



Catholic SRE 'Scripture' classes - update

24 March 2020

Dear Clergy, Parish SRE Coordinators and Catechists,

Statement

- Catholic Special Religious Education (**SRE**) classes in public schools are being paused for the remainder of Term 1, 2020. This pause in the delivery of Catholic SRE classes will be reassessed in due course in accordance with Government health decision announcements.

The above statement was communicated to the NSW Department of Education yesterday afternoon (23 March) to enable coordinated messaging by the Department to School Principals to help them over the remainder of this week to rearrange local public school timetables.

"Next steps" for pausing the delivery of Catholic SRE classes

- **Parish Clergy and Catechist Coordinators** are advised to also inform your local School Principals, as soon as possible, that the delivery of Catholic SRE classes is being paused for Term 1. Please consider requests from your local School Principals that help them to withdraw Catholic SRE classes from school timetables as soon as practicably possible in a coordinated way. Principals will appreciate time to rearrange class groupings where SRE classes are still operating.
- Due to SRE being an integral part of the NSW public school curriculum, Catholic SRE Providers in NSW are exploring other available options to provide online learning resources, in consultation with the Department of Education online learning and best practice recommendations, for parents/carers to choose to use with their children.
- If you have any questions, please contact your deanery CCD Faith Education Officer, as per your usual lines of communication.

Background information

As you would be aware, our Federal and State Government leaders are meeting regularly to ensure the Australian community responds with increasing urgency to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney appreciates the manner in which Catechists have responded to the ongoing delivery of SRE classes where possible in recent weeks. In doing so, we have respected the advice, directives and strategies of the NSW Departments of Health and Education, the decisions of local schools, in coordinated collaboration with other providers of SRE.

Catholic SRE providers across our NSW-ACT Dioceses, along with other SRE providers, have maintained the delivery of SRE as best as practically possible, consistent with the expectations of the NSW Department of Education, because SRE is regarded by the Department as an essential class within the timetabled school curriculum, which requires considered and coordinated management.

In accordance with NSW Health advice, the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney has also supported the individual decisions of SRE Catechists to withdraw from delivering classes.

In recent days, a number of key SRE providers from other Christian denominations and other faiths, in weighing up what is sustainable for them, have advised they are removing their teachers from delivering SRE. As a result, larger numbers of students are being managed into other alternative meaningful activities whilst schools ensure social distancing practices are maintained.

This evolving situation has made it difficult for schools to conduct SRE as normal.

Yesterday (23 March), an update was received from the Department of Education to advise that, whilst Government decisions are still being made, it is very likely the Department will shortly move to withdraw all types of volunteers from schools for the protection of volunteers and school communities. We appreciate this indication from the Department and immediately moved a recommendation:

The Catholic Conference of Religious Educators in State Schools NSW (**CCRESS**) recommended a *pause to the involvement of the NSW-ACT Catholic Dioceses in the delivery of SRE for the remainder of Term 1, 2020*, whilst it explores other modes of delivery for Catholic SRE.

This recommendation has the endorsement of Bishop Brian Mascord DD, the CCRESS liaison Bishop for the NSW-ACT Catholic Bishops Conference, and will be reassessed as health management decisions are released by our Government.

Thank you for your wonderful support and commitment to our families who have chosen Catholic SRE for their children. Your continued understanding of this quickly evolving situation is much appreciated. We will keep you informed.

We invite SRE Catechists to pray for school communities during what would normally have been their timetabled SRE lesson times with students.

As you are so used to doing as Catechists, may we be a people of hope, compassionate service and a reassuring presence in witnessing to the love of Jesus.

With prayers and best wishes,

Douglas Mawhinney | Director
Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) Sydney
Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney

10.00am 24 March 2020