

Did you know?

(The seventh in a series of articles exploring religious education in government schools.)

Approved religious persuasions

A number of TCFNSW members have asked: Who gets to teach special religious education (SRE) in government schools?

Each religious group (persuasion) needs to have Ministerial approval to teach SRE in government schools. Once the group is approved it has the authority to authorise teachers on its behalf.

Until the 1980s most approved groups were the well-known Christian churches. The Rawlinson Report, *Religious Education in NSW Government Schools* 1981, broadened the definition of religious persuasion and set criteria for the approval of new groups.

The current criteria include the provision of:

1. a copy of the constitution and a statement of doctrine or beliefs
2. details of the general organisation and the appointment of clergy
3. details of the number of members and adherents
4. details of the places at which your persuasion conducts its business
5. confirmation that the persuasion is independent, not a member of a wider "umbrella" organisation and not subject to the direction or control of any other organisation or body
6. details of who would provide the religious instruction in schools
7. an assurance that the requirements of the *Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998*, including the use of *Prohibited Employment Declaration* forms, are implemented and that a procedure is established so that no teacher is authorised who has a criminal conviction for: violence, sexual assault, providing prohibited drugs or a crime against a minor.

The growth in the number of persuasions has not been only with non-Christian religions but also with the growing number of new Christian persuasions and independent Christian churches. A current list of approved persuasions can be viewed on the web site www.curriculumsupport.det.nsw.edu.au/index.htm

The criteria have proven useful and expanded the number of approved providers of SRE in schools. However, the distinction between a religious persuasion and a cult remains a grey area.