, Doing Your Best, Fair Go, Freedom, Honesty and Trustworthiness, Integrity, Respect, Responsibility, Understanding Tolerance and Inclusion.)

The Department of Education has a CODE OF CONDUCT for its employees. As a volunteer within a school, we need to be aware of and operate under this code of conduct.

The actual Department of Education Code of Conduct is 47 pages!  
<https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/associated-documents/The-2014-Code-of-Conduct-approved-by-Minister-1-July-2014-updated-Dec-2016-not-tracked.pdf>

Suggest they look it up sometime since as an SRE teacher they work under it. Give out Code of Conduct summary (See Appendix Module One) and ask participants to read and discuss it.

***ASK: Is anything a surprise to you?  
Is there anything you feel you can't comply with?***

- **Becoming an authorised SRE Teacher. Who are Approved Providers?**  
Outcome 7: To outline the role of the SRE Provider  
(Church/Denomination)

An Approved Provider is a denomination or church that has been approved by the Department of Education to teach SRE in its schools. The list is on the Department website. To teach SRE you must be authorised by a provider on this list.

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/learning-across-the-curriculum/religion-and-ethics/approved-sre-providers>

The Special Religious Education Procedures, outlines the role of the SRE Provider.

Ask participants to identify the section about SRE Providers in their document. (Page 7)

1. Annual Approval to deliver SRE.
2. Recruitment, training and support
3. Lesson content is the responsibility of the Approved Provider. They must authorise the materials and pedagogy used by all the teachers they authorise. make their curriculum scope and sequence accessible on their website so parents and carers can understand what is covered in lessons. provide the link to their website to the school  
Provide information about lesson content when requested by principals/parents/caregivers
4. Make publicly available their complaints procedure and resolve complaints. In a combined program it must be clear which approved provider is responsible for resolving complaints.

### **Show Approved Providers Checklist.**

Approved Providers have to guarantee to the Department of Education certain things each year to retain their approved provider status. They have to guarantee that you have had **Initial training** including in **Child Protection** and are aware of the Department's **Code of Conduct** including **Social Media Policy**

They have to guarantee that you **know your authorised curriculum** and the scope and sequence and will deliver it with **sensitivity** and in an **age-appropriate** manner.

Approved Providers must have in place a process of regular ongoing training which includes child protection, classroom management strategies and implementation of the curriculum. They have to say that your teaching will be reviewed by things like mentor support, lesson observation and self-reflection. It's all part of that core value of excellence in government schools

Some Approved providers are just catching up with these new requirements. If you see things there which you haven't done before, think about how to start doing them. It will be necessary before your authorisation is renewed.

***ACTIVITY OPTION Ask participants to tell the person next to them what an Approved Provider is and what an Approved Provider's responsibilities are. Have them name their Approved Provider.***

Summarise: Approved Providers have responsibility for all the teachers they authorise. As teachers our responsibility is to maintain current authorisation and to meet our Approved Provider's conditions for authorisation.

**Outcome 8: To accept responsibility to complete the authorisation process**

Your Approved Provider is responsible to

1. authorise representatives to teach SRE,
2. authorise materials and pedagogy used by SRE teachers,
3. ensure that the school is informed of the names and contact details of authorised SRE teachers,
4. provide information about the content of lessons when requested by parents/ caregivers.

But you as an SRE teacher have responsibilities as well

You are responsible to

1. meet the legislated requirements for Child Protection.
2. meet the requirements of your Approved Provider for completing an engagement form, being endorsed by your local clergy, keeping your training up to date, and fulfilling your authorising body's requirements for their review.
3. carry your current authorisation when in a school. It must have your name, your church/denomination, when your authorisation expires, an official seal or authorising signature from your Approved Provider.
4. teach from an approved curriculum and use pre-approved, or seek approval for any extra curricula material you want to include in your lesson.
5. When working with other churches/denominations, all must approve all the teachers in the program and agree on an approved curriculum via the cross authorisation form/letter.

**ACTIVITY OPTION Use the How SRE Works Activity in Module One Appendix**

- **Why we teach SRE. Motivation.**

Outcome 9: For Participants to articulate their motives for becoming an SRE teacher.

***Allow 1 min for everyone to think about their main motivation for volunteering for SRE and write it down. Encourage participants to share their answers with those around them or with the whole group.***

Because SRE is a feature of public schools, it has to fit not just with the core values but be a genuinely educational activity.

***ACTIVITY Pose the question 'How would you express your motivation to a school principal?' Would what you've written be readily understood/appropriate? Challenge participants to rephrase their motivation for a principal.***

***Challenge participants to rephrase their motivation in a way that is readily understandable for a parent/caregiver so they will see it as benefiting their child. (This needs to address the parent/carer desires for their children, not yours!)***

**Share and discuss some of the responses.**

People who are against SRE sometimes talk about 'Christians going in with their own agenda' to 'brainwash' students. Sometimes it's because we've expressed our motivations in terms that fit our church culture and others from outside that culture don't know what we mean. SRE is cross cultural ministry for many of us. We need to use the language and behaviours of the schools in which we minister for the benefits to be understood.

**ACTIVITY OPTION How would you give your positive opinion of SRE to an opponent? Hear some responses.**

*Jesus called them together and said, "The other nations have rulers. You know that those rulers love to show their power over the people, and their important leaders love to use all their authority. But it should not be that way among you. Whoever wants to become great among you must serve the rest of you like a servant. Whoever wants to become the first among you must serve all of you like a slave. In the same way, the Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many people."*

*Mark 10:42-45 New Century Version (NCV)*

**Outcome 10: To claim some of the privileges of being an SRE teacher**

SRE teachers are in the privileged position of influencing students in public schools, a privilege denied to most of the population.

All SRE teachers should seek to serve the school and work for the good of students and staff. Our hearts and motivation must be right before we enter a school.

How individual SRE teachers interact with the school and each other will be a practical demonstration of God's love and Christian values to the local community.

**Outcome 11: To claim some of the responsibilities of being an SRE teacher**

An SRE teacher doesn't operate as an individual.

We are responsible to

- the Department of Education which has the ultimate duty of care to the students we teach.
- our authorising body, which guarantees our suitability, our training and conduct,
- our SRE coordinator
- the parents of the students we teach
- the school we teach in to add value to their programs
- local churches and other believers. Students views of churches and believers are influenced by our lessons.
- the students - to teach the curriculum and display Christian character.
- God who gives us all we need to represent the faith well.

- **How SRE impacts our local school communities by adding value to public education**

Outcome 13: To identify five contributions that SRE makes to Public Education in NSW

**Choose ONE of the following methods for participants to engage with the topic.**

- ***In small groups or pairs list the benefits participants see that SRE delivers and feedback answers to larger group.***
- ***Hand out 'Benefits' cards asking groups or pairs to attempt to put them in order of importance and choose their top 3.***
- ***Work through the Benefits on PPT asking participants to choose the most important to them, to schools, to parents.***
- ***Walk around and view 'Benefits' posters, discussing and deciding the most relevant to children, schools, parents.***

A Study of SRE and its Value to Society was carried out in 2018 by two academics, Gross and Rutland which found that SRE was a benefit to NSW society including in these ways.

1. SRE can strengthen young people's personal identity and assist their moral and ethical development.
2. SRE provides an effective values education that empowers student decision making, fosters student action and assigns real student responsibility.
3. Since there is provision for children of all faiths and no faith, it strengthens the multicultural fabric of Australian schools.
4. Religion has been shown to provide important psychological benefits to students' mental health and well being.
5. SRE creates safe spaces for students to explore the deeper questions of life, faith and belief.

Remembering the above reasons from this recent research can help us speak positively in ways the community can understand.

A summary of the report is available at

[http://www.ices-group.org/uploads/3/2/0/1/32011459/sre\\_report\\_executive\\_summary-prof\\_gross\\_prof\\_rutland\\_1\\_1.pdf](http://www.ices-group.org/uploads/3/2/0/1/32011459/sre_report_executive_summary-prof_gross_prof_rutland_1_1.pdf)

There are over 10,000 SRE teachers across the state. If all could give a reasoned response as to how SRE benefits society, the support for SRE might be greater.

### **ACTIVITY OPTION**

***Do role plays of a principal and parent asking 'Why do you teach SRE?' and an SRE teacher giving a readily understandable answer. Try to incorporate something from the Study of SRE and its Value to Society in your answer.***

## Outcome 14: To identify three sources of support for themselves as SRE teachers

In SRE you are not alone. You can expect support from these sources.

- Your Approved Provider
- The Inter Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools, ICCOREIS, is a group of Christian Approved Providers of all theological persuasions who met under the banner of Christian SRE. It has 14 members who between them represent 80% of SRE taught in NSW so it is the peak body. ICCOREIS works closely with the NSW Department of Education and the NSW government to represent the member churches on issues related to SRE in schools. ICCOREIS was part of the Rawlinson committee into SRE in 1975 and more recently represented the churches at the NSW government enquiry into SEE. ICCOREIS works to meet the challenges facing SRE within the community and has resources you can access via their website as well as up to date information about SRE and ongoing training available.  
<http://iccoreis.asn.au/>
- Christian SRE is an initiative of ICCOREIS. Its tagline 'Question. Explore. Discover' describes the pedagogy of Christian SRE. Through promotional literature and a website it also seeks to inform parents/caregivers and schools of the benefits of SRE. (You may like to have available Christian SRE brochures to give to or show participants. These are available from [info@christiansre.com.au](mailto:info@christiansre.com.au).)
- Your church coordinator
- Your local church. Seek prayer support. Report to them.
- Other SRE teachers. Many teams that work in combined arrangements meet to pray and debrief each term. Some even every week.

### Conclusion

Being an SRE teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility.

It is a privilege to be allowed to teach students about our faith, supported by both the DoE and legislation. Our responsibility is to take this privilege seriously, by following the procedures set down, using our approved curriculum.

All SRE teachers should seek to serve the school and work for the good of students and staff. Our hearts and motivation must be right before we enter a school.

How individual SRE teachers interact with the school and each other will be a practical demonstration of God's love and Christian values to the local community.

Prepare and teach well.

Reflect upon your teaching and always go for excellence.

We are influencing future generations of Australians.