

Special Religious Education Policy and Procedures – July 2021

Special Religious Education Policy

Introduction

The NSW Education Act (1990) makes provision for a “religious persuasion” to teach “special religious education”(SRE) in government schools. The Department of Education (DoE) oversees this provision of the Act in its schools.

“Special religious education (SRE) is the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion delivered by authorised representatives of that persuasion.” (DoE Special Religious Education Procedures 2019, p. 4)

DoE policy is that only those religious persuasions that are approved as “providers” can authorise teachers of SRE. The Presbyterian Church of Australia (NSW) (the Church) is a DoE approved SRE provider.

In order to maintain its status as a provider, the Church must give an annual assurance to the DoE that it has proper processes in place to authorise its SRE teachers.

Policy

In order to teach special religious education which is in keeping with the Church’s beliefs and is good pedagogy and to provide assurance to the DoE that each teacher and helper is authorised the Church will:

1. Provide a process that leads to authorisation of its SRE teachers and helpers;
2. Maintain records of the training of all its SRE teachers and helpers;
3. Verify all Working with Children Checks and keep a record of the verification as required by the legislation;
4. Ensure to the best of its ability that every SRE teacher has initial and ongoing teacher training including classroom management and continuing professional development;
5. Ensure to the best of its ability that every SRE teacher and helper has child protection training and this remains current;
6. Authorise both the curricula and the pedagogy used by its SRE teachers; and
7. Provide links to its approved curricula on a relevant website.

Where appropriate, the Church will join with other Christian providers in “combined arrangements” (Special Religious Education Procedures 2019, p. 8) so that students receive SRE. Combined arrangements are not a parachurch activity. All responsibility for a Presbyterian SRE teacher in a combined arrangement still lies with the Church.

The Church will also join with other providers to develop and improve standards and advocate for the validity and importance of SRE in our multicultural society.

The Director of the Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU) is the official point of contact for everything related to child protection and the Working with Children Check.

So that it is abreast of all expectations in terms of compliance and opportunities to deliver SRE in schools, the Church has appointed PYNSW to represent it in negotiations with the Department of Education (DoE) and in SRE forums and organisations.

The General Manager (or delegate) of Presbyterian Youth (PYNSW), in consultation with the CPU, will sign the annual DoE letter of assurance regarding authorisation of SRE teachers

and is the official point of contact between the Church and the DoE and other providers in relation to all other SRE matters.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA) Breaking the Silence Policy and Code of Conduct and the Church's SRE Procedures.

Special Religious Education Procedures

As a religious persuasion and a DoE approved provider of SRE, the Church will take up the opportunity to educate students in its beliefs and, where practical, work in partnership with other approved providers to deliver Christian SRE through "combined arrangements" (Special Religious Education Procedures 2019, p. 8).

Teaching the Church's Christian beliefs must take account of the developmental stage of students and the principles of pedagogy, which is the act of teaching a lesson from a curriculum in a classroom so that students are engaged and increase their understanding.

In order to maintain its status as a DoE approved provider, the Church will follow a process for authorising all SRE teachers and helpers that involves:

1. Presbyterian Youth (PYNSW) providing basic SRE teacher training to a recognised standard and in principle approval of curricula subject to ratification by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of New South Wales including the Australian Capital Territory (GANSW).
2. The Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU) collecting and managing all the confidential records, in particular verifying the Working with Children Check and issuing an official nametag and SRE authorisation to teach card to teachers and helpers on behalf of the Church to the Session of a pastoral charge for authorisation.

1. Responsibilities

1.1 The Session of the Pastoral Charge

The Session of the Pastoral Charge is to:

1. Inform prospective SRE teachers or helpers of the process of becoming authorised;
2. Organise basic SRE teacher training;
3. Organise *Breaking the Silence Basic* Training or equivalent child protection training;
4. Organise a suitable person to observe the teacher in an SRE lesson;
5. Sign the lesson observation form if the lesson is satisfactory or advise if a second lesson is needed
6. Lodge the *SRE Teacher/Helper Authorisation Form* with the CPU; and
7. Retain a signed *Job Description: SRE Teacher/Helper* and give one to the teacher or helper.

When the Session of the pastoral charge receives confirmation from the CPU that an SRE teacher or helper has completed all the requirements, they must arrange for:

1. The Minister or Session Clerk to sign the authorisation card and give it to the SRE teacher or helper;
2. Ensure the SRE teacher or helper wears the official PCNSW nametag;
3. The SRE teacher or helper to obtain and understand the child protection reporting requirements of the school;
4. The school to receive the teacher or helper's name and contact details by giving the school the completed "Letter of Authorisation" found on the DoE website.
5. The teacher to only use a PYNSW approved curriculum or resource as listed on the

- PYNSW website;
6. The teachers and helpers to comply with any policies and procedures required by the school and assist them to access any necessary training or obtain any necessary information;
 7. Teachers are listed on the CPU list of workers and volunteers.
 8. Ensure that the details on the school website matches the completed "Letter of Authorisation" such as curriculum listed on PYNSW website, list of providers and list of meaningful activities
 9. Renewal of the authorisation of the SRE teacher or helper when it expires (every 3 years);
 10. Continuing Breaking the Silence training as required by the CPU; and
 11. Continuing annual professional development for both teachers and helpers.

The Church's SRE authorisation card and the official nametag must be with the teacher or helper whenever they are in a school.

1.2 Presbyterian Youth

Presbyterian Youth (PYNSW) provides the Session of a Pastoral Charges and its SRE teachers and helpers with:

1. Appropriate and accessible minimum teacher training in line with the Inter Church Commission on Religious Education in Schools (ICCOREIS) Basic Training Standard;
2. Assessment and in principle approval of curricula for both primary and high school programs;
3. Opportunities for Continuing Professional Development (CPD); and
4. Advice about resolving problems delivering SRE, unless the problem relates to child protection, in which case the CPU is responsible.

1.3 Conduct Protocol Unit

The Conduct Protocol Unit (CPU) processes all SRE teacher and helper authorisation applications on behalf of the Church using the information provided by the Session of a Pastoral Charge. The CPU assesses the *SRE Teacher or Helper Authorisation Form* and associated information and:

1. Records completed teacher training and/or approval of recognised prior learning (RPL);
2. Verifies the Working With Children Check and keeps a record of the verification;
3. Issues an authorisation card and official nametag for the SRE teacher or helper to the Session of a Pastoral Charge;
4. Provides suitable child protection training for all SRE teachers and helpers; and
5. Issues notices to pastoral charges showing expiry dates of SRE authorisation alerting them to the need for renewal of authorisation to teach or help.

1.4 SRE teacher

The SRE teacher must complete all of the required training and provide the information for the Session of the Pastoral Charge to complete an SRE Teacher Application Form to submit to the CPU. After the CPU issues the Session of the Pastoral Charge with an authorisation card for the SRE teacher, the person must:

1. Retain a copy of the Job Description: SRE Teacher;
2. Carry the authorisation card signed by the Session and wear the official nametag whenever they in a school;
3. Recognise the authority of the principal or appointed executive staff member whenever they are at the school;

4. Use only a PYNSW approved curriculum or resource (as listed of the PY SRE website);
5. Do Continuing Professional Development (CPD) each year;
6. Complete a lesson observation every 3 years; and
7. Be aware of their WWCC expiry and renew when required

1.5 SRE helper

The SRE helper must complete the required training and provide the information for the Session of the Pastoral Charge to complete an SRE Teacher Application Form to submit to the CPU. After the CPU issues the Session of the Pastoral Charge with an official nametag and authorisation card for the SRE helper, the person must:

1. Retain a copy of the Job Description: SRE Helper;
2. Carry the authorisation card and wear the official nametag whenever they in a school; and
3. Recognise the authority of the principal or appointed executive staff member whenever they are at the school.
4. Be aware of their WWCC expiry and renew when required

2. SRE in primary schools

In primary schools the Session of the Pastoral Charge manage SRE teachers and helpers according to section 1.1 above.

2.1 Combined arrangements

Most SRE classes to which the Session of the Pastoral Charge provides teachers and helpers will have a mode of delivery the DoE calls a “combined arrangement.” In essence, this means DoE approved providers, like the Church, combine their teachers and helpers to provide SRE classes for students of various religious persuasions using a common curriculum.

Where teachers or helpers from the Church are involved in a combined arrangement, the Session of the Pastoral Charge must

1. Sight evidence that all other teachers and helpers are authorised by an approved provider;
2. Cross-authorise in writing every teacher and helper;
3. Authorise in writing a common curriculum from amongst those approved by PYNSW and listed on the PYNSW website;
4. Keep a copy of all documentation sighted and signed;
5. Make sure the school is provided the “Letter of Authorisation” at the beginning of each year;
6. Ensure that the details on the school website matches the completed “Letter of Authorisation” such as curriculum listed on PYNSW website, list of providers and list of meaningful activities
7. Ensure that the authorisation of all teachers and helpers is up-to-date;
8. Confirm that every teacher and helper has an official nametag and carries his or her authorisation card in school; and
9. Support continuing professional development for all teachers and helpers;
10. Confirm with the school what policies and procedures the teachers and helpers are required to comply with; and
11. Assist all the SRE teachers and helpers to undertake any necessary training or obtain any necessary information.

2.2 SRE Assemblies

Occasionally the Session of the Pastoral Charge will be asked to support an “assembly style” of Christian SRE for multiple classes or stages. The Session of the Pastoral Charge must

confirm that the teaching at the assembly relates directly to the scope and sequence of the cross-authorised SRE curriculum. Where an external presenter or group is used, the Session must ensure that they have a verified Working with Children Check. External presenters or groups must be under the direct supervision of a fully authorised Christian SRE teacher at all times they are on school grounds.

3. SRE in high schools

3.1 Seminars

Where volunteers are required for a seminar style pattern of SRE for year or stage groups, and the local Presbyterian Church is the organising denomination, the Session of the Pastoral Charge must confirm that everyone in the team is authorised by an approved provider. The Session of the Pastoral Charge must:

1. Sight evidence that all volunteers are authorised by an approved Christian SRE provider;
2. Cross-authorise in writing all volunteers;
3. Authorise in writing that the topic is related to the scope and sequence of a curriculum approved by PYNSW and listed on the PYNSW website;
4. Make sure the school is provided with a list of all volunteers using the “letter of Authorisation”; and
5. Confirm that every volunteer wears their official nametag and carries their authorisation card.

3.2 Employed SRE teachers

Where local approved Christian SRE providers join together to develop and sustain SRE by employing a teacher of SRE, this is to be viewed as a type of “combined arrangement” (Special Religious Education Procedures 2019, p. 8). In order to provide a legal structure for the processing of decisions and raising money to employ an SRE teacher, individuals may choose to be involved in creating an “association” through following the process set out by the NSW Fair Trading and register with the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission.

In order to provide Christian SRE, the association must ensure that the SRE teacher is authorised by an approved SRE provider. Where the approved SRE provider is to be this Church, the Session must establish a combined arrangement. Where the employed SRE teacher is not already authorised, the Session of the Pastoral Charge must follow the responsibilities set out in 1.1. as well as ensuring the teacher completes the extra training required of employed High School teachers as found on the PYNSW website. Please note: the responsibility for the teacher still lies with the Church.

Where the employed SRE teacher is to be authorised by an approved SRE provider other than this Church, the Session must:

1. Sight the authorisation of the employed SRE teacher by an approved provider;
2. Insist that all local providers who are represented in the school by the employed teacher cross-authorise him or her in writing; and
3. Cross-authorise a curriculum approved by PYNSW.

4. Complaints Procedure

All approved SRE providers like the Church are committed to implementing the DoE’s own Special Religious Education Procedures 2019. Sometimes there are local school decisions, personal behaviours and misunderstandings that negatively impact the delivery of SRE.

The following flow charts are a simplified picture of a process for negotiating issues with

delivering SRE in a school. The foundational principles of the process are:

1. Where at all possible, issues should be handled early and managed at a local level;
2. Where an individual or provider is involved, the person or religious persuasion has a right to know the allegations against him or her or them;
3. The individual or provider has the right to be heard; and
4. The decision makers must be free from bias or perceived conflict of interest.

4.1 When the Session of the Pastoral Charge has an issue with the way the Special Religious Education Procedures 2019 are interpreted or implemented by the school.

The DoE has a Complaints Handling Policy and School Complaints Handling Procedures. Normally most issues relating to SRE can be resolved without recourse to these documents. The Session of a Pastoral Charge should also be familiar with the DoE's Religious Education Policy and the Special Religious Education Procedures.

The Session of the Pastoral Charge should encourage teachers and helpers to follow the flow chart. Where an issue cannot be immediately resolved the Session of Pastoral Charge should make an appointment with the principal. If the complaint involves a problem with implementation of the DoE SRE/SEE procedure within the school, then it is helpful for all providers (including Primary Ethics if applicable) to meet together with the Principal at the same time

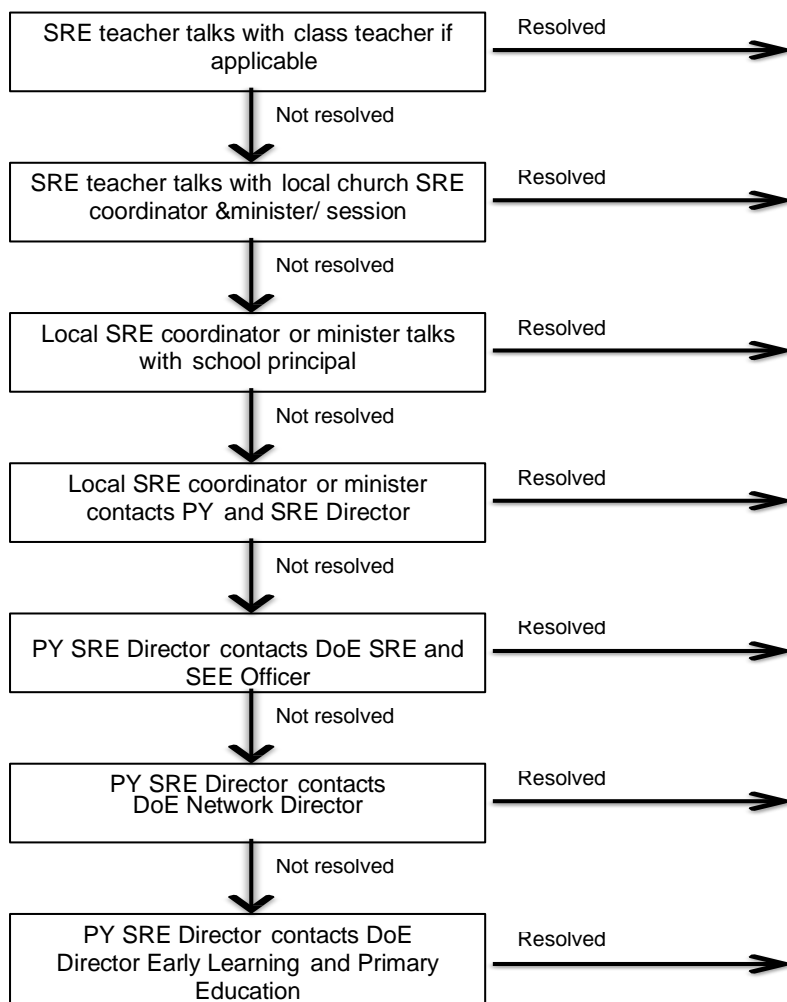


Figure 1: Flow chart for resolving problems with combined arrangements of SRE in schools in NSW

4.2 When the school has a problem with an SRE teacher or helper

In the event that the school or a parent has a concern with the delivery of SRE, the Church expects someone from the school, like the school SRE Coordinator or the principal, to contact either the Session of the Pastoral Charge or the appointed church SRE Coordinator or the minister. There is a complaint form on the PYNSW SRE website.

The DoE has clear procedures for dealing with child protection complaints. If there is a complaint made about an SRE teacher or helper from the Church in relation to child protection, the CPU must be notified immediately.

The nature of any concern or complaint should be documented on the complaints form and include the date and time and name of the person who makes contact from the school. The PYNSW SRE director needs to receive a copy of this form.

The local SRE Coordinator or minister must talk with the SRE teacher(s) involved and seek some resolution of the issue at the core of the complaint based on the DoE Special Religious Education Procedures 2019 and the Church's SRE Policy and Procedures.

When the complaint is resolved, the local churches SRE Coordinator or the minister should talk face-to-face with the principal of the school so that there is clear communication and an agreed resolution of the complaint.

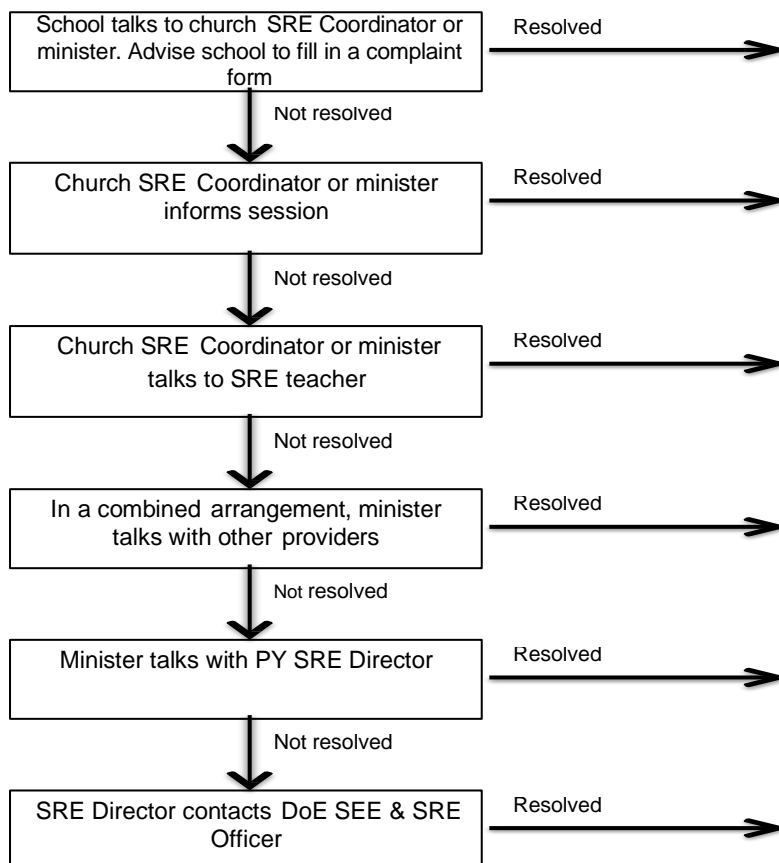


Figure 2: Flow chart for resolving complaints from schools with combined arrangements for SRE