

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The purpose of religious education, delivered as part of the Victorian Curriculum, is to ensure every young Victorian learns about the key tenets and beliefs of major world religions.

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* provides that government school education must be secular. Government schools must not promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect, and must be open to adherents of any philosophy, religion or faith.

Learning about religious and other world views is, however, an important part of learning about the contemporary world.

LEARNING ABOUT RELIGIONS

Learning about religions is part of the Victorian Curriculum.

It provides information to students about world faiths and secular belief structures, which enables them to understand the world around them, display tolerance and respect towards people from all cultures and build strong and respectful relationships.

The curriculum is delivered by qualified teachers. The curriculum reflects the importance of religion and ethics in our society and ensures that all students, regardless of their background or faith, can learn about the ideals and values that define a modern, multicultural Victoria.

Students may be taught about, and schools may acknowledge, common religious celebrations or festivals. This may include acknowledging and learning about key religious celebrations. Activities typically include learning about cultural and religious traditions of our multicultural society, for example singing Christmas carols, making Christmas decorations, dressing up for the Diwali festival or sharing a meal as part of Eid celebrations.

SPECIAL RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

In addition to the religious education provided through the Victorian Curriculum, schools may work with churches and other religious groups to provide Special Religious Instruction (SRI).

SRI is 'instruction provided by churches and other religious groups and based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs'. The provision of SRI in government schools is governed by Ministerial Direction (MD) 145.

SRI is not compulsory and student participation is subject to parental approval. Principals decide whether or not to offer SRI based on the circumstances of their school.

SRI is available in several faiths including Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Judaism, Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and the Baha'i faith.

As it is not part of the Victorian Curriculum, SRI is not delivered by teachers or during class time. SRI can be provided at lunchtime or before or after school by accredited volunteers from churches or religious organisations approved by the Department of Education and Training. SRI may include activities that use religious texts (e.g. the Bible or Koran), saying prayers, and instruction on living in accordance with the tenets of a particular faith.

Moving SRI to lunchtime or before or after school strikes the balance between delivering SRI to students whose parents wish them to participate, and maximising the amount of teaching time available to students.

Any group seeking to facilitate, lead or provide SRI must satisfy the requirements of MD145 and Department of Education and Training policy. Further information about MD145, including legislation, policy and operational requirements is available at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/curriculum/Pages/sri.aspx>.

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