

# Is There a Place for Religion in Schools?

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**T**he public discourse on the topic of religion has become increasingly toxic. It is no different in our education institutions, especially in public schools. In 2016, with growing pressure from various parent and education advocacy groups, the Victorian government removed Special Religious Instruction (SRI) from Victorian public school classrooms. At that time, this was the only form of religious education that was available to students. As a result, every year more than 550,000 students (in Years 1-10) and 45,000 teachers in Victorian public schools have no genuine presentation of Christian beliefs and worldview during class time.

In response to this challenge, Faith Values was established in 2020. Its vision is to see all young Victorians provided with quality religious education at school so that they might flourish in a successful and cohesive multicultural society.

After examining the possibilities, we believe that we can present the Christian faith in classrooms again via the statutory General Religious Education (GRE). As GRE exposes students to religious and non-religious worldviews, we recognise that this is an opportunity to collaborate with other faiths to provide religious education in Victoria.

To this end, under the auspices of the Faith Communities Council of Victoria, we have been meeting with other faith community leaders (Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh). As a collective multifaith education collaboration, we are aware that the default setting in our public schools is totally secular. It presumes that people of faith are odd or idiosyncratic and that faith is irrational and subjective.



Over the past two years, we have been working with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), which has acknowledged that more could be done with GRE in schools. The VCAA is also aware that teachers are often ill-equipped to teach a religious worldview. As a result, we have been offered the opportunity to help them address this challenge.

We have also partnered with the Melbourne Graduate School of Education to help identify the barriers for teachers and students engaging in GRE, and to globally survey the best resources for teaching GRE. This re-

search will help us to develop engaging and relevant resources for students in Victorian classrooms.

As we develop momentum in our mission, we continue to seek partners who can support us through prayer, finances, and skilled volunteers. With your support we believe we can help the next generation encounter the Christian faith in school class time through GRE. ☺

*For further information on Faith Values and how you can support its GRE initiative, contact Herbert Um at [Herbert.um@faithvalues.org.au](mailto:Herbert.um@faithvalues.org.au).*