



CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS IN STATE SCHOOLS

CCRESS EXECUTIVE

CATHOLIC CHURCH SUPPORTS SRE IN SCHOOLS

The provision of Special Religious Education (SRE) has been integral to NSW public education since the Public Instruction Act 1880. It was, and remains, an important acknowledgement and reminder that education is centred on the child as a whole person, with family, culture, ethnicity, life experience, faith affiliation and spirituality together defining the character and identity of the child.

Recognising and providing for all these aspects of the child promotes mental health and respects human dignity. Further, Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that our children have a right to an education which respects their cultural identity and affiliation, and includes the development of a sense of responsibility towards others, and respect for cultural diversity. The Australian Curriculum General Capabilities state that students will communicate across cultures, consider and develop multiple perspectives and empathise with others. Certainly, children must know, understand and respect their own cultural identity before they can compare it to others.

At a time when children, for their essential well-being, need connection to their faith and culture like never before, there have been recent, but not new, calls from the NSW Primary Principals Association, the NSW Secondary Principals Council, and the NSW Teachers Federation to remove SRE from Public School timetables, to simplify a crowded curriculum and give the time back to teaching. However, SRE time was never “taken away” from teachers. It has always been an integral part of NSW Public Education.

It is appropriate and right that the NSW Department of Education seek to streamline curriculum content and ensure that students are getting the best education that can be provided. Indeed, the Catholic Church, along with many other interested parties, is keen to hear about all the content which Principals and Teachers might decide is overcrowding our children’s days at school.

However, no attention should be taken from the learner at the midst of the education process. All parents have the right to choose that their child’s education includes a knowledge and understanding of their faith. It is, after all, this connection to their faith and culture that guides ethical and moral choices. It forms an awareness of and respect for all cultures, as they see their buddies go off to their SRE or SEE class, and promotes harmony in the community. Classroom teachers who have developed a relationship with their students know that unless they are “seeing” the whole child, they are not teaching the whole child, nor is the child learning to capacity.

The Catholic Church supports parent/carer choice of SRE in class time for the thousands of Catholic families that send their children to public schools in NSW and call to both sides of politics to support the legislated right of parent/carers to continue to choose SRE as part of their children’s public school education.

Anna O’Dwyer

CCRESS Liaison Officer

23 September 2020

<https://www.ccross.org.au>

Alison Newell Chair T: 02 8379 1637 E: alison.newell@bbcatholic.org.au	Doug Mawhinney Deputy Chair & Treasurer T: 9307 8330 E: douglas@ccdsydney.catholic.edu.au	Michael Tebbutt Secretary & Special Projects T: 4334 3367 E: michael.tebbutt@bbcatholic.org.au	Anna O’Dwyer Liaison Officer T: 02 6627 6286 E: anna.odwyer@lism.catholic.edu.au
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