

Special religious education and Special education in ethics

Fact Sheet

Special Religious Education (SRE) is education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion. Special Education in Ethics (SEE) is a program in ethical decision making, action and reflection within a secular framework, based on a branch of philosophy.

Background

Section 32 of the Education Act 1990 states that 'in every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion. 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.'

Section 33A of the Education Act 1990 specifies that if the parent/caregiver of a child objects to their child receiving SRE, that child is entitled to receive SEE, at the parent/caregiver's request, provided it is reasonably practicable for SEE to be made available at the school the child attends.

Principal responsibilities

Principals must allow time for SRE/SEE where representatives of approved providers are available. On average, not less than 30 minutes and not more than one hour per week should be allocated. The lesson period should be consistent with the age and attention span of the students.

Parents/caregivers have the right to general information about how SRE and SEE will be organised each year and which organisations will deliver it. Parents/caregivers should also be informed of the alternative meaningful activities for those who have withdrawn. This general information should be provided to the school community in a number of ways, for example, via the school website, during parent meetings, in school newsletters and at enrolment.

Principals should use the information provided in the enrolment form to set up classes. If a religious persuasion is written on the enrolment form and available at the school, then the student will be placed in that SRE program.

If 'no religion' is written, or where there is no nominated persuasion or the persuasion is unavailable, then the principal is to send a letter containing general information about how SRE, SEE and alternative meaningful activities are organised, as well as a SRE participation letter to parents/caregivers. The SRE participation letter outlines the options available for SRE including the option to withdraw.

Parents/caregivers may at any time notify the school in writing that they wish to withdraw their child from SRE.

Parents/caregivers are to then be advised of specific information about options, including SEE if established in the school. If SEE is not established and a parent/caregiver requests it, the principal is to provide the name and contact details for Primary Ethics.

Principals will support SRE/SEE by ensuring that no academic instruction or formal school activities occur during the time set aside for SRE/SEE. Students not attending SRE or SEE should be in a separate space from these classes and be provided with alternative meaningful activities such as reading, private study or completing homework.

SRE/SEE providers' responsibilities

SRE/SEE is delivered by providers that have the approval of the Minister for Education for that purpose. A list of approved providers and sample letters are available on the website.

Providers must publish age-appropriate curriculum on their website. Only persons authorised by approved providers teach SRE/SEE. SRE providers must ensure that all personnel have had a Working with Children Check (WWCC).

SEE providers must ensure that all personnel have signed a Working with Children Check Declaration or have had a WWCC until their phase in of 31 March 2018.

For more information contact

Learning and Teaching directorate
Special Religious Education and
Special Education in Ethics Officer

T 9244 5484

E SREcontact@det.nsw.edu.au or

E SEEcontact@det.nsw.edu.au

Early Learning and Primary Education
Level 3, 1 Oxford Street
Darlinghurst NSW 2010

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