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## 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 opt-in extra-curricular programs depending on the circumstances of the school.



### Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy, please contact the school office

### 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).
- Maintain the DET values of leadership, respect, responsiveness, human rights, integrity, impartiality and accountability.

### Implementation

- The principal has the overall responsibility of implementing this policy
- The principal will delegate to a member(s) of staff to coordinate SRI throughout the school.
- This policy works alongside DET's Special Religious Instruction policy found at <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/special-religious-instruction/policy>

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.
- Operate SRI as an opt in extra-curricular activity that students may only attend with parental consent.
- Only offer SRI to students outside of class time for a maximum of 30 minutes per week during lunchtime or in the hour before or after school.
- Provided SRI by instructors accredited by a provider and approved by the Department.
- Ensure all Special Religious Instruction activities are supervised by a teacher from the school.

### Decision making on 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 the principal will take into consideration 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 above, 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.

### Offering SRI

If SRI is offered at the school:

- Only program materials approved by the instructor's accredited provider and available for parents to access online can be used as part of SRI
- SRI instructors are visitors to schools and must comply with DET and the school's policies on [Volunteers in Schools](#) and [Visitors in Schools](#)
- Students who attend SRI must not be offered any enticement or other benefit of a tangible nature
- SRI instructors must not attempt to convert students to a particular religion or invite students to attend activities outside of SRI

### Attendance and Consent

- SRI is not compulsory for any student.
- Parental consent must be obtained before a student attends SRI using the prescribed [Special Religious Instruction — Parent Consent Form](#).
- The principal must provide parents with the following information when seeking parental consent for SRI:
  - the religion(s) in 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 students at 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 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

### Scheduling

- The principal must ensure that students do not attend for more than 30 minutes per week. This can be the hour before school, the hour after school or during lunchtimes.
- 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.



### Instructors

- The principal must ensure that only accredited instructors provide SRI at a government school, by emailing the Department's [Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division](#).
- SRI providers must ensure the instructors they accredit meet certain requirements. Instructors must:
  - have a valid Working with Children Check (WWC Check)
  - 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 approval to provide SRI in a government school
- The principal must ensure:
  - the instructor is not a government schoolteacher
  - instructors are accredited by an approved provider
  - a copy of the instructor's formal accreditation including WWC Check is retained on the school's records
  - instructors do not continue to instruct if their WWC Check card has expired
  - instructors comply with the school's volunteer and visitors policies
  - instructors are supervised by a schoolteacher at all times
  - any instructor conduct that does not meet the requirements of the Code of Conduct or this policy is reported to the Department's [Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division](#) as soon as practicable
- The principal and SRI providers must ensure SRI instructors are not referred to as 'teachers' but as 'instructors' to avoid confusion about their role. This includes instructors who may have a teaching qualification or Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration, as they are at the school in their role as an SRI instructor, which is a volunteer, not as a teacher.

### Program and materials

- Each SRI provider prepares its own program materials for use during SRI. Materials must not be referred to as 'curriculum' and may only be referred to as 'materials' or 'program materials' as SRI is an extra-curricular activity.
- Given the religious nature of the content, the Department does not endorse the program materials that providers may use. However, the Department does determine minimum standards for content of the program materials to ensure it does not conflict with human rights and anti-discrimination laws, or principles of law.
- Parents or school staff wishing to view the materials used by agencies should view them online or contact the school or the SRI instructor's provider.
- The principal must ensure the SRI instructors in their school deliver only the program materials that are approved by the instructor's provider and are available for parents to access online.
- Principals must also ensure SRI programs support schools to be safe places for all students, irrespective of their family and cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status.
- The principal must ensure that any SRI program is delivered in a manner that supports and promotes the principles and practices of Australian democracy including a commitment to:
  - elected Government
  - the rule of law
  - equal rights for all before the law
  - freedom of religion



- freedom of speech and association
- the values of openness and tolerance

Any concerns about the content of the provider-approved material delivered at a particular school should be directed to the principal. The principal must email the Department's [Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division](#) to report the complaint.

#### 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.

#### 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 they have 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), they 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.

#### 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 \(Vic\)](#).
- Students and teachers also have responsibilities under the [Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 \(Vic\)](#) 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.
- Further information about religious rights and responsibilities can be found on the [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#) website or by calling 1300 292 153.
- Ministerial Direction 145 does not stop students from expressing their faith. For example, students may engage in individual or group prayer during school hours or break times, where this is part of their religion. However, student prayer, religious study groups or religious youth groups cannot be led, conducted or instructed by a teacher, staff member or visitors or volunteers outside of SRI.
- Students may also dress in accordance with their faith and their school dress code. The Department's policies promote an inclusive approach to religious diversity, refer to [Student Dress Code](#).
- Students can organise and participate in voluntary religious activities outside of the school program. Such activities cannot be promoted by the school.



### Parent concerns and 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 [Complaints — Parents Policy](#).

### General religious education

- SRI differs from general religious education taught by government school teachers as part of the curriculum.
- A secular education still includes education about world faiths. Learning about religions is part of the Victorian Curriculum. It provides information to students about world faiths and secular belief structures, which enables them to understand the world around them, display tolerance and respect towards people from all cultures and build strong and respectful relationships.
- The school must ensure that their programs and teachings are delivered in a manner that supports and promotes the principles and practice of democracy, including a commitment to freedom of religion, speech and association.
- Government school teachers must not provide teaching in religion other than general religious education.
- As part of the general religious education curriculum provided by government school teachers, students may be taught about, and acknowledge, religious celebrations or festivals. This may include recognition of, and educational activities relating to, key religious celebrations such as Christmas, Eid al-Adha or Hanukkah. General religious education classes or events may include guest speakers who are representatives of a particular faith to explain the workings and belief structures of their religion. However, the guest speakers must not provide instruction in their religion or promote the religion.
- School celebrations and cultural events that are part of general religious education rather than SRI must be led by teaching staff. SRI instructors may be guests or guest speakers at general religious education events, however, the instructor must not lead the event and must understand that as guests they must not provide instruction in (as opposed to general information about) their religion and must not promote the religion.

### **Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed as part of a cycle or as needed to comply with DET policy changes.

### **Document Status**

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