Religion Guidelines

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Document History

Date	Responsible	Action
2014-05	S. Meaghan	Developed and published.
2018-07-19	J. Hoogland	Reformatted.

Next Review

2018

Terminology

Term	Meaning
DET	Department of Education
GRE	General Religious Education
SRE	Special Religious Education

Intent

Coolbinia Primary School (the school) supports the Department of Education's (DET) policy statement that the "curriculum and teaching in public schools is not to promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect' [1] .

The school acknowledges and values the diverse cultural backgrounds and faiths of students at the school. The school aims to minimize or avoid circumstances where parents feel compelled to seek to exempt their child from attendance at classes because of religious content or values. This document sets out the school's policy in relation to the celebration and acknowledgement of events that may involve religious values or other belief systems.

Background

The DET policy requires consideration by a School Council [Board] about "a general policy concerning the use of prayers, songs and other materials based on religious, spiritual or moral values to be used in a school activity as part of GRE" (General Religious Education). The School Board has undertaken consultation with parents in relation to the above statement set out in the DET policy. By way of background, GRE is defined in the DET policy as follows:

> General Religious Education (GRE) is about the major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian Society and other societies and may be provided in public schools as part of the general school curriculum. The focus of GRE is on the sociological based study of various religious traditions rather than on the encouragement of personal commitment by students to a particular set of religious beliefs.

This contrasts to Special Religious Education (SRE) which is "based on distinctive religious tenets or beliefs and may be provided in public schools by persons authorized to deliver SRE." SRE is not part of the school's curriculum, and there are no current plans to include SRE as part of the school's curriculum.

Events & Activities

The consultation with parents identified a number of events based upon religious or cultural celebrations, as well as various belief systems. The decision whether to acknowledge or celebrate these events is made by the teacher or principal. Teachers may integrate activities associated with these events as part of GRE within the curriculum (e.g. history) or as optional activities. All-school activities (including Harmony Day, ANZAC Day, end of year celebrations, discos) not related to the curriculum, but will be organised such that they respect parent's views about religious and cultural content.

Guidelines for teachers

At the consultations conducted with parents, views were sought about the "use of prayers, songs and other materials based on religious, spiritual or moral values to be used in a school activity as part of GRE." The consultation identified a list of specific recommendations for events. Consistent themes arising from those recommendations are set out in the following guidelines for use by teachers in developing activities:

- Activities are not to promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect,
- Activities should not be biased towards one religion over another, e.g. time spent on one celebration should not be excessive and should be appropriately balanced with other celebrations and activities,
- Some general activities suggested as acceptable ways of acknowledging or celebrating events, include:
    - Consumption or making of food that is relevant to the specific event,
    - Making of craft, provided that there are secular options for students to choose from,
    - Singing, performing, listening to or playing music, provided that these activities do not promote any particular belief system over another,
    - General activities to increase understanding of religious or culturally significant event provided they don't offer bias or opinion

Exemptions

As set out in the DET Religious Education Policy, parents can notify the school in writing that their child should be exempted from any part of a school activity which involves prayers, songs and other material based on religious, spiritual or moral values as part of GRE. This is consistent with the DET's Guidelines for Exemption from Particular Classes.

It is suggested that parents notify the school if they seek a general exemption from any aspect of a class that may involve religious content.

Review

Any concerns in relation to the implementation of this policy should be raised with the school as per the Communication and Conflict Resolution Policy. This policy will also be reviewed within 3 years of initial implementation.

References

1. Western Australia Department of Education, Religious Education Policy, 29 December 2008, available at www.det.wa.edu.au/policies