

Religious activities in schools and preschools policy

This is a mandated policy under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this policy must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting operational policies](#) page.

Overview

This policy outlines the principles and requirements for conducting religious activities in public schools and preschools.

Scope

This policy applies to religious activities in public schools and preschools. It also applies to religious activities carried out or authorised by public schools and preschool in other locations.

It does not apply to:

- content about religion and religious practices that forms part of the Australian Curriculum
- activities by third parties using public school and preschool sites for private purposes.



Contents

Religious activities in schools and preschools policy.....	1
Overview.....	1
Scope.....	1
Detail.....	3
Policy principles.....	3
Policy requirements.....	3
Roles and responsibilities.....	5
Education Director.....	5
School and preschool leaders.....	5
Employees.....	6
Engagement and Wellbeing directorate.....	6
Definitions.....	6
child and young person.....	6
detriment.....	6
ordination, commissioning, endorsement or other methods.....	6
proselytise.....	6
secular.....	6
Supporting information.....	6
Related legislation.....	6
Related policies.....	7
Record history.....	7
Approvals.....	7
Revision record.....	7
Contact.....	8

Detail

Public schools and preschools are inclusive and diverse. They support and educate children and young people from all backgrounds across South Australia. The universal and diverse nature of public education means that public schools and preschools must be able to teach children and young people to engage with, understand and respect different religious beliefs without favouring a specific world view or set of religious beliefs.

This policy supports schools and preschools to balance the universal and secular nature of public education with valuing and respecting the diverse religious backgrounds within school communities.

Policy principles

The [Education and Children's Services Act 2019](#) (section 7) includes the following principles:

- The cultural and religious diversity of the student population must be recognised.
- Children and students should not be unlawfully discriminated against on the ground of their religion, nor that of their parents.
- Education and children's services provided by government schools, government preschools and children's services centres are to be secular in nature.
- Schools, preschools and children's services centres are free to celebrate events that are of significance to their communities (including, for example, by singing Christmas carols).

Policy requirements

No discrimination

School and preschool policies and practices must not unlawfully discriminate against children and young people, their parents, or their relative or associate, on the basis of their religion, religious appearance or dress.

This includes policies and practices that relate to activities including (but not limited to) sport, food and cooking.

Children and young people must not be discriminated against for identifying as atheist, or not having or expressing religious beliefs.

Meeting the requirements of faith

Schools and preschools may establish multi-faith prayer rooms or spaces on site to allow children and young people to meet the requirements of their faith.

On request, schools should provide a conditional exemption to a child or young person from schooling to the extent that this is required for them to meet the requirements of their faith. This must be done in line with the department's [attendance policy \(PDF 242KB\)](#) and [exemption from school procedure \(PDF 243KB\)](#) (staff

login required).

No proselytising

Public schools and preschools are secular and should respect the strong multicultural nature of South Australia's community.

Staff and third party service providers hired by the school or preschool must not proselytise by doing any action that converts or attempts to convert a child or young person to share their beliefs (refer to [definitions](#) section).

The celebration of events that are significant to the school and preschool community, through concerts, singing songs including Christmas carols, special assemblies, extra-curricular activities, casual days, fetes and community events that do not promote a specific set of religious beliefs, and are provided/organised by school staff, are not considered to be a religious activity that requires notification and exemption (see further below).

Providing wellbeing services

The school principal may engage a religious organisation to provide wellbeing services at the school as part of their responsibility for the welfare and development of children and young people.

This includes participation in the National Student Wellbeing Program (NSWP), in line with the NSWP project agreement and [NSWP procedure for schools \(PDF 187KB\)](#).

Principals must follow departmental procurement requirements and include in any service agreements or purchase orders that:

- the religious organisation is required to follow this policy
- religious content must not be presented to children or young people outside of any religious activity approved in writing by the school.

Conduct of religious activities by a third party

The principal of a school may set aside time for religious activities provided by a third party to take place at the school or at other locations.

When deciding to allow religious activities by a third party, the principal should consider:

- the religious diversity of the school population
- any feedback from the school community about conducting religious activities
- the amount of time provided for religious activities compared to other extra-curricular activities and the amount of time required to deliver the curriculum in the organisation of the school day.

The person conducting religious activities at a school (or other location authorised by the school) must be recognised by a generally recognised or accepted religious organisation through ordination, commissioning, endorsement or other methods (refer to the [definitions](#) section).

The school principal must make sure working with children requirements are met, in line with the [Child](#)

[Safety \(Prohibited Persons\) Act 2016](#) and the department's [screening and suitability – child safety policy \(PDF 217KB\)](#) and [screening and suitability – child safety procedure \(PDF 197KB\)](#).

The school principal must notify, in writing, a person who is responsible for a child or young person enrolled at the school of any intended religious activity involving the child or young person.

A person who is responsible for a child or young person enrolled at a school can choose for their child or young person to not participate in religious activities by providing written notice to the principal. This can be for a specific religious activity or for all religious activities.

A child or young person who does not participate in a religious activity cannot be made to suffer any detriment for not participating (refer to the [definitions](#) section). The child or young person must be offered an alternative activity related to the curriculum when the religious activity is conducted.

Using sites and services managed by religious organisations

Schools considering using camp sites managed by religious organisations where a religious activity is offered must follow the requirements of this policy and the [camps and excursions procedure \(PDF 447KB\)](#). Any religious activity proposed to take place during the course of a camp should be notified to parents in line with this policy.

Purchase orders for contracts with camp sites must require that:

- grace or prayers cannot be said before meals
- religious content not be presented to children or young people outside of any school approved religious activity.

Children or young people who are exempt from attending religious activities at a camp cannot be made to suffer any detriment for not participating. They must be provided with a meaningful alternative and inclusive activity during this time.

Roles and responsibilities

Education Director

Support each school and preschool in their portfolio to effectively apply the policy.

School and preschool leaders

Make sure this policy is effectively applied at their school or preschool.

Make sure proposed religious activities are clearly communicated to people who have responsibility for children or young people enrolled at the school.

Make sure written exemptions for children and young people not to participate in religious activities are followed, documented and retained in the child or young person's school file.

Employees

Comply with this policy and any associated policies and procedures.

Engagement and Wellbeing directorate

Give timely and accurate advice on applying this policy.

Definitions

child and young person

A person under the age of 18 years.

detriment

Harm that is experienced by a person due to another person's actions. It can include intimidation, harassment, discrimination, disadvantage, adverse treatment, humiliation, denigration and other negative outcomes.

ordination, commissioning, endorsement or other methods

When recognised or accepted religious organisations recognise an individual as being able to conduct religious activities on their behalf.

proselytise

The act of seeking to persuade someone to share your beliefs, especially religious or political beliefs.

secular

Not connected with religion.

Supporting information

[Purpose statement for public education in South Australia](#)

Related legislation

[Child Safety \(Prohibited Persons\) Act 2016 \(SA\)](#)

[Education and Children's Services Act 2019 \(SA\)](#)

[Education and Children's Services Regulations 2020 \(SA\)](#)

[Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(SA\)](#)

Related policies

[Attendance policy \(PDF 242KB\)](#)

[Camps and excursions procedure \(PDF 447KB\)](#)

[Exemption from school procedure \(PDF 243KB\)](#)

[National Student Wellbeing Program procedure for schools \(PDF 187KB\)](#)

[Screening and suitability – child safety policy \(PDF 217KB\)](#)

[Screening and suitability – child safety procedure \(PDF 197KB\)](#)

Record history

Published date: July 2023

Approvals

OP number: 280

File number: DE20/08924

Status: approved

Version: 1.1

Policy officer: Assistant Director, Engagement and Wellbeing

Policy sponsor: Director, Engagement and Wellbeing

Responsible executive director: Executive Director, Support and Inclusion

Approved by: Director, Engagement and Wellbeing

Approved date: 13 July 2023

Next review date: 13 July 2026

Revision record

Version: 1.1

Approved by: Director, Engagement and Wellbeing

Approved date: 13 July 2023

Review date: 13 July 2026

Amendment(s): Updated hyperlinks and references to NSW name change.

Version: 1.0

Approved by: chief operating officer

Approved date: 14 July 2020

Review date: 14 July 2023

Amendment(s): New policy developed.

Contact

Engagement and Wellbeing directorate

Phone: 8226 2002

Email: education.EngagementAndWellbeing@sa.gov.au