

## 6 The SRE Teacher

### 6.1 Working in a Government School

#### 6.1.1 Authority to be in the School

All voluntary SRE teachers, and anyone who accompanies them into a school for SRE, must:

- a) complete an SRE teacher's engagement form (or equivalent), that is issued by the local church. This must be signed by the head of the local church;
- b) sign a *Prohibited Employment Declaration* form to indicate that they are not a prohibited person under the child protection legislation;
- c) obtain an identification card (commonly green), to show that they are an authorised SRE teacher. This card must be carried when visiting the school.

All employed SRE teachers, in addition to the above, should have been screened as part of the authorisation process by the local church.

The local head of each participating church must authorise every SRE teacher.

For a more detailed account of the above requirements, refer to Chapter 3 of this handbook.

#### 6.1.2 Following School Procedures

As a visiting teacher to the local government school, the SRE teacher should:

- a) ensure that the children are safe and happy and that the procedures of the school are maintained as harmoniously as possible;
- b) teach with sensitivity, being aware of the child and the family's religious background, and adopt normal practices and courtesies expected of all teaching staff in the local schools;
- c) be familiar with the Department of Education and Training directions on classroom management and discipline as this helps to improve lesson quality;
- d) become familiar with the school welfare, discipline and other policies relevant to the SRE teacher;
- e) refer to class teachers to find out what is to be expected of children's conduct;
- f) enquire if any children have special learning difficulties, endeavouring to understand their special problems by consulting their normal class teacher and, where appropriate, with special resource personnel attached to the school;
- g) be available for consultation with parents concerning SRE;
- h) avoid counselling children for emotional problems. This should be left to school staff who are specially trained for the task and will have access to wider information and resources.

Attention needs to be given to routine matters including:

- a) being prompt for lessons;
- b) giving sufficient notice to the Church SRE Coordinator and/or School SRE Coordinator if unable to attend;
- c) marking the roll each lesson (where this is a school requirement) and reporting absences to the class teacher;
- d) never leaving a class unsupervised, including at the end of a lesson;
- e) the procedures to be followed if a child has to be sent from class;
- f) the procedures to be followed if a child has an accident.

### 6.1.3 Child Protection

Under NSW legislation voluntary SRE teachers are not mandatory reporters of child sexual, physical and emotional abuse, neglect or injury. However, if an SRE teacher has concerns about a child, the SRE teacher should discuss the matter confidentially with the school Principal and refrain from discussing it with anyone else.

SRE teachers need to be particularly careful to ensure that their own behaviour at all times is moral and exemplary. To minimise the chance of any allegations being made against an SRE teacher for sexual impropriety or another form of unacceptable behaviour, the teacher should:

- a) Avoid physical contact with children.
- b) Always make sure that they are in the view of others when talking with only one or two children and avoid relatively secluded places.
- c) Distinguish between the normal boundaries of teacher/pupil relationships and those that move beyond those boundaries. Ensure that levels of affection remain within normal boundaries.

## 6.2 Being an Effective Teacher

### 6.2.1 Becoming an Accredited SRE Teacher

Chapter 4 of this handbook deals with the accreditation of SRE teachers. All SRE teachers are encouraged to:

- a) be familiar with their denomination's requirements for basic accreditation and what recognition is given for prior learning and experience;
- b) commit themselves to participate in training to at least basic accreditation level;
- c) participate in advanced courses and in-service training as opportunities arise.

### 6.2.2 Strategies for Becoming an Effective SRE Teacher

- a) Students must never be left unsupervised.
- b) Dangerous activities are to be avoided.
- c) Physical contact or anything that might offend the students or their families is to be avoided.
- d) The teacher must be sensitive to the rights of parents in determining the nature of their child's education.
- e) Any plans for a lesson which may disrupt the school routine must be discussed with the School SRE Coordinator, and then, if necessary, with the Principal.
- f) The teacher must be punctual and attend regularly, arriving ten minutes before the lesson begins and signing the attendance book.
- g) If unable to attend, the teacher should arrange a substitute; if a substitute cannot be found, the school is to be informed as early as possible.
- h) The School SRE Coordinator is to be informed if the teacher intends to bring a visitor to the next class, remembering that all visitors need to be authorised as SRE teachers.
- i) Furniture must be replaced as found.
- j) Difficulties should be discussed with the classroom teacher before complaining about them (for example, providing chalkboard space).
- k) The teacher should be familiar with the school policy on discipline and ensure that their actions are, where possible, consistent with the school policy.
- l) When SRE programs plan to deal with controversial topics, the parents, school Principal and authorising person must be notified; similarly, if any matters arise during an SRE lesson that might affect other school lessons, the School SRE Coordinator or Principal must be informed.
- m) Direct communication with parents is to be restricted to matters related to the content of SRE lessons and information related to the religious persuasion as approved by the authorising person.
- n) The SRE teacher should participate, wherever invited, in the school program (for example, the use of a system of merit awards).

## 6.3 Managing a Classroom

### 6.3.1 Helpful Suggestions

In order to more effectively manage the classroom, the teacher should:

- a) direct the entrance, seating and exit of students as appropriate;
- b) gain the attention of the whole class before giving general instructions and give them from the front of the room;
- c) establish the procedures for the beginning and conclusion of the lesson;
- d) follow up instructions to make sure they are carried out;
- e) make sure students are aware of the consequences of misbehaviour and that any discipline measures are appropriate and consistently carried out, not penalising the whole class for the misbehaviour of a few students;
- f) affirm positive behaviour and work;
- g) speak to students with respect, especially when correcting or disciplining them;
- h) expect good behaviour and the students' best work. Calmly insist that reasonable standards be met, and do not tolerate deliberate misbehaviour;
- i) give positive attention to all students and especially those who need encouragement to improve;
- j) have a set of related activities that can be used with students or classes who finish work quickly.

### 6.3.2 Reference Material

For other helpful suggestions, refer to the book *Teacher's Pet: Encouragement for Religious Education Teachers*, edited by Mark Hillis and published by The Joint Board of Christian Education, 65 Oxford St, Collingwood, Victoria.

## 6.4 Knowing the School

### 6.4.1 Basic Information

At the meeting of SRE teachers at the start of the school year, teachers should be informed of:

- a) the name of the school,
- b) the location of the school,
- c) contact details for the school,
- d) office hours,
- e) SRE arrangements,
- f) the names of key people - school Principal,
  - School SRE Coordinator,
  - office secretary,
  - classroom teacher,
  - librarian.

### 6.4.2 School Procedures

SRE teachers should become familiar with the school policies, rules and class procedures, including procedures to book and use items such as audio visual equipment, overhead projectors, the library and the chalk/white board.

### 6.4.3 Classroom Management and Expectations

The SRE teacher can discuss expectations of children's conduct (noise level, changing seats, personal property) with the classroom teacher and also seek information about children with special needs. It may also be helpful for the SRE teacher to observe a normal lesson conducted by the classroom teacher to gain an understanding of:

- a) teaching style,
- b) classroom management,
- c) preferred learning styles of the students,
- d) inter-personal dynamics of particular children.

Composite SRE classes might present certain behavioural problems that are not evident in the normal classroom. Assistance should be sought from the School SRE Coordinator if difficulties arise.