**NSW GOVERNMENT** | **Education**

# Department of Education Response to the Recommendations of the 2015 Review of Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics in NSW Government Schools

11/04/17_26880

## Recommendations – Special Religious Education (SRE)

| Recommendation | Response |
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| **1.** The Department of Education investigate and then implement ways to provide accurate and regular monitoring data about the nature and extent of SRE in NSW Government schools. The department explore:<br><br>– the feasibility of establishing a state-wide monitoring system for SRE, drawing on locally collected data from school enrolment forms – acknowledging this would be complex and there are problems with accuracy of data<br><br>– alternative approaches for monitoring the nature and extent of SRE such as commissioning periodic surveys of a stratified random sample of schools to provide up-to-date data on the extent of SRE. | **Not supported.**<br>Information on religious persuasion is currently collected by schools through the 'Application to enrol in a NSW Government school' at the point of enrolment. The information is collected for the purposes of planning at individual schools.<br><br>Actual participation and attendance in SRE at the school level changes frequently and does not reflect the data collected at enrolment. The department does not consider it to be the best use of resources to establish an additional state-wide monitoring system for attendance in SRE. |
| **2.** The department – in consultation with the sector – review the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (2015) to ensure the procedures provide principals, school staff, parents/caregivers and providers with clear and comprehensive information regarding the implementation of SRE in current and emerging contexts, consistent with broader departmental policies. These should be well promoted to all schools and providers.<br><br>– There should be separate but related implementation procedures for secondary/central schools and primary schools because of their different operating contexts. This will allow secondary schools/central schools to deal with the challenges posed by low student participation rates in SRE and other logistical challenges. See also Recommendations 9, 22, 27, 38 and 39.<br><br>– The revised implementation procedures should include advice about minimum standards for teacher authorisation; developed by providers (see Recommendation 17). | **Supported.**<br>The department will review the Religious Education Implementation Procedures in conjunction with the NSW Consultative Committee for SRE.<br>The Implementation Procedures will be made available for all schools and approved providers of SRE.<br><br>**Not supported.**<br>The implementation procedures will remain as a single<br>K-12 document and will provide parent/caregivers consistent messages and advice about SRE.<br><br>**Supported in principle.**<br>This will form part of Recommendation 17 which will be considered by approved providers. |

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| **3.** All advice and related documents about SRE produced by the department be clearly dated and the updates identified for ease of implementation of the advice. | **Supported.**<br>The department will date all future SRE documents. |
| **4.** To meet parents' information needs, schools to make information about the provision of SRE in the school publicly available on websites and during school induction days and at enrolment in school. | **Supported**.<br>The current *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* include this provision. |
| **5.** The department assess the suitability of the new school enrolment form (October 2015) and processes to ensure these are clear and working as intended. Such an assessment should canvas the views of all stakeholders. | **Not supported.**<br>The enrolment form was reviewed in 2015.  The department has a process for the regular review of all policies which includes extensive internal and external consultation with key stakeholder groups. The revised enrolment form in 2015 involved consultation with the Department's Consultative Committee for SRE and the Department's Consultative Committee for SEE. |
| **6.** The department provides clear, consistent and easily accessible information for parents about their SRE participation choices and processes including alternative activities and SEE where this is offered. | **Supported.**<br>The current *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* include this provision. |
| **7.** The department makes clear on all information materials relating to SRE participation that parents have the right to withdraw their child from SRE. | **Not supported.**<br>The Religious Education Implementation Procedures currently provide parents/caregivers with the right to withdraw their child from SRE in writing at any time. |
| **8.** The department retains the current method of opt-out SRE participation for primary schools. | **Supported.**<br>The current *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* include this provision. |
| **9.** An opt-in SRE participation process is more suitable for secondary school students and the department should facilitate this change, which may require changes to the current legislation. | **Not supported.**<br>The Education Act 1990 provides for parents of a child to object to their child receiving SRE. |
| **10.** The department revises the provider application form to collect a broader amount of information about potential providers to allow fuller consideration of appropriateness and governance structures and identify radical groups or cults. | **Not supported.**<br>The current application form allows for full consideration of appropriateness, and governance structures. |
| **11.** The department provides clear advice to potential providers about the approval process including timing of meetings and processes. | **Supported**.<br>The department currently provides advice to potential providers about the approval process including regularity of meetings. The department will provide advice on meeting timing and processes of approval. |
| **12.** The department makes it clear in information materials accompanying the application form and in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*, the reasons a provider would lose their status as an approved SRE (nature of breach and frequency). | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will review the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* (see Recommendation 2). |
| **13.** The department takes steps to make the provider approval process more transparent by publishing the application form and criteria for decision-making on the department website. | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will consider the provision of the 'Application to become an approved provider of SRE' on the department's website. The criteria for approval and how to apply is already available on the department's website. |

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| **14.** Schools place online annual and updated information about approved SRE providers working in their school, links to the SRE curriculums and a list of SRE volunteers so parents are fully informed about SRE provision for their child.<br> – This information should be given to schools by the providers who access them. | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will review  the Religious Education Implementation Procedures (see Recommendation 2). The department does not support publishing a list of SRE volunteers. The department believes this to be unnecessary and a potential breach of privacy. |
| **19.** The department negotiates and sets clear timelines for all faith groups and providers to comply with placing their curriculum scope and sequence in the public domain. | **Supported.**<br>The department will recommend that it be a part of the annual assurance process. |
| **20.** The department monitors adherence to clearly stated expectations on a regular basis (e.g. five-yearly basis). | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will monitor expectations as part of the annual assurance process. |
| **21.** Schools communicate with complainants about the outcomes of every complaint made about SRE and the reasons for the outcome.<br> – Schools make clear to parents and representatives of SRE providers what issues are the responsibility of the school to resolve and which are the responsibility of the provider to resolve.<br> – Any resolution/action taken is communicated in a timely way to parents. | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will consider this recommendation within the review of the Religious Education Implementation Procedures (see Recommendation 2). |
| **22.** The department's *Complaints Handling Policy* be clearly referenced in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and a link provided to the policy on the department's Religious Education Webpage. | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will consider this recommendation within the review of the Religious Education Implementation Procedures (see Recommendation 2). |
| **27.** The revised *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* should recognise the role of SRE Boards, Associations and Committees and third party organisations in supporting SRE delivery. The revised procedures should make it clear to schools and providers the limits of their influence, the rights of other providers and where conflicts of interest may apply. | **Not supported.**<br>The current Religious Education Implementation Procedures provide information about 'combined arrangements' which may include SRE Boards, Associations and Committees and third party organisations. |
| **36.** The department consider providing SRE curriculum developers with access to advice that highlight and support effective teaching practices, in particular age appropriate learning experiences. | **Supported.**<br>The department will provide expert advice to approved providers on effective teaching and age appropriate learning experiences. |
| **37.** The department monitors adherence to clearly stated expectations on a regular basis (e.g. five-yearly basis). | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will ensure that expectations for providers are clearly stated in the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and monitor adherence via the annual assurance process. |
| **38.** Schools continue the practice of continuing enrolment as for the previous year without further confirmation.<br><br>If principals wish to confirm annually as part of their school practice, that should be allowed under the Religious Education Implementation Procedures. | **Supported.**<br>This is current practice in schools.<br><br>**Not supported.**<br>The current implementation procedures will continue. |

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| **39.** In revising the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* for secondary and central schools the department should allow students not participating in SRE to continue their regular classwork. This provision would apply in secondary/ central schools where there is a low rate of student participation in SRE e.g. affecting more than half of the students. | **Not supported.**<br>The current Religious Education Policy is that no academic instruction or formal school activities should occur during time set aside for SRE. |
| **40.** Primary Ethics has systems in place to provide data on student participation in SEE, and data on participation rates are publicly available. Departmental processes for regularly monitoring participation in SEE should be established if and when other SEE providers are approved. | **Not supported.**<br>Information is collected at a local school level for the purposes of planning for SEE classes. The department does not consider it to be the best use of resources to establish a state-wide monitoring system. |
| **41.** The department – in consultation with the Consultative Committee for Special Education in Ethics – reviews the *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* to ensure these provide in principals, school staff, parents/caregivers and providers with clear and comprehensive information regarding the implementation of SEE in current and emerging contexts, consistent with broader departmental policies. The review should take account of considerations for changes to the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*.<br>  – As part of the revision, greater focus be placed on the specifics of SEE delivery, for example, acknowledging there is one provider and referencing the specific coordination and management structures Primary Ethics have in place to support SEE. | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will review the Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures in conjunction with the NSW Consultative Committee for SEE.<br><br>The Implementation Procedures will be made available for all schools and approved providers of SEE. |
| **42.** The department ensure all advice and related documents about SEE produced by them are clearly dated and the updates identified for ease of implementation of the advice. | **Supported.**<br>The department will date all future documents. |
| **43.** To meet parent's information needs, schools to make information about SEE in the school, publicly available on websites and during school induction days and at enrolment. | **Supported.**<br>The current Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures includes this provision. |
| **44.** The department establishes an open and transparent application process for groups wishing to become providers of SEE. | **Supported.**<br>The department will develop an 'Application to become an approved provider of SEE' and publish on the department's website. |
| **45.** The department makes it clear in information materials accompanying the application form and in the SEE implementation procedures, the reasons a provider would lose their status as an approved SEE provider (nature of breach and frequency). | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will review the Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures (see Recommendation 41). |
| **46.** Schools place annual and updated information about SEE provision in their school, links to the curriculum and a list of SEE volunteers so parents are properly informed about SEE provision for their child. | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department will review the Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures (see Recommendation 41). The department does not support publishing a list of SEE volunteers. The department believes this to be unnecessary and a potential breach of privacy. |
| **48.** The department continue its role in reviewing the age appropriateness of the SEE curriculum. | **Supported.**<br>The department will provide expert advice to approved providers on effective teaching and age appropriate learning experiences. |

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| **49.** The department monitor adherence to clearly stated expectations on a regular basis (e.g. five-yearly). | **Supported in principle.**<br>The department monitors expectations as part of the annual assurance process. |
| **50.** Schools communicate with complainants about the outcomes of every complaint made about SEE and the reasons for the outcome.<br>  – Schools make clear to parents and representatives of Primary Ethics (and any future providers of SEE) what issues are the responsibility of the school to resolve and which are the responsibility of the provider to resolve.<br>  – Any resolution/action taken is communicated in a timely way to parents. | **Supported in principle.**<br><br>The department will consider this recommendation within the review of the Religious Education Implementation Procedures (see Recommendation 41). |
| **51.** The department's *Complaints Handling Policy* be clearly referenced in the *Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures* and a link provided to the policy on the department's Religious Education Webpage. | **Supported**.<br>The department will review the Special Education in Ethics Implementation Procedures (see Recommendation 41). |