

ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

Special Religious Education Policy and Procedures

1 INTRODUCTION

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

“Special religious education (SRE) is education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion by authorised representatives of that persuasion.” (*DE Religious Education Implementation Procedures 2016*, p. 2)

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

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

2 POLICY

To teach Special Religious Education (or Scripture as it is better known), which is in keeping with the Church’s beliefs and is good pedagogy. To provide assurance to the DE that each teacher and helper is authorised, the Church will:

- Provide a process that leads to authorisation of its SRE teachers
- Maintain records of the training of all its SRE teachers
- Verify all *Working with Children Checks* and keep a record of the verification as required by the legislation
- Ensure to the best of its ability that every SRE teacher has initial and ongoing teacher training
- Ensure to the best of its ability that every SRE teacher has child protection training and this remains current
- Authorise both the material and the pedagogy used by its SRE teachers, and
- Provide links to its approved curricula on a relevant website.

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

The SRE Coordinator (SREC) in the Church is the official point of contact for everything related to child protection and the *Working with Children Check*. The SREC will sign the annual DE letter of assurance regarding authorisation of SRE teachers and is the official point of contact between the Church and the DE and other providers in relation to all other SRE matters.

3 SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROCEDURES

As a religious persuasion and a DE approved provider of SRE, the Armenian Apostolic Church (the Church) will take up the opportunity to educate students in its beliefs.

To maintain its status as a DE approved provider, the Church will follow a process for authorising all SRE teachers that involves:

1. Providing basic SRE teacher training to a recognised standard including an awareness of the DE's Code of Conduct and Code of Conduct training needs in the initial teacher training
2. The SRE Coordinator (SREC) collecting and managing all the confidential records, verifying the *Working with Children Check* and issuing an SRE authorisation to teach card to teachers on behalf of the Church.

3.1 SRE COORDINATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The SREC processes all SRE teacher authorisation applications on behalf of the Church. The SREC assesses the *SRE Teacher - Engagement Form* and associated information and:

- Records completed teacher training and/or approval of recognised prior learning (RPL)
- Verifies the *Working with Children Check* and keeps a record of the verification
- Issues an authorisation card and adequate nametag for the SRE teacher
- Provides suitable child protection training for all SRE teachers
- Ensure the SRE teacher understands the child protection reporting requirements of the school,
- Reports the results of the review process as a part of the annual assurance process including a description of efforts to address identified issues such as further training and mentor support and

- Issues notices showing expiry dates of SRE authorisation, alerting them to the need for renewal of authorisation to teach.

The SREC is to:

- Retain a signed *SRE Teacher - Job Description* and give one to the teacher
- Arrange for the school to receive the teacher's name and contact details
- Ensure the SRE teacher only uses approved curriculum or resource
- Assist the SRE teacher to comply with any policies and procedures required by the school and help them to access any necessary training or obtain any necessary information
- Renew the authorisation of the SRE teacher when it expires
- Help provide continuing professional development for SRE teachers.

3.2 SRE TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES

The SRE teacher must provide the information to complete an *SRE Teacher - Engagement Form* to submit to the SREC. After the SREC issues an authorisation card for the SRE teacher, the person must:

- Retain a copy of the *SRE Teacher - Job Description*
- Carry the signed authorisation card and wear an appropriate name badge whenever they are in a school
- Recognise the authority of the principal or appointed executive staff member whenever they are at the school
- Use only approved curriculum or resource,
- Deliver the curriculum with sensitivity and in an age appropriate manner,
- Undertake continuing Professional Development courses each year and
- Participate in an annual review of SRE teaching which may include teacher self-reflection, student feedback, classroom observation, supervisor feedback, mentor support to ensure the authorised curriculum is being implemented.

3.3 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

All approved SRE providers like the Church are committed to implementing the DE's own *RE Implementation Procedures*. Sometimes there are local school decisions, personal behaviours and misunderstandings that negatively impact the delivery of SRE.

The following is a simplified picture of a process for negotiating issues with delivering SRE in a school. The foundational principles of the process are:

- Where at all possible, issues should be handled early and managed at a local level,
- 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,
- The individual or provider has the right to be heard, and
- The decision makers must be free from bias.

When the SREC has an issue with the way the *RE Implementation Procedures* are interpreted or implemented by the school:

The DE has a *Complaints Handling Policy* and a *Complaints Handling Policy Guidelines*. Normally most issues relating to SRE can be resolved without recourse to these documents. The SREC should also be familiar with the DE's *Religious Education Policy* and the *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*.

The SREC should encourage teachers to follow up any issues with them. Where an issue cannot be immediately resolved the SREC should make an appointment with the Principal.

When the school has a problem with an SRE teacher:

If 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 the appointed Church SRE Coordinator.

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

The nature of any concern or complaint should be documented and include the date and time and name of the person who makes contact from the school.

The SREC must talk with the SRE teacher(s) involved and seek some resolution of the issue at the core of the complaint based on the DE *RE Implementation Procedures* and the Church's *SRE Policy and Procedures*.

When the complaint is resolved, the SREC should talk face-to-face with the Principal of the school so that there is clear communication and an agreed resolution of the complaint.

4 WEBSITE PUBLICATION

Special Religious Education (Scripture) is a voluntary program in New South Wales schools. Scripture lessons complement the general education of Armenian Apostolic Church children.

The curriculum developed for and implemented in schools by the Armenian Apostolic Church is a Bible-based program founded on the stories, truths and principles of our Christian faith in keeping with the teachings of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The curriculum is designed to engage children in knowing God, understanding His love for us and developing a relationship with Him.

The curriculum is organised around a yearly program taking the children through a Bible journey to experience God's hand at work through the lives and stories as found in the Old and New Testaments.

Teaching notes are available to guide facilitators through the weekly lessons and age-appropriate hands-on activities are provided to students to reinforce the learning outcomes.

Participation is free and entirely voluntary and only at the discretion of the parents or guardians.

The volunteer facilitators are faithful members from the Church Bible Study groups who devote their time and service each week to visit schools and enlighten children.

The Armenian Apostolic Church of Australia, is a Department of Education approved provider.

4.1 MODES OF DELIVERY:

The Armenian Apostolic Church authorises, trained volunteers to deliver an approved curriculum.

Teachers must have the appropriate *Working with Children Check* and evidence of their clearance is kept on record in the parish.

A system is in place to ensure that all special religious education teachers attend initial and ongoing training in classroom management and child protection issues.

4.2 RECOMMENDED CURRICULA:

A copy of the curriculum outline is publicly available on the following link:

<http://armenianchurchsydney.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Curriculum-Outline-for-Website.pdf>

There may be minor variations in the delivery of the program across schools due to timetables or combined classes.

For more information contact the Armenian Apostolic Church. If you wish to make a complaint about a specific teacher, or the material being taught, or any other issue, please use the complaint procedure provided below.

4.3 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE:

Our complaints process is designed to encourage the fast and efficient resolution of your issue. For non-urgent matters we encourage that you send us an e-mail explaining your complaint, if this is not possible, or if it is urgent, please call the Church Office as soon as possible.

During your complaint, we will aim to tailor any proposed resolutions to provide a fair and reasonable outcome to all parties involved. We will aim to deliver our mutually agreed resolution to you within 10 business days, or 2 business days where the complaint is urgent.

Please follow the steps below to raise your complaint. If you require assistance with making a complaint, please do not hesitate to call us.

NON-URGENT COMPLAINTS:

If your complaint is of a non-urgent nature, then please send us an e-mail explaining the situation to: church@armenian.com.au

In the message, please provide a detailed description of the complaint, including the date and time, the school or place, and the people involved. The more information we have, the easier and quicker the complaint will be processed and resolved.

URGENT COMPLAINTS:

If you believe your complaint is urgent, please call the Church Office directly, or visit us, as soon as possible.

10 Macquarie Street, Chatswood NSW 2067 | Tel. 9419 8056

5 APPENDIX I: SRE TEACHER - ENGAGEMENT FORM

Strictly Confidential

ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHER'S ENGAGEMENT FORM

Name: (Fr, Dr, Mr, Mrs, Ms)

Address:

.....Postcode:

Telephone: Email:

WWCC #: Expiry Date: Date of Birth:

Responsible to:(SRE Coordinator)

School(s) in which I am authorised to teach:

Primary: Secondary:

General Conditions:

I agree to carry out my task as a volunteer SRE teacher in accordance with the principles and policies of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and the guidelines of the NSW Department of Education. I undertake to exercise due care for the safety and behaviour of students when teaching or supervising them. I acknowledge that the teaching given to students in the SRE classroom will be the highest quality possible.

No remuneration is paid to me as a volunteer SRE teacher, nor may I incur any expenses without prior approval.

Volunteer Statement:

- a) I acknowledge that the Armenian Apostolic Church has special responsibilities to the students, their parents, and carers and to the school authorities because of the opportunities given to the Church to instruct students in Special Religious Education (Scripture).
- b) I agree to carry out those tasks in accordance with the conditions set out above.
- c) I wish to volunteer my services on the above basis to the Armenian Apostolic Church, and I acknowledge that I am responsible to the SRE Coordinator who has responsibility for the schools in which I teach.
- d) I undertake to teach SRE from the approved curriculum materials as directed by SRE Coordinator.

Volunteer Statutory Declaration:

I hereby solemnly and sincerely declare that:

- a) I have never been convicted for any criminal offence which involves:
 - (i) an act of violence towards another person or
 - (ii) sexual assault or
 - (iii) any offence against a minor person or
 - (iv) provision of prohibited drugs
- b) I understand that I am required to provide my WWCC Number to verify the accuracy of this statement.
- c) I understand that should I fail to meet my commitments as set out above, I could be asked to withdraw from the ministry of SRE in schools.
I understand also that any authorisation may be withdrawn at any time.
- d) If I am charged with any crime referred to in (a) above, or if I am under investigation by the police or officers of the Department of Community Services or the Department of Education, I will notify the minister in charge immediately.

And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and in accordance with the provisions of the Oaths Act 1990.

Declared at: on:
(place) *(date)*

Signature:

in the presence of:

Witness:

Signature: Date:
(signature of witness)

6 APPENDIX II: SRE TEACHER - JOB DESCRIPTION

ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHER'S JOB DESCRIPTION

AIM

As an SRE Teacher, you aim to:

- Teach the Bible faithfully and truthfully to those in your class.
- Model the Christian life to the individuals in the class and school. Show them in the way you act and speak both the struggles and joys of being Christ-like.
- Encourage and pray for everyone in your class.
- Be involved in the planning and implementing of the Scripture teaching program for all the years in the school.

RESPONSIBILITIES

You are directly responsible to SRE Coordinator of the Armenian Apostolic Church and to the Principal of the School in which you teach.

You are responsible for:

- Using the approved curriculum to create a programme for the term.
- Encouraging and praying for the members in your class.
- Welcoming and speaking to the parents of the students when you see them.
- Attending the appropriate school functions.
- Running the class for the designated period.
- Participating in and being involved with the school and its staff.
- Ensuring that there is no breach of trust towards the students or other leaders.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE POSITION

You must:

- Be a regular attender at church and a Bible study group.
- Obtain a *Working with Children Check*.
- Sign a copy of this job description.
- Complete the SRE Teacher's Engagement Form.
- Have a valid SRE Teacher's Authorisation card signed by the SRE Coordinator.

ACTIONS

- If you are training up younger teachers/helpers by having them help you in the Scripture class, it is important to pastorally care for them. When delegating tasks to them, it is important to work alongside with them in the organising and implementing of the specific tasks.
- You are part of the school and you are required to follow all policies and guidelines as the rest of the school staff. This also means that you must find out what the schools

policies are for discipline, dealing with parents, using school equipment, such as the photocopier etc.

SAFE MINISTRY PROTOCOLS FOR THIS POSITION

- All children and others under your leadership, regardless of age, are covered by these protocols.
- Do not allow yourself to be in any area alone with a student or person under your leadership. Always have other students or another teacher.
- If a student of the opposite sex comes to you for counselling, immediately take them to a school counsellor or teacher. NEVER counsel or talk through issues with a student of the opposite sex.
- If a student of the same sex comes to you for counselling, ensure you do so in an open area, never a closed room.
- If you should need to speak to a student about their behaviour or participating or helping in the class, ensure you do so in the vicinity of other people, never alone in a room.
- If a student has questions for you at the end of the class, ask another teacher or student to remain in the room while you talk to them.
- If a child is distressed and needs to be consoled, it is important that a person of the same sex does the consoling. Ensure that another teacher or student is with you always, and use your discretion when speaking and comforting the child. (Follow school policies)
- If a student discloses information to you regarding any kind of abuse or neglect, you must divulge this information to the school. Be careful not to reveal this confidential information to any other person.

I have read and understood this Job Description:

Name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: / /