

## **Trial of ethics lessons**

(A submission from the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.)

### **Preface**

This submission is made by the Diocese of Sydney on behalf of Dr Peter Jensen, the Archbishop of Sydney and Metropolitan of New South Wales, in response to the invitation of Mr Ken Olah on 30 June 2010 to contribute to the evaluation being undertaken by Dr Sue Knight of the recently concluded trial of ethics lessons in 10 primary schools in New South Wales. It is noted that Mr Olah's letter of invitation did not set out the terms of reference for Dr Knight's evaluation. This submission is also being provided to the Premier and the Minister for Education and Training.

Since the 1880s Anglicans of NSW have been firm supporters of free, secular and compulsory public education. We regard it as a matter of justice that every child in NSW should have access to education at an excellent standard. Most Anglican families continue to send their children to public schools and of course will wish to continue to do so. The proper evaluation of the recently concluded ethics trial is therefore a matter of particular interest to Anglicans, not only because we are an approved provider of Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW schools, but because of our long-standing support of public education in NSW.

This submission falls into three parts. In the Introduction we explain the problems in principle with the provision of Ethics as an alternative to SRE. We then include a Report prepared for the Diocese on the trial which details a number of concerns in relation to its conduct. Lastly we include an Appendix which details the history of SRE in this State. We believe these matters should be carefully considered by Dr Knight and by the NSW Government before any decisions are made.

Our concerns about the trial can be summarised as follows –

- The trial was approved on the basis of untested assumptions;
- The trial was extended to all students;
- The outcome of the trial appears to have been treated by some as a foregone conclusion;
- Labelling philosophical discussion as 'ethics' is misleading and has sent a confusing signal to parents;

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- The scope of the trial is flawed and its implementation compromised;
  - The evaluation does not appear to be an open and transparent process.

We conclude that in view of these concerns, the recently concluded trial cannot provide a sound basis for extending the availability of the ethics lessons to all NSW primary schools and grades on an ongoing basis.

### Introduction

Special Religious Education is a remarkable local effort which brings thousands of volunteers into the schools of NSW each week in a way which enriches education. It is a key interface between the school and the community in which the school is set. It is made possible by the trust of the parents in the volunteers who are usually locally based, as are the churches and other religious groups which are represented. It encourages parents of many faiths and from different backgrounds to participate in the public school system.

The existence of SRE is a recognition that an understanding of religion, as a significant human activity, should be part of the education of the whole person. SRE has become even more important in recent years as there has been a notable decline in the teaching of General Religious Knowledge in schools. This has occurred at a time in human history when religious knowledge has become even more vitally important.

Furthermore, in providing for teaching by accredited adherents of particular religions, SRE allows students to explore a particular faith in the concrete rather than the abstract. In the case of the majority Christian religion, it means that children are introduced to the Bible which, on any account, is one of the basic texts of our civilization and one which an educated person should be familiar with, in order to understand history and literature and the general culture.

SRE has been sustained in the State of NSW over many decades. Given the inherent difficulties involved with the training and sending of so many volunteers into the schools, it has been a striking and worthwhile achievement and one of which all parties can be proud. It is made possible by a carefully worked out balance between the requirements of schools, the needs of the students and volunteers, and the right of parents to withdraw their children if they desire to do so. The importance of SRE has been acknowledged by the clearly enunciated and oft re-iterated fundamental rule, **that nothing else be offered at the same time although students withdrawn from class should be properly supervised and gainfully occupied.** It has always been acknowledged that if this rule is breached it will create

unwelcome conflict of choice for parents and students and difficulties for SRE, as it would for many other subjects or activities if an alternative activity were offered. This is all the more so as schools come under pressure to provide a far wider range of educational experiences than before.

So what has changed? The atmosphere and demand for SRE remains strong as demonstrated by petitions, messages of support and statements by faith communities. What has developed is the questioning of what it means to be gainfully occupied. In the past there has been proper supervision and valuable time spent in supervised work, be it homework or reading, for those who do not choose SRE. Clearly that remains valuable as many parents in the trial schools continued to choose that alternative instead of the ethics course or SRE. If there are shortcomings in certain schools, then we submit that is a local management issue rather than a justification for policy change.

Thus the key objection to the introduction of Ethics as an alternative to SRE is not to Ethics as such. There are other possibilities which parents may prefer to either Ethics or SRE – for example, physical fitness classes, extension maths or instruction in health issues. It is the far more fundamental issue of provision being made in school education for the teaching of Religion and for ensuring, as has been the commitment of the authorities since the beginning, that SRE be given a genuine place and not one compromised by competing claims. It would be utterly wrong to regard this as a turf war. The question is to do with the nature of the education which is on offer in the State of NSW.

The study of Ethics is not the same as the study of Religion. Both disciplines have their own integrity. The philosophical ethics offered in the recent trial may well be worthwhile for all children to experience at some stage in their schooling. But the introduction of Ethics, achieved by mimicking the provision of the SRE which arises from acknowledged religious groups and churches, raises questions as to who will teach such a course and to whom and under whose auspices and for how long. There is no church or religious group with stated doctrines and accredited authorities to be responsible. It is not a parallel to SRE either in subject matter or in delivery.

*The evaluation of this initiative requires, therefore, a more fundamental approach than merely considering the success or failure of the trial.*

As the Report below indicates, however, the trial itself was conducted in a way which has made the task of assessment extraordinarily difficult. The premise on which the trial was allowed to proceed was that something had to be done for non-SRE students. But the intention is for the offering to be voluntary and it is unknown how many non-SRE

children would actually be involved. That is, it does not solve the alleged problem. Even more important, in practice it was offered to all students, and so immediately competed with SRE. It was vital that proper process be observed, but the whole matter seems to have been rushed and the trial was limited in scope, misleadingly introduced, not available for proper scrutiny.

### **A Report concerning the Ethics Trial**

In the somewhat opaque conditions under which the trial was conducted, Diocesan officials and agencies have investigated the actual practice of the trial as far as possible. Some detail of the Report relies on information from churches, local co-ordinators and scripture teachers. Every effort has been made to check veracity of information although some information, indicated by its context, is reproduced as it was given to us from people who did not wish, for one reason or another, to be publicly identified. We do not believe such information should be dismissed but must be treated according to its context.

As a result we note the following difficulties and give our reasons for mentioning them.

### **The trial was approved on the basis of untested assumptions**

1. The premise given publicly for the Government approving the trial was that a significant number of parents whose children did not attend SRE wanted a "course in ethics" because their children were not attending SRE. This premise was never tested before the trial was announced. The Minister for Education and Training (the Minister) approved the trial on the recommendation of the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations (the Federation) and the St James Ethics Centre (the Ethics Centre).
2. The original request from the Federation and the Ethics Centre for an ethics course was based on the assertion that it would complement SRE and not be an alternative to it. In other words, it would be for students not attending SRE. It appears that the Government believed that an ethics course would address a concern about the alleged increasing number of students not attending any SRE and a perception that such students were generally not engaged in meaningful activities during this time. Again, we are not aware of any attempts to verify these assumptions before the trial was approved.
3. Of course such a perception is directly contrary to Department of Education and Training (DET) policy that students are to be involved in supervised activities which may include 'completing

homework, reading and private study' (Implementation of Special Religious Education Procedures, A.11).

**The trial was extended to all students**

4. Both Premier Kristina Keneally and Minister Verity Firth informed the Archbishop that their sole concern was for students who do not attend SRE.
5. However, in fact, all students in Years 5 and 6 at the 10 primary schools participating in the trial, including children already enrolled in SRE, were invited to enrol in the ethics classes in a letter ("Ethics Pilot Information and Permission") sent from Teresa Russell, Pilot Project Coordinator, St James Ethics Centre, to parents dated 8 February 2010 as follows –  
"We now invite participation from Year 5 and 6 students, regardless of whether they currently 'opt-out' of Scripture/SRE or not. All will be welcome."  
  
This was quite contrary to statements that the classes were for non-SRE students only.
6. At all 10 schools selected for the trial, SRE is provided by a variety of approved religious groups and has been available for many years.
7. At one school, where the population is 90% Chinese background, the invitation was translated as: "regardless of whether your child goes to SRE they can go to ethics." Later a Chinese parent was reported as saying: "We weren't even aware that ethics is on at the same time as Scripture".
8. In some of the schools a second note went to parents in the last week of Term 1, clarifying that the trial was for 10 weeks only, explaining that the DET had authorised the note to go to all students and that children would be welcomed back into SRE afterwards. We understand that at least two principals wrote to the DET complaining about how this was handled.
9. Insofar as the trial was extended to all Year 5 and 6 students, including those who were already attending SRE, the assertion that the ethics course would be a complement to SRE rather than an alternative has, in our view, been shown to be false.
10. The extension of ethics classes to students who were already attending SRE is also at odds with the claim that the provision of ethics classes was aimed at addressing the alleged meaninglessness of activities undertaken by non-SRE attendees during SRE classes.

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**Some events surrounding the trial seem to presuppose a positive result**

11. A number of actions taken by the Minister have given the impression that there is a commitment by the NSW Government to implementing ethics classes in NSW primary schools regardless of whether the trial itself was found to provide a sound basis for changing the status quo in relation to SRE. In particular –

- The original announcement by Premier Rees was that the trial would be conducted in Semester 2. The trial was in fact brought forward with the Minister's agreement to Term 2 at the request of the Ethics Centre and the Federation thereby creating the perception at least, that there was need for haste rather than proper consideration and evaluation
- The Minister's media comments in particular suggest a personal commitment to the introduction of Ethics. For example, in the Minister's Media Release on 20 April 2010, she states that "The trial is an Australian first and is very important to me as Minister... I look forward to feedback on the ethics trial in the spirit of enriching the diversity and rigour of our public school system in NSW". This apparent lack of objectivity concerning the outcomes of the trial is a serious concern.
- The Minister has remained silent in the face of the Federation and the Ethics Centre actively pressing local school communities to endorse the implementation of the ethics program in their schools in 2011 prior to the trial being concluded, prior to the outcomes from the trial being fully and properly evaluated, and prior to any final decision being made by the NSW Government. It has been reported to us that at a Parents & Citizens' Association (P&C) meeting at a school in the Liverpool area in May 2010, the Federation representative stated that local branches were being encouraged to support the introduction of ethics (before the end of the trial) and saying: "it is the hope of the Federation that so many students will sign up to do the ethics course that it will do away with SRE altogether".

At the annual conference of the Federation held on 23-25 July 2010, the motion was passed: "That the NSW Federation of P&C Associations call upon the NSW Minister for Education to amend the policy of the Department of Education and Training to allow secular

ethics classes to operate as a complement to Special Religious Education in all New South Wales public Schools". Local P&Cs have been encouraged to vote to adopt this motion at their meetings. In our view, such a vote is premature and does not reflect a responsible and considered approach to such an important issue.

12. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that –
- the endorsement of the trial is seen simply as a necessary formality prior to a change being made in the DET policy and practice from the beginning of 2011, and
  - at least some involved in this process view the trial as an opportunity to remove SRE from schools altogether.

**Labelling philosophical discussion as ‘ethics’ is misleading**

13. The course bears the label Ethics yet chiefly concerns the process of philosophical inquiry. By introducing a course of philosophical inquiry and labelling the classes “Ethics” a confusing signal has been sent to parents. This confusion is also exemplified and reinforced by media stories with titles such as: “School teaches kids right from wrong” published in *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* on 11 March 2010, which stated: “Hurstville Public School has been selected as the only school in St George and Sutherland Shire to participate in a new course to teach students about ‘good behaviour’”.
14. A course in ethics requires the learners to explore the systems in which ethical decisions are made. Parents who have been led to believe that their children will learn how to determine whether something is right or wrong, albeit using a variety of case studies, have been let down. Establishing a basis for right and wrong, even one that is non-religious, has not been part of the 10 lessons, at least from what we can observe from what has been disclosed. Unfortunately the lesson-set has still not been made publicly available.
15. The underlying assumptions of the ethical enquiry method adopted in the trial have not been adequately disclosed for public scrutiny. Using teachers as ‘facilitators’, who merely guide the students as they explore their personal values, leaves students with nothing higher than their own subjective likes and dislikes, based on experience, pragmatism or peer pressure. Inherent in the approach is the assumption that exploration of personal values and feelings, with no right or wrong answers, is preferable to teaching about the great moral ideals, like courage, justice and service that have inspired civilizations throughout history. These are matters which have significant

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implications for our community and deserve a broader community discussion. The introduction of a course in philosophy, taught and examined by properly trained teachers, would be desirable in the secondary school curriculum. But for kindergarten aged children, for example, to be asked to grapple with fictional dilemmas without moral guidance is pedagogically questionable.

16. Other states have considered the introduction of some kind of basic philosophy course into the curriculum. There are groups which support 'philosophy for children' 'philosophy for kids', or 'critical thinking'. New South Wales seems alone in trying to consider this whole field as 'ethics lessons'. It may be that the choice of the St James Ethics Centre as provider has skewed the direction of these developments. In which case this may be a case of the 'tail wagging the dog' when looked at in terms of concept and provider.

**The scope of the trial is flawed and its implementation compromised**

17. The trial was limited to 10 half-hour lessons for 10 classes of Year 5 and 6 students in 10 primary schools. These schools were not representative of the broad mix of schools across the State. From an educational point of view, it is questionable how one can reasonably conclude from this limited trial that the ethics program proposed is capable of being delivered every week for seven years (i.e. 270 lessons rather than 10 lessons) to students from Kindergarten to Year 6 in any or all parts of the State. Whilst it may never have been the Government's intention to use the trial as a test for extending the ethics lessons beyond Years 5 and 6, or even beyond 10 weeks in Year 5 or Year 6, this has not been made clear.
18. In terms of the implementation of the trial, we have a number of concerns regarding -
  - a lack of transparency and consultation in relation to the trial;
  - the bias apparent in the sample of schools selected or invited to participate in the trial;
  - the exclusion of many communities from the trial;
  - the questionable sustainability of ethics classes beyond a 10 week program for Year 5 and 6;
  - the use of school teachers to teach the course; and



19. In relation to the lack of transparency and consultation, we make the following comments -
- The curriculum for the 10 ethics lessons was not made public, either before the trial or during it. Repeated requests<sup>1</sup> by existing providers to the DET and to the Ethics Centre for a copy of the curriculum were declined on the grounds that copyright was held by the University of NSW. In point of fact, there is no “curriculum” in the normal sense of the word but only broad lesson outlines.
  - The intended outcomes of the series of ethics lessons have not been disclosed. We do not know how they relate to the rest of the students’ learning. We therefore do not know how anyone can possibly measure the extent to which the students have achieved the outcomes.
  - We are not aware of the process by which the trial of the students’ learning is being measured by the evaluator. Was any pretesting done? Were any control groups established to gather comparative data?
  - At no stage in the preparations for the implementation of the trial were the approved SRE providers in the schools consulted about the process. Consultation with the DET’s own Director General’s Consultation Committee was minimal. Attempts by the providers to secure details about the arrangements were thwarted.
20. The use of only 10 primary schools (representing less than 1% of all primary schools) is not statistically significant.
21. Insofar as the trialling process is supposedly meant to establish whether the “course” should be permitted to continue or be permitted to run elsewhere, the choice of trialling schools is

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<sup>1</sup> The Director-General's Consultative Committee on Religious Education met on 4 November 2009, 2 March 2010 and 4 May 2010. The various providers (Christian and others) asked the DET at the November meeting, and the Project Officer of the Ethics Centre at the March meeting, for a copy of the curriculum. The Buddhist Council and the Jewish Board of Education each made separate requests for a copy of the curriculum from the Ethics Centre. The initial comment from the DET was that the curriculum was still being developed. The subsequent comment from the Ethics Centre representative was that the curriculum had been submitted by the Minister for Education and Training to the Board of Studies. At the May meeting, members were told that the lessons (which presumably counted as the curriculum) were the property of Professor Cam and that they could be viewed on the Ethics Centre’s website.

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flawed. It has been asserted by the providers (the Federation and the Ethics Centre) that the 10 schools were chosen because they volunteered.

One school volunteered on the basis of the results of a petition sent to all parents. Of the 60 or so parents who registered their support (out of a school community of approximately 600 students), many of these did not have children in Years 5 or 6 and at least one person did not even have children at the school. No similar opportunity was given to parents to register their non-support of the school being a trial school. This raises questions as to how truly representative the decision was.

22. Even a cursory review of the trial schools would suggest that they are hardly a representative sample of Government primary schools across NSW. It has been suggested that these are schools in which there is an activist group in the P&C or on the staff who are passionate about providing an alternative program to SRE. It is also not surprising that in many cases they are schools where the principals have adopted an opt-in approach to SRE rather than the opt-out approach specified in DET policy.
23. A large number of key regions across the state were effectively excluded from the trial and if the decision is made to proceed, the ethics course will be imposed upon communities which have been denied an opportunity to observe and make their own evaluation.  

Communities excluded by the very limited trial include those on the Central Coast, in the Hunter Valley, the Illawarra, the North Coast, and Western NSW including far Western NSW. The interests of regional and rural communities are again being marginalised and ignored.
24. This also effectively excluded many, if not most, indigenous communities from the trial.
25. DET's involvement in allowing its own full-time employees to be trained (at departmental expense) and to become teachers of the ethics course in the schools in which they teach is a serious matter. This is industrially inappropriate and contravenes the DET practice that prevents full-time employees from teaching SRE whilst they are on duty.
26. We understand that the reason for allowing the DET employees to teach the lessons was that had they not been allowed to do so, the trial would have had to have been aborted in some schools.

This problem was highlighted in a report from one school involved in the trial, which stated that they had enough parent interest in the ethics course to provide three classes, although only two people from the school community volunteered to present them (the mother of a Year 1 student, and a Year 6 teacher). The other Year 5 and 6 teachers were asked and did not want to be involved. The Ethics Centre therefore sourced a presenter from another part of Sydney to enable the third class to go ahead.

27. In his *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) article of 22 June 2010, Heath Gilmore reported that the practice of allowing full-time DET employees to teach the ethics course will not be repeated. We look forward to this being officially confirmed by the NSW Government.
28. As a result the trial cannot be considered to be representative of the full program as in future apparently teachers will be prohibited from being involved. Whether or not there is sufficient interest to provide sufficient volunteers to teach a course over a full year has not been shown. Therefore the issue of staffing any broader implementation of the ethics course is unresolved.
29. The ethics trial was afforded preferential treatment in the media and within each of the trial schools compared to that which is afforded to SRE classes. There is nothing 'Special' about the ethics course. It has been deliberately promoted as being suitable for all children, whatever their beliefs and whether they are enrolled in SRE or not. Consequently, it has an advantage over all the other approved religious SRE programs offered in the same timeslot. At all levels, from the Minister, through to the media, Principals and local P&Cs, ethics was promoted as a new, contemporary, refreshing and relevant alternative. We believe this unequal promotion casts doubt on the validity of the trial for assessing 'success' based on the number of students who participated.

**The evaluation does not appear to be an open and transparent process**

30. We are concerned that the evaluation of the trial does not appear to be an open and transparent process. In particular we note that –
  - The terms of reference for the evaluation of the trial have not been made public despite frequent requests from the Churches and others to know what they are; and

- The name of the evaluator had not, until an article appeared in the *SMH* on 5 July 2010, been made public. This was followed by a letter to the Archbishop confirming Dr Sue Knight as the evaluator. However, the terms of reference for this evaluation were not disclosed to us in that communication and had not been given as at the time of writing this report.

### **Conclusion**

We submit that the recently concluded trial cannot provide a sound basis for concluding that the status quo concerning SRE should be changed and that the ethics classes as proposed should be made generally available to primary schools across the State on an ongoing basis.

The trial has failed even the very limited outcomes defined by the Ethics Centre in their submission to the Minister (September 2009) that “the pilot would permit the Minister to assess the effectiveness of, and interest in, an ethics based course”. It is impossible to safely extrapolate from a 10 week course in 10 primary schools for Year 5-6 children how effective an ethics course might be for K-6 children, whether it is sustainable and whether there is any broader interest beyond the already committed and vocal minority.

We believe that if the Government is minded to persist in looking to introduce a complementary program of non-religious ethics in primary schools across the State, a very carefully prepared further trial of “humanist philosophy” should be undertaken involving a genuinely representative sample of primary schools across the State, consultation with all stakeholders, and transparent terms of reference and outcomes by which the success of the trial can be measured, with any final report being made public before any Government decision is made.

We strongly suggest that such an important issue should be resolved as a whole of Government decision after the evaluation is complete, Dr Sue Knight’s final report is made public and the community has had an opportunity to consider and debate her recommendations. The underlying principles which have always guided the provision of SRE need explication and defence. Such a process would be accompanied by openness and transparency.

A decision to implement ethics based on the recently completed trial would be methodologically unsound. In view of a significant number of partisan statements made about the value of ethics courses prior to the conclusion of the trial, it would also be seen by many within Christian and other faith communities as little more than an attempt to diminish and in due course marginalise or even exclude SRE from primary

schools. The resulting division within our community would be highly unfortunate because it is entirely avoidable.

30 July 2010



## Appendix

### History and Explanation of Special Religious Education

The Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney welcomes the opportunity afforded to it and other religious persuasions to deliver quality Special Religious Education (SRE) to students in government primary and secondary schools. It acknowledges that the purpose for which access is provided is to deliver well thought-out educational programs using contemporary teaching methods and suited to the appropriate stage of students' faith development.

Religion has always played a part in the education provided by New South Wales (NSW) government schools. The NSW Public Instruction Act of 1880 set down the pattern of teaching that exists to this day: based on a dual system of secular education (which included religious teaching) and special religious education. In 1975, the Government of the day set up a Committee to Review Religious Education, chaired by Dr Ralph Rawlinson. The Report addressed the place of religion in education and examined the potential contribution of religion to the full development of the individual in terms of intellectual, social and moral development. **In each area the Committee concluded that religion has a valid and distinctive part to play in the ongoing education of children.** Most of the recommendations of the Rawlinson Report were incorporated into the NSW Education Act of 1990. The Religious Education Policy was further refined and approved in 2007.

#### Education Act 1990

The Education Act 1990 makes the following provisions for religious education of children in NSW government schools:

##### *Secular instruction*

30. In government schools, the education is to consist of strictly non-sectarian and secular instruction. The words secular instruction are to be taken to include general religious education as distinct from dogmatic or polemical theology.

*Special religious education*

32. (1) In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion, but the total number of hours so allowed in a year is not to exceed, for each child, the number of school weeks in the year.
- (2) 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.
- (3) The religious education to be given is in every case to be the religious education authorised by the religious body to which the member of the clergy or other religious teacher belongs.
- (4) The times at which religious education is to be given to children of a particular religious persuasion are to be fixed by agreement between the principal of the school and the local member of the clergy or other religious teacher of that persuasion.
- (5) Children attending a religious education class are to be separated from other children at the school while the class is held.
- (6) If the relevant member of the clergy or religious teacher fails to attend the school at the appointed time, the children are to be appropriately cared for at the school during the period set aside for religious education.

*Objection to religious education*

33. No child at a government school is to be required to receive any general religious education or special religious education if the parent of the child objects to the child's receiving that education.

**Current Practice 2010**

In practice, SRE in NSW operates in the following ways:

- The Act protects and upholds the distinctive role that Special Religious Education (SRE) plays in the education and development of the child. In general, Primary SRE is provided from Kindergarten to Year 6, and consists of a weekly allocation of approximately 30 minutes per lesson. The times for SRE are fixed by agreement between the principal of the school and the authorised religious providers and vary widely depending on the number of students enrolled in SRE, the availability of religious providers and timetable considerations.

- Under the Act, SRE is provided by authorised representatives of the religious persuasion. To enter a NSW government school and provide Special Religious Education, a religious persuasion must meet Department of Education and Training requirements and be approved by the Minister for Education. SRE providers are unpaid volunteers who are required to meet Authorisation standards and be trained in appropriate materials and pedagogy. For Anglican providers this includes completion of Safe Ministry and Accreditation training modules.
- The Implementation of Religious Education Policy states that it is the responsibility of the schools

“... to support SRE by ensuring that no formal lessons or scheduled school activities occur during time set aside for SRE. Such activities may create conflict of choice for some parents and for some students attending SRE.” (3.A.3)

For students not attending SRE, schools are to provide

“... appropriate care and supervision at school. This may involve students in other activities such as completing homework, reading and private study. These activities should neither compete with SRE nor be alternative lessons in the subjects within the curriculum or other areas, such as, ethics, values, civics or general religious education.” (3.A.11)

In practice, administration of this policy differs between schools: those which apply good supervision practices and activities for students during the non-scripture period generally find it works well.

- The Policy states that it is the responsibility of schools to record the nominated religious persuasion at enrolment for the purpose of SRE. This information is intended to be used to form SRE classes and continued provision of the religious persuasion. Parents are afforded the opportunity to ‘opt out’, i.e. to enrol or withdraw their child from SRE and/or GRE at any time during the child’s schooling.

Contrary to this policy, many schools have adopted an annual ‘opt-in’ practice with regard to enrolment in SRE, requiring parents to return permission slips nominating the SRE of their choice at the beginning of each year. This practice results not only in greater administrative handling for the school each year, but in increased numbers of students sitting in non-SRE than in those schools which maintain the Department of Education and Training’s ‘opt out’ policy.