



# Special Religious Education CODE OF CONDUCT

Faith Respect Responsibility Fairness Impartiality Integrity Honesty Mission

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## Statement of Ethics

Ethical principles upon which this Code is based relate to educators in the Catholic tradition. They are:

### Principle 1: Commitment to the students

SRE Teachers and Assistants believe that children and young people have worth and dignity. Each person is to be seen as valuable in God's world. SRE Teachers and Assistants have a special responsibility to encourage each student to achieve maximum potential. They can work to stimulate the spirit of enquiry, acquisition of knowledge and understanding, the thoughtful formulation of worthy goals and values and a sound relationship with God, the Church and community. This forms part of the lifelong faith journey of children and young people.

### Principle 2: Commitment to parents/carers, family members

SRE Teachers and Assistants know that children and young people are influenced by home, communities, and a society in which attitudes toward Christian values are both affirmed and challenged. The family home is where children and young people begin to form faith, especially relationships with God and Jesus. Special Religious Education is where students attend classes of their families' choice to complement and support the ongoing education and formation begun in the home. As SRE Teachers and Assistants, we are called to assist these families in fulfilling their responsibility for the spiritual formation and religious education of their children.

### Principle 3: Commitment to the community

SRE Teachers and Assistants believe the school is both an agent for change and a preserver of foundational values. SRE Teachers and Assistants consider that the students who attend NSW public schools are an integral part of the parish, so SRE Teachers and Assistants have a vital role to play in preparing future citizens, parishioners, civic and church leaders.

### Principle 4: Commitment to sound educational practice

SRE Teachers and Assistants strive for excellence with our students for their own good, and the good of our Church, society, nation and world. SRE Teachers and Assistants strive to create a Christian classroom environment which promotes sound moral values based upon both the teachings of Jesus and the beliefs of the Catholic Church.

## 1. Introduction

The Special Religious Education (SRE) Code of Conduct draws on the Catholic Church, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Vision and Mission statement: "To hear God's people and empower them to participate fully in Christ's mission" and the shared values which underpin our work.

The Code is based on "Integrity in the Service of the Church" – a resource document of principles and standards for lay workers in the Catholic Church in Australia". © *The National Committee for Professional Standards (NCPS), 2011* - A committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops and the Leaders of Religious Institutes in Australia.

The Code also draws on the following State, Federal law and Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle standards:

The NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) Code of Conduct © December 2009 (revised 2012) NSW Department of Education and Communities has also been followed and incorporated in parts.

*Towards Healing* [2000] and *Integrity in Ministry* [June 2004].

*Child Protection Code of Professional Standards for Catholic Schools, CCER and CEO Sydney* amended by Catholic Conference of Religious Educators in State Schools (CCRESS) 2005.

*SRE Code of Conduct* Diocese of Maitland Newcastle 2005-2014.

*Code of Conduct Policy* Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle 2009.

### Related documents:

*Reporting Child Protection Concerns Policy* Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

*ICT Acceptable Use Policy No. 12 2013* Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

*Advocacy & Grievance Policy* Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

*Ombudsman's Act 1974*

*Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*

*Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*

*Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000*

*Religious Education Implementation Procedures 2013* NSW DEC

Codes of Conduct from Archdiocese of Sydney, Dioceses of Bathurst, Broken Bay, Parramatta and Wollongong

*Volunteer Rights and Volunteer Checklist* Volunteering Australia 2009

## 2. The Purpose of the SRE Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct (Code) underpins the work of all those involved in the Ministry of Special Religious Education in NSW public schools that form part of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. The terms Special Religious Education (SRE) and SRE Teacher, SRE Assistant and SRE volunteer will be used throughout this document referring to Catechesis and Catechist. The Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle will be referred to as the Diocese.

The aim of the Code is to guide the SRE volunteer to a better understanding of standards of behaviour which are currently expected by society in general, and the DEC and the Diocese in particular.

This Code does not attempt to provide a complete list of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours but rather a broad framework to assist with ministry in SRE.

The Code also outlines how we can all take responsibility for our own conduct and work together with others, so the work we do is

“...a mission that transforms the ordinary values of the world. It grows slowly, from small beginnings, often unnoticed but always carried forward by the powerful Spirit of God. Its foundation is love: ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with your entire mind’; ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’ In fact, to live the reign of God is a commitment to a way of love. ‘I give you a new commandment; love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you. It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples.’ (Integrity in Ministry pg viii)

Adhering to the Code will assist you to understand what will be appropriate conduct for your work in child-related ministry. It will also help you assist schools in achieving a safe and supportive environment for students, SRE Teachers and Assistants and the broader community of the school. The SRE Code of Conduct applies to all people involved in the ministry of Special Religious Education.

“...A code of conduct is not intended to restrict or stifle the conduct of those professionals to whom it applies. Rather, it is a set of behavioural standards to ensure that professionals themselves preserve their own dignity and respect the human dignity of all to whom they relate in the exercise of their profession....” (Foreword, ‘Integrity in Ministry’ June 2004.)

Special Religious Education (SRE) (also known as Scripture) is an important ministry within the Diocese that supports parents, students, SRE Teachers, clergy and parishes in the religious education of Christian/Catholic students attending Government schools. The Children's Ministries team coordinates this ministry so that the developing faith of children and young people is based on sound educational principles.

Children's Ministries serves the parishes, parents and children of the diocese by research, development and pastoral practice. Support with policies, training and formation, resources and programs are readily available by contacting the Children's Ministries team.

### 3. Who has to comply with the SRE Code of Conduct?

The SRE Code of Conduct applies to all employees, volunteers, clergy, religious and lay people working on behalf of the Diocese. There is an expectation that all people involved in SRE Ministry will comply.

SRE Teachers and Assistants are to endorse the principles of current Child Protection Law and follow the DEC Religious Education Implementation Procedures (2013) as an essential responsibility. The SRE Code of Conduct will assist SRE Teachers and Assistants in understanding and fulfilling their legal and other responsibilities in the ministry.

### 4. What does the Diocese expect of SRE Teachers and Assistants?

As an employee or volunteer, you are required to be aware of all legislation, policies, procedures and work related to the role. The most relevant of these will be made available to you through induction and training. A requirement is for people undertaking the role of SRE Teacher and/or SRE Assistant to engage in the relevant Diocesan SRE training.

As a representative of the Christian/Catholic faith, you will be caring and compassionate towards the students in your class. In doing so you must set appropriate boundaries since you are in a position of authority and have a duty of care for students. There is an expectation that you will only use approved curriculum materials and appropriate resources for SRE lessons.

### 5. What happens if I breach the Code of Conduct?

The Code touches on many significant issues relating to people working with children and young people. SRE Teachers and Assistants are representatives of the Bishop, Priests or Pastoral Coordinators who authorise them and the parish communities that commission them. Special Religious Education Teachers or Assistants who do not comply with the Code of Conduct could be asked and expected to withdraw from SRE and other child-related ministries.

### 6. Reporting concerns about employee conduct

The breach in Code of Conduct may initially be identified by a student, parent/carer, classroom teacher, SRE Coordinator or school staff who would then refer the matter to the authorising person. The Parish Priest or Pastoral Coordinator must be notified of breaches of the Code. This authorising person will determine the course of action that needs to be taken in consultation with the Children's Ministries Team.

All allegations against an SRE Teacher or Assistant must be referred to the Diocesan Professional Conduct and Child Protection Unit (Zimmerman Services) as well as Parish authorities.

## 7. Respect for others

It is not only what we do and say but the way we do and say it that demonstrates our commitment to the Gospel message and to creating a safe and friendly environment in which the children and young people in our care can grow and develop.

**Behaviour, attitudes and language** are an integral part of the SRE lesson. SRE Teachers and Assistants must not discriminate against or harass colleagues, students or members of the public on a number of grounds including gender, marital status, pregnancy, age, race, religion, culture, ethnic or national origin, physical or intellectual impairment or sexual preference or politics. Such harassment or discrimination may constitute an offence under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*.

**Treat students with respect and care:** SRE Teachers and Assistants must always treat students with respect even when their behaviour may be difficult or challenging. There is no place for sarcasm, derogatory remarks, offensive comments or any conduct that may result in emotional distress or psychological harm to a child. Such behaviours include targeted and ongoing criticism, belittling or teasing, excessive or unreasonable demands, hostility, verbal abuse, threatening (e.g. with fear of devil and hell) rejection or scapegoating and using inappropriate locations or social isolation.

**Cultural awareness:** SRE Teachers and Assistants need to be sensitive to cultures and traditions that are different from their own. They should not make statements, or behave in a way that demonstrates ignorance, bias or ridicule towards other denominations, religions or cultures.

**Types of families:** SRE Teachers and Assistants need to be sensitive to the words they use, especially in the classroom, which make any assumptions about a child or young person's background, family status and primary caregivers. The family takes many forms in today's society and SRE Teachers and Assistants must respect the support structures of the children and young people in their care.

**Gender and physical differences:** SRE Teachers and Assistants need to be sensitive to gender, physical and intellectual differences and will therefore avoid language and activities which discriminate.

**School environment:** Every school has a Discipline and Welfare Policy. SRE Teachers and Assistants must obtain a copy of the policy for the schools in which they work and adhere to the policy (see school website).

SRE Teachers and Assistants are to promote an atmosphere of respect for the classroom teacher and school personnel by their language and behaviour. All students are to be treated fairly. An interaction with a student which is discriminating, demeaning or belittling is not acceptable and constitutes a breach of the Code.

## 8. Duty of Care

Duty of care is the legal obligation to provide reasonable care and not harm others. The care of children and young people begins with the attitude of SRE Teachers and Assistants to a variety of issues which can impact on those in our care. Duty of care includes but is not limited to:

- Adequate supervision of SRE classes
- Ensuring a safe physical environment which is free from obstacles and obstructions
- Restricting students from activities in which they or another person may be injured
- Reporting any bullying or harmful behaviour to school authorities
- Seeking assistance from trained school personnel should a medical need for a student arise
- Considering your own safety as well as that of others
- Remembering that safety relates to both physical and psychological wellbeing of individuals

## 9. Volunteer Rights and Volunteer Checklist

Unlike paid staff, volunteers are not covered by awards or work-place agreements. Volunteers however do have rights, some which are enshrined in legislation and some which could be considered the moral obligations of organisations engaging volunteers. Volunteering Australia promotes the following as the basic rights of a volunteer.

As a volunteer you have the right to:

- Work in a healthy and safe environment (Work, Health and Safety Acts/Policies)
- Be interviewed and engaged according to Equal Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination Legislation
- Be adequately covered by insurance
- Be given accurate and truthful information about the organisation for which you are working
- Be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses
- Be given a copy of the organisation's volunteer policy and any other policy that affects work
- Not to fill a position previously held by a paid worker
- Not to do the work of paid staff during industrial disputes
- Have a job description and agreed working hours
- Have access to a grievance procedure
- Be provided with orientation to the organisation
- Have your confidential and personal information dealt with in accordance with the principles of the Privacy Act 1988
- Be provided with sufficient training to do your job

Check that:

- The organisation is a not-for-profit
- The purpose of the organisation matches your own values and beliefs
- The organisation carries volunteer insurance and your role is clear and specific
- The organisation can provide you with written information about its purpose and activities
- You are satisfied that the funds of the organisation are expended in accordance with its Mission

Source: (<http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/volunteering-resources/volunteers/>)

## 10. Responsibilities

As SRE Teachers / Assistants you have a responsibility to:

- Become familiar with and support NSW Department of Education and Training statement of core values, "Values in NSW Public Schools". [www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies)
- Comply with the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle SRE Authorisation policy and process
- Apply for a Working with Children Check (WwCC) clearance number
- Inform the Children's Ministries office of your clearance number for verification
- Agree to and undertake induction, Child Protection and other relevant training
- Become familiar with Child Protection laws, reporting procedures
- Report any concern of risk of significant harm to students directly to the Principal
- Report any situation of reportable conduct to the Principal
- Comply with all reasonable instructions from the Parish Priest, or Parish delegate, the Parish SRE Coordinator or Deanery Coordinator
- Wear a name badge identifying yourself and/or have your Authorisation Card when attending schools
- Regularly and punctually attend SRE classes
- Notify schools in a timely manner if unable to attend a lesson
- Always use the authorised SRE curriculum(s) of the Diocese
- Prepare lessons according to authorised curriculum materials
- Use language, words and behaviours that are not threatening
- Dress appropriately for SRE classes
- Do not let personal feelings adversely affect SRE interactions with students
- Not investigate allegations of misconduct or abuse
- As a person engaged in ministry on behalf of your parish and the Diocese, do not do or say anything that is contrary to the teachings and values of the Catholic Church
- SRE Teachers/Assistants in a NSW public school are required to comply with all reasonable instructions from the school principal, delegate or any supervising teacher
- Become familiar with related laws and policies over time
- Become familiar with individual DEC school policies over time

## 11. Behaviour Management

It is good work practice to make sure that you are aware of and comply with all the applicable school policies, especially the Discipline and Welfare policy and procedures in the school in which you work. Ask the principal of each school, or his/her delegate, for copies of these documents. Schools have policies appropriate to learning, behaviour, privacy and safety. SRE Teachers and Assistants are asked to adhere to these policies.

Practice positive reinforcement and being respectful in all interactions with the students.

Ongoing training in Classroom Management is provided by the Diocese in accordance with DEC expectation of best practice.

## 12. Unacceptable (Prohibited) Behaviour Management practices include

SRE Teachers and Assistants under no circumstance are to;

- Use physical discipline or practice behaviours which humiliate, belittle or frighten students
- Use an object, such as a ruler or piece of chalk, to gain a student's attention
- Hold or restrain a student other than to prevent an injury or harm to another
- Intimidate students by standing over them, making them feel alienated, ashamed, guilty or engaging in discriminating behaviour or disrespectful behaviour

Corporal punishment is prohibited by law. Corporal punishment involves the application of physical force to punish or correct a student unless that physical contact is reasonable and necessary for the protection of any person.

## 13. Appropriate Relationships between SRE Teachers, SRE Assistants and Students

All students have a right to a safe physical and emotional environment. As a diocesan employee part of your role is to promote the safety, welfare and well-being of children and young people. You must actively seek to prevent harm to children and young people and to support those who have been harmed.

All SRE Teachers and Assistants are required to follow the SRE Code of Conduct. All SRE Teachers and Assistants are required to understand and observe current Child Protection Policies and attend training in Child Protection. If you become concerned about a child or young person's well-being it is important to report/speak with the school principal or delegate.

SRE Teachers and Assistants must not engage in improper conduct that could lead to Reportable Conduct. SRE Teachers and Assistants must not:

- Impose physical, verbal or psychological punishment
- Have an inappropriate relationship with any student
- Give gifts of a personal nature that encourages the student to think they have a special relationship with the SRE Teacher or Assistant
- Expose a student to material that contains messages and themes that are violent or inappropriate given the student's age and curriculum experience
- Invite student(s) to your home or hold conversations of an intimate nature with students
- Use sexual innuendo or inappropriate language and/or material with a student
- Have contact with a student through social media, letters, phone etcetera

### 14. Being alone with students

You should avoid, as far as is reasonable, situations where you are alone with a student. When responsible for a single student SRE Teachers and Assistants are advised to discuss the situation with the school authorities. If ever alone with a student be sure to locate yourself and the student in a visible area like the hallway and/or make sure classroom doors are open.

You are reminded to become familiar with Diocesan Child Protection policies and related laws:

- The law prohibiting sexual or inappropriate relations with a person under the age of consent (16 years), Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, Crimes Act 1900
- The law prohibiting any sexual or inappropriate relations between a volunteer (employee) and student under the age of 18 (NSW Ombudsman 1974)
- The law prohibiting child pornography (NSW Ombudsman Act 1974)
- Privacy laws
- Provision of prohibited drugs
- An act of violence towards another person
- Any offence against a minor person

## 15. Relationships with students and their families outside school hours

A healthy student/teacher relationship is confined to the school and classroom.

SRE Teachers and Assistants must not give details of their email, telephone numbers or address to a child or young person.

If teaching Catholic students the Catholic SRE Teachers and Assistants may notify families of parish events by agreement with the school principal and others involved in SRE at the school.

If contact happens through family and social networks and is an existing relationship with a student's family, avoiding contact with that student and their family would be impractical and undesirable.

## 16. Appropriate use of DVDs, film clips, internet sites, YouTube, and/or social networking sites

Check for age classification when using electronic media in the SRE classroom. Use only sites which are child-safe. Internet sites must be free from inappropriate content.

## 17. Use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco

SRE Teachers and Assistants are to support a safe, productive and healthy workplace. Children and young people are not to be given alcohol, tobacco or prohibited substances. Students are to be encouraged in healthy practices. SRE Teachers and Assistants must not be affected by alcohol or drugs and the use of alcohol or drugs must not put themselves or others at risk of harm. Do not enter school premises under the influence of alcohol or prohibited drugs. Any questions about the application of your school's policy should be discussed with the school principal or his/her delegate.

## 18. Identifying and managing conflicts of interest

SRE Teachers and Assistants must remain impartial and objective. A conflict of interest can involve financial gain or other benefits. SRE Teachers and Assistants are not to use SRE lessons as an opportunity to proselytize or to use information about students for church purposes. (Proselytize - attempt to recruit or convert someone to one's own way of thinking, believing or worshipping).

## 19. Recruitment/Staffing/Resourcing of SRE

The staffing of the SRE ministry is the responsibility of each parish. The DEC expects SRE classes to be adequately staffed. The Parish Priest or Pastoral Coordinator is the authorising person and some parishes have a SRE Coordinator.

The resources used for SRE are the responsibility of the local parish. This is not a responsibility of the DEC. Schools may assist with writing equipment, photocopying, the use of teaching spaces and technology e.g. interactive whiteboards. SRE Teachers and Assistants are to be economical, look after resources and avoid waste.

## 20. Record keeping and protecting confidential information

A record serves an essential administration, legal and historical purpose. Records may be class rolls, emails, electronic documents, digital images and audio recordings, correspondence, files, forms, plans, drawings, notes, photographs, film or memory cards for cameras.

Any class rolls are confidential. Class rolls are for the sole purpose of SRE.

A copy of the SRE Authorisation Form is kept by the Parish, the SRE volunteer and the Children's Ministry Office, in paper and electronic form.

SRE statistical data is collected once a year. The data reflects numbers of students in schools only and has no private information relating to students or schools.

## 21. Gifts

It would be acceptable to receive small gifts for example after a presentation, from a student's family by way of thanks. Any gift over the value of \$50 must be declared and returned. Never accept cash gifts of any amount.

If you are offered a bribe (i.e. anything given in order to persuade you to act improperly), you must refuse it, explain why it is not appropriate and immediately report the matter to the Principal or Parish Priest/Pastoral Coordinator.

Accepting or giving a gift or bribe has the potential to compromise your position by creating a sense of obligation and undermining your impartiality. You must not create an impression that any person or organisation is influencing the Catholic Church or the DEC.

## 22. Leaving/retiring from SRE Teaching/Assisting

When leaving the ministry it is appropriate to advise the Parish Priest, SRE Parish Coordinator or other relevant personnel of your intention. If possible consider a handover process to the next volunteer. All equipment, teacher's manuals and other resources that do not belong to you are to be returned. Class rolls are to be destroyed.

## 23. Copyright and intellectual property

All resources listed in approved SRE curriculum 'Teacher's Manuals' have copyright approval from the authors and composers for use in SRE lessons. Only works of music, art or literature for which the SRE volunteer has copyright approval may be used to present an SRE lesson or assembly.

All government schools and most non-government schools are covered by the Statutory Text and Artistic Licence. When conducting a lesson in an educational setting an SRE volunteer is also covered under this licence. Please see the following link for guidelines and further information: <http://www.smartcopying.edu.au/information-sheets/schools/educational-licences>