

Department of **Education**
Learners first, connected and inspired



Religious Instruction in
State Schools

Guidelines



Religious Instruction in State Schools Guidelines

1. Introduction

Religious instruction in Tasmanian state schools is provided for under Section 34 of the Education Act 1994. The Act allows for programs to be provided at state schools with the approval of the Secretary of the Department of Education.

These guidelines constitute the Secretary's requirements for program approval which build on Section 34 of the Act to govern the operation of religious instruction programs in schools.

2. Definition

Religious instruction in state schools is defined as any non-secular instruction provided to school students during any time which they are required to attend school. Under the Education Act 1994, religious instruction programs are not part of the state-provided, secular school curriculum.

3. Principles

The principles that underpin the operation of religious instruction in state schools are:

1. Religious instruction programs will be compatible with the codes and practices of the school and the framework of values and purposes on which the school curriculum is based.
2. The application and approval process for religious instruction programs will be non-discriminatory and equitably applied to all religions and denominations.
3. Religious instruction programs in schools will respect and recognise the diversity of individuals' beliefs.
4. Religious instruction programs will be non-discriminatory.
5. Whilst providers of religious instruction programs may convey personal beliefs, they will not proselytise.]

4. Program Requirements

a) Providers

A provider of a religious instruction program:

- must be "a member of the clergy, or another person, authorised to do so by the religious body to which that member or person belongs" as per section 34 (2) (a) of the Education Act 1994;
- must have appropriate written authorisation from the religious organisation that they represent; and
- will be subject to a good character check by the Department of Education which will involve a record of conviction check, an identity check and may involve checks on any relevant disciplinary action in employment.

b) Program content and delivery

Religious instruction program content and delivery will be assessed by the school principal as part of the application process. The principal will determine whether the content of the program, and the learning and teaching approaches used to deliver it are consistent with, and supportive of:

- I. the values and purposes underpinning the school curriculum framework;
- II. learning, teaching and assessment principles which guide the practice of teachers and students;
- III. commonly agreed pedagogical approaches used in the school;
- IV. the codes and practices which guide the actions of the school community; and
- V. appropriate developmental expectations for students of various age groups.

The principal will also make an assessment as to whether or not delivery of the program is possible within the organisational and management resources of the school.

It should be noted that approval for programs involving the attendance of younger students will be on the basis that the content and pedagogy of such programs are age appropriate and acknowledge the specific learning needs of young children as identified by current research.

Learning for young children should be connected to their everyday world and should encourage curiosity, questioning and wonder. Information that is presented without the context in which it will be used is confusing and difficult for young children to retain. The impact of developmentally inappropriate learning experiences which deal with ideas beyond their grasp may have long-lasting negative effects on children's concept about themselves as learners.

Young children respond well to challenges providing that the questions hold interest and meaning for them. Learning for this age group should be a rewarding and enjoyable experience in which they play, explore, discover, rehearse, practise, build positive dispositions and revise concepts as they adjust their understandings. The role of the adult is to provide an optimum environment to stimulate exploration and inquiry by encouraging young children to set their own questions and problems rather than the adult posing all the challenges.

c) Student participation

Students may participate in a religious instruction program if:

- their parents/carers have been fully informed:
 - of the program and its content;
 - that the program is not part of the school curriculum; and
 - of the activity(ies) available to their child if they do not participate; and
- parent/carer permission has been provided.

Parental approval for a student to participate is specific to a program, is valid for no more than one school year, and may be withdrawn at any time.

d) Timetabling

Under the Education Act, 1994, it is up to the principal to determine when a religious instruction program is held during the school day, with the best time being where a range of activities is offered.

The total number of hours that can be made available for religious instruction programs for each student is no more than the number of weeks in the school year.

e) Duty of care

The school retains overall duty of care for all students attending the school during the school day.

It is the responsibility of the principal to determine the level of direct supervision required for a religious instruction program.

5. Application Process

a) The application process

- Applications for provision of religious instruction programs in state schools are to be submitted to the School Association for consideration.
- In considering applications, the School Association must:
 - I. comply with the Principles for Religious Instruction in State Schools ensuring that processes are equitable for all applications;
 - II. ensure that applications are consistent with all program requirements outlined in Section 4, and that the principal has made an assessment of the content and delivery against the requirements of section 4b;
 - III. ensure that programs are consistent with, and supportive of, the goals identified in the school plan;
 - IV. ensure that the management and the overall organisational structure of the school can accommodate the program in accordance with Section 23 of the Education Act 1994, 'Functions and Powers of Principals'.
- Reapplications will include an evaluation of the previous year's program.
- Approval will be for a maximum of one school year.
- Unsuccessful applicants will be provided with a clear statement outlining the grounds on which the program did not meet the requirements.
- If at any time the program is assessed by the School Association as no longer complying with these guidelines, approval may be withdrawn.
- Approval to deliver a religious instruction program in a school does not imply government endorsement of a program.

b) Appeal procedure

Where an applicant or member of the school community is dissatisfied with the outcome of an application process, a grievance may be made in writing to the Secretary, Department of Education. The grievance should clearly identify the aspects of the process(es) believed to be inappropriately applied.