

Special Religious Instruction Policy

Background

At Huntingdale Primary School students come from a wide range of religious backgrounds. The school can offer Special Religious Instruction (SRI) as part of its extra-curricular programs and in adherence to Department of Education and Training (DET) Policy.

Purpose

To ensure:

- Huntingdale Primary School is compliant with Ministerial Direction MD 145 and procedures set out by the Department of Education and Training (DET).

Implementation

- The Principal has the overall responsibility of implementing this policy
- The Principal will delegate to a member(s) of staff to coordinate Special Religious Instruction throughout the school.

Guiding Principles

Freedom of Religion

- Students and teachers have the right to hold their own spiritual beliefs and to practice their religion. These rights to freedom of religion and belief, freedom of expression and freedom of association are protected under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.
- Students and teachers also have responsibilities under the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* which prohibits behaviour that incites or encourages hatred, serious contempt, revulsion or severe ridicule against another person or group of people because of their religion or belief.
- Students can organise and participate in voluntary religious activities outside of the school program as they are not part of the curriculum provided by the state in government schools. Such activities cannot be promoted by the school.
- Ministerial Direction 145 does not stop students from expressing their faith. For example, students may engage in individual or group prayer during school hours where this is in accordance with the requirements of their religion, or during break times.
- However, student prayer, religious study groups or religious youth groups cannot be led, conducted or instructed by a teacher, staff member or visitors/volunteers outside of SRI.



As per DET policy Huntingdale Primary School will:

- Provide a secular education and will not promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect; and are open to adherents of any philosophy, religion or faith. This does not prevent the inclusion of *general religious education* in the curriculum. *General religious education* is defined as: “*education about major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world*” .
- Ensure that programs and teaching are delivered in a manner that supports and promotes the principles and practice of Australian democracy, including a commitment to freedom of religion, speech and association.
- Not promote any religion or faith that is not part of the Government school curriculum.
- Allow students to receive secular education in government schools that is non-compulsory special religious instruction (SRI) (section 2.2.11 of the Act). SRI is “*instruction provided by churches and other religious groups and based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs*”.
- Allow any group seeking to facilitate, lead or provide instruction in programs that are based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs during lunch time or out-of-school hours (where this is provided by the school and supervised by school staff).

Offering SRI

- The Principal has the decision-making responsibilities around offering SRI at the school.
- The Principal may decide to offer, or not to offer, to change the time, or to cease offering SRI, based on the circumstances of the school.
- In making the decision Principals should have regard to relevant considerations such as the:
 - Level of demand by parents for SRI to be delivered at the school.
 - Availability of teaching staff to appropriately supervise the delivery of the program.
 - Availability of an accredited and approved instructor to deliver the program.
 - Availability of school funds to employ casual relief teachers, if required, to provide supervision.
 - Availability of an appropriate space in which SRI may be delivered at the times an instructor is available.
 - Timetabling of any other extra-curricular activities.
 - Views of the School Council.
 - Views of the school community, and
 - Any other matters the Principal considers relevant in the particular circumstances.
- The Principal may consider some or all of the considerations listed, depending on the circumstances of the school.
- The Principal must not have regard to their own personal views about religion or their personal religious beliefs or practices in making a decision to offer, or not to offer, or to cease offering SRI.
- The Principal may consider publishing a notice in the school newsletter to provide an opportunity for feedback prior to making a decision about the provision or not of the program. A record should be kept of the process taken and the reasons for making such a decision.



Attendance and Consent

- Attendance must not be compulsory for any student.
- Students who attend SRI must not be offered any enticement or other benefit of a tangible nature.
- The program must operate as an 'opt-in' extra-curricular activity that students may only attend with their parents' informed consent obtained using the prescribed consent form - CFMD145. If a parent does not provide the consent form within the timeframe specified in the form, the child must not participate in SRI.

Note: *The school enrolment form does not provide an opportunity for parents to provide consent for their child's participation.*

- The Principal must ensure parents are given appropriate informed consent and are provided with the following information in relation to the provision of SRI in the school:
 - The religion(s) for which SRI is being offered at the school
 - The session times, and whether they run all year, for one term only or for some other specified period
 - The age grouping for the session(s)
 - An overview of the program (provided by the accredited instructor)
 - How a parent may access the program materials online
 - The name of the accredited and approved instructor who will deliver the session/s, and the name of the provider they have been accredited through;
 - That they may withdraw their child from SRI at any time by notifying the school.
- Parental consent may be withdrawn at any time.

Scheduling

- The Principal must ensure that students do not attend for more than 30 minutes per week.
- The 30-minute maximum applies to a student's attendance at SRI, rather than the total amount of SRI that a school may offer.
- SRI may be delivered to multi-age groupings of students. The Principal should ensure they understand what age-groups form part of a particular session being offered to the school by the instructor.
- SRI is offered at lunchtime

Supervision

- All program activities must be supervised by at least one school teacher and ensure that students are not removed from the school ground by SRI instructors during SRI.
- School teachers are required to supervise SRI and fulfil their duty of care obligations. Teachers should be made aware of guidelines and policy relating to SRI, and the distinct difference between SRI and general religious education.
- A teacher who is responsible for the supervision must report any concern he or she has about the delivery, provision or content of the program to the Principal, as soon as it is practicable. For example, if a teacher believes that the content of the program conflicts in some way with a Department policy (such as the policy regarding diversity), he/she must report that concern to the Principal. Similarly, if a supervising teacher believes that the content or nature of any SRI class raises concerns from a duty of care perspective, the teacher must report that to the Principal.
- The Principal is also required to ensure that students not participating in SRI are supervised by a teacher in line with school policy regarding yard duty supervision.



Charging for SRI

- Instructors may charge a fee to participating students.
- This fee can include the cost of materials or program.
- This fee cannot be charged prior to consent to participate having been sought from parents.
- Schools may assist instructors in collecting this fee, but schools should not meet the costs of SRI materials and recoup the cost from parents.

Instructors

- The Principal must ensure, by consulting with the DET, that only accredited and approved instructors provide SRI at a government school who are approved by the Minister for Education.
- SRI instructors must not attempt to convert students to a particular religion or invite students to attend activities outside of SRI.
- Accredited instructors have undertaken training through their accredited provider and have signed a Code of Conduct which outlines how they are required to conduct themselves.
- The Principal and SRI providers must ensure SRI instructors are not referred to as 'teachers' but as 'instructors' to avoid confusion as to their role. This includes instructors who may have a teaching qualification and/or VIT registration, as they are at the school in their role as an SRI volunteer, not as a 'teacher'.
- Approved providers must ensure that the instructors they accredit:
 - Have a valid Working With Children Check (WWCC)
 - Undertake regular training
 - Meet minimum suitability standards for persons who work or volunteer with children
 - Sign up to a Code of Conduct established by the Department
 - Understand relevant Victorian legislation, Department and school policies
 - Receive Ministerial approval to provide SRI in a government school.
- Principals must ensure the instructor:
 - Is not a government school teacher
 - Are accredited by an approved provider
 - Provides a copy of their formal accreditation (including WWCC details) and this is retained on school records
 - Does not continue to instruct if their WWCC card has expired
 - Complies with the school's Volunteer and Visitors to Schools Policies
 - Supervised by a school teacher at all times
- Any instructor's conduct that does not meet the requirements of the Code of Conduct or this policy must be reported to the DET's Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division as soon as practicable upon discovery of failure to meet these requirements.
- SRI teachers can be sourced from the following accredited providers approved by DET:
 - Christianity (Access Ministries)
 - Catholicism (Catholic Education Office)
 - Islam (Arkan Toledo/Islamic Council of Victoria)
 - Judaism (United Jewish Education Board)
 - Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Orthodox Christianity, Baha'i faith and others (Religions for Peace Australia)



Program Materials

- The only program materials that can be used as part of SRI are those that are approved by the instructor's accredited provider and that are available for parents to access online.
- The content of any program proposed to be delivered by visitors to schools must be examined by the Principal to ascertain whether the content is based in the *religious tenets and beliefs* of a particular religion and thus falls within the SRI policy framework.
- See <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/curriculum/Pages/sri.aspx#link50> for further information.

Parent Concerns/Complaints

- Parents who want to raise a concern or make a complaint related to the provision of SRI should discuss the matter with the Principal in the first instance in accordance with the Department's Parent Complaints Policy.

Other Religious Activity

At Huntingdale Primary School we will:

- Teach students about a religious celebration, festival, special event etc., as part of the *general religious education* curriculum by classroom teachers. This may include recognition of and educational activities relating to key religious celebrations such as Christmas, Eid, Hanukkah and others.
- Conduct *general religious education* classes or events that may include guest speakers who are representatives of a particular faith to explain the workings and belief structure of their religion. Those speakers must not otherwise provide instruction in their religion and must not promote the religion. They must be supervised by a teacher at all times.
- Provide a secular education and not promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect; be open to adherents of any philosophy, religion or faith and must support and promote freedom of religion, speech and association.

Special Events

- School celebrations and cultural events that are part of general religious education rather than SRI should not be led by SRI instructors but by teaching staff.
- SRI instructors may be guests or guest speakers at general religious education events; however, the instructor should not lead the event and must understand that as guests or guest speakers they must not provide instruction in (as opposed to general information about) their religion and must not promote the religion.
- Only SRI students (whose parents have completed, signed and returned the consent form) can attend such SRI classes or events.

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's 3 year cycle or as needed to comply with DET policy changes.

Document Status

Reviewed	School Council Ratification	Next Review
June 2016	19 th July 2016	19 th July 2019