



*Catholic Diocese of Bathurst*

**Special Religious Education  
CODE OF CONDUCT**

*Bound with Love*

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## *Catholic Diocese of Bathurst*

This document is an acknowledgement of the previous document originally formulated in 2005 by Sister Maureen Schiemer rsj and Mrs Gene Smith, retired Principal of Mackillop College.

The document was further reviewed and updated, 2014, by Miss Helen Ryan, Diocesan CCD SRE Director and Mrs Vicki Mair, SRE Coordinator Diocese of Bathurst. Guidance was provided by Fr Paul Devitt, Episcopal Vicar for Education and Mr Paul Crennan, Chair of Catholic Education Council for the Diocese of Bathurst.

The current version of this document was reviewed and updated in September 2018 by CCD staff.



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### **Message from Bishop McKenna**

I am pleased to introduce this revised Code of Conduct of which, with the advice of our Catholic Education Council, I have approved publication.

This Code will provide assurance for me and other relevant authorities, including parents, that our teachers of Special Religious Education have a clear set of principles and rules in carrying out their important responsibilities. The Code will also be of great assistance to them.

I take this opportunity to thank God for the generous and dedicated work that these volunteers undertake in the service of the Gospel.

**+ Michael McKenna  
Bishop of Bathurst**

October 2014



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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 provision of a safe and supportive environment is an essential element to ensure that each student entrusted to the care of a NSW Public School is to be affirmed in his or her dignity and worth as a person. The Code of Conduct will assist in achieving a safe and supportive school environment for students, SRE Teachers/Assistants and the school's broader community. This is the environment in which Catholic Parish SRE Teachers/Assistants carry out their ministry of Special Religious Education (SRE) to children attending Public Schools.

It is expected that Catholic SRE Teachers/Assistants in schools endorse the principles of child protection as a fundamental responsibility and it is within this context that this Code of Conduct for Catholic SRE Teachers/Assistants has been prepared.

Compliance with the various pieces of Child Protection Legislation is mandatory and non-negotiable for all persons involved in this ministry. It is essential that all participants be fully acquainted with and adhere to their legal, ethical and moral responsibilities pertaining to children at all times.

The Special Religious Education (SRE) Code of Conduct draws on the Catholic Church, Diocese of Bathurst Vision and Mission statement: “To empower God’s people to participate fully in God’s Mission” and the shared values which underpin our work.

The Code is based on *“Integrity in the Service of the Church”* (see below).

The Code draws on the following Church, Diocesan, State and Federal standards:

1. *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.
2. *The NSW Department of Education (DoE) Code of Conduct* © July 2014 (updated 2016)
3. *Towards Healing* [2000] and *Integrity in Ministry* [2010].
4. *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.
5. *Reporting Child Protection Concerns Policy* Diocese of Bathurst
6. *Social Networking Policy*. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference May 2015.
7. *Social Media Policy* NSW DoE March 2018
8. *Complaints Policy/Guidelines, Catholic Diocese of Bathurst 2014* Anti-Discrimination Act 1977
9. *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*
10. *Work Health & Safety Act 2011*
11. NSW DoE Special Religious Education *Implementation Procedures 2019*



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12. Codes of Conduct from Archdiocese of Sydney, Dioceses of Bathurst, Broken Bay, Parramatta and Wollongong
13. *Volunteer Rights and Volunteer Checklist* Volunteering Australia 2009
14. Equal Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination Act 1977
15. Guidelines for Professional Conduct in the Protection of Children and Young People. NSW Catholic Systemic Schools, April 2014.

## 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 Bathurst. 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 Bathurst 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, the DoE 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 neighbour 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 appropriate conduct for your work in child-related ministry will be. 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



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that supports parents, students, SRE Teachers, clergy and parishes in the religious education of Christian/Catholic students attending Government schools. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) team coordinates this ministry so that the developing faith of children and young people is based on sound educational principles.

The CCD Coordinating Team 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 CCD Coordinating 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 Department of Education Special Religious Education Implementation Procedures (2019) 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 & 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 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 and Priests 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.



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### 6. Reporting concerns about employee conduct

A 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 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 CCD Coordinating Team and the Catholic Diocese of Bathurst Special Religious Education Complaints Policy.

All Child Protection allegations against an SRE Teacher or Assistant must be referred to the Safeguarding Office 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 such grounds as gender, marital status, pregnancy, age, race, religion, culture, ethnic or national origin, physical or intellectual impairment, 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 the 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.

**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.



## **8. Duty of Care**

Duty of care is the legal obligation to provide reasonable care and not harm to 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 of 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 & Safety Act 2011)
- Be treated as co-workers. This includes job descriptions, Equal Employment Opportunity, Occupational Health & Safety, anti-discrimination legislation and organisational grievance processes.
- Be asked for their permission before any job-related reference, police or other checks are conducted.
- A job or task worthwhile to them, for no more than 16 hours a week on a regular basis in one role.
- Know the purpose and “ground rules” of the organisation.
- Appropriate orientation and training for the job.
- Be kept informed of organisational changes and the reasons for the changes.
- A place to work and suitable tools for the job.
- Reimbursement of agreed expenses.
- Be heard and make suggestions.
- Personal accident insurance (in place of workers compensation insurance).
- A verbal reference or statement of service, if appropriate.

*Source: <https://www.volunteering.com.au/for-organisations/managing-volunteers/rights-and-responsibilities/>*



**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

## **10. Responsibilities**

As SRE Teachers / Assistants you have a responsibility to:

- Become familiar with and support NSW Department of Education statement of core values, “Values in NSW Public Schools”. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library>
- Comply with the Diocese of Bathurst SRE Authorisation process
- Apply for a Working with Children Check (WWCC) number
- Inform the Catholic Chancery office of your clearance number for verification
- Agree to and undertake induction, Child Protection and other relevant training eg. Classroom Management.
- Become familiar with Child Protection laws and reporting procedures.
- Report any concern about risk of significant harm to students directly to the principal
- Report any situation of reportable conduct in accordance with legal obligations and to the principal.
- Comply with all reasonable instructions from the Parish Priest, CCD Coordinator or the Parish SRE Coordinator
- Wear a name badge identifying yourself and 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 an authorised SRE curriculum(a) of the Diocese
- Prepare lessons according to authorised curriculum materials
- Use language, words and behaviours that are not threatening
- Dress appropriately for SRE classes
- Not let personal feelings adversely affect interactions with students
- Not investigate allegations of misconduct or abuse but to report them as required.



- 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, staff delegate or any supervising teacher
- Become familiar with related laws and policies over time
- Become familiar with individual DoE 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 DoE expectation of best practice.

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

SRE Teachers and Assistants under no circumstance are to;

- Use physical discipline or practise 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. Relationships between SRE Teachers, SRE Assistants & 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.

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 etc.

## **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 1914
- The law prohibiting any sexual or inappropriate relations between a volunteer (employee) and student under the age of 18 (NSW Ombudsman 1974)
- The Crimes Act 1914, Crimes Amendment (Child Pornography) Act 2007.
- There is a desire to identify legislation picked up, reference to the legislation by industry bodies and the Department of Education.
- 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. View all content before showing to the class. Comply with DoE Social Media Policy 2018 and ACBC Social Networking Policy 2015.

## **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 DoE expects SRE classes to be adequately staffed. The Parish Priest is the authorising person and some parishes have an SRE Coordinator.

The resources used for SRE are the responsibility of the local parish. This is not a responsibility of the DoE. 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. Recordkeeping and protecting confidential information**

A record serves as 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 Teacher Engagement Form is kept with the Safe Ministry Check and Clearance Form by the Catholic Chancery Office at Bathurst. Each Parish will receive notification of the reception of the forms and verification of WWCC numbers.

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.

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 DoE.

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

When leaving the ministry, it is appropriate to advise the Parish Priest, SRE Parish Coordinator or CCD 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. Copy right and intellectual property**

All resources listed in SRE Teacher's manuals have copyright approval from the authors and composers for use in SRE.

It is important not to copy or sell any resources expressly purchased for SRE.

Only works of music, art or literature for which the SRE Teacher or Assistant has copyright approval may be used in the presentation of an SRE lesson or assembly or during Mass.

Any or all works of music, art or literature used in the presentation of an SRE lesson or assembly or during Mass must be recorded on parish copyright records.