



RELIGION POLICY

1. PREAMBLE

The South African Schools Act (Act 94 of 1996) upholds the constitutional rights of all citizens to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion, and freedom from unfair discrimination on any grounds whatsoever, including religion, in public education institutions.

Within this constitutional framework, and as a public school, the school has a responsibility to promote the core values of a democratic society, through the curriculum, through extracurricular activities, and in its approach in general. This policy has been developed with reference to the following:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996
- National Education Policy (Act 27 of 1996) and amendments
- South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) and amendments
- National Policy on Religion and Education of 2003 (“NPR”)
- Western Cape Provincial School Education Act, Act 12 of 1997
- Department of Basic Education Circular 01/LEG/2018

2. DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

equitable basis	means on a basis that is deemed fair, right, reasonable and just and gives equal treatment to everyone.
freedom of conscience	refers to the freedom of an individual to consider a fact, point of view or thought independent of others.
freedom of religion, belief, and opinion	is the right to choose, express or practise any religion, belief or opinion free from coercion, prejudice or interference.
parent	has the meaning assigned to it in the South African Schools Act.
religion	“is used to describe the comprehensive and fundamental orientation in the world mostly with regard to ideas of divinity, spiritual and non-secular beliefs, including (but not restricted to) organised forms of religion and certain worldviews as well as being used collectively to refer to those organisations which are established in order to promote and protect these beliefs” (NPR).
religion education	“is a curricular programme with clear age-appropriate educational aims and objectives, for teaching and learning about religion, religions, and religious diversity in South Africa and the world.” (NPR).
religious holiday/holy day/festival	is a day or period of observation, remembrance, celebration of any cultural or religious activity that is recognised as a feature of a particular cultural or religious community.
religious instruction	“refers to a programme of instruction which is aimed at providing information regarding a particular set of religious beliefs with a view to promoting the inculcation and adherence thereto” (NPR).
religious observance	“are those activities, behaviours, and practices that recognise and express the views, beliefs, and commitments of a particular religion, and may include gatherings of adherents, prayer times, dress and diets” (NPR).



school	refers to Westerford High School.
school community	includes all learners and members of staff of the school and all parents/guardians of learners who, at any time, attend the school.
school day	“entails that portion of each day in which it is compulsory for educators and learners to be at school” (NPR) and includes the seven hours contact time that is expected of educators and learners, including breaks, compulsory activities, assembly and designated extramural activities.

SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SRP	Westerford High School’s Religion Policy

3. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this religion policy is to:

- recognise that all members of the school community have a Constitutional right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion.
- ensure that there are no practices at the school that discriminate against learners, their families, or staff on the basis of religion.
- ensure that all religions in the school are protected and respected and accorded dignity and equal status.
- describe how various aspects relating to religion will be accommodated in the school.

4. APPLICATION AND SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- This policy applies to all members of the school community.
- Visitors to the school, including education department officials, and representatives of faith-based organisations and political parties are required to respect the Constitutional right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion and the principles of the SRP while on the school premises or during a school event.

5. PRINCIPLES

- The school accepts the Constitutional right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion and its obligation to ensure this right is respected by all members of the school community.
- Recognising the diversity of religions, beliefs, opinions, and cultures of the school community, the school accepts its obligation to promote the core values of a democratic society.
- The school will exercise its right to allow religious observances on an equitable basis and participation in them will be free and voluntary.
- The school will not tolerate discrimination against any person based on their religion.
- The school will act against any person who fails to adhere to this SRP using appropriate strategies provided in terms of applicable school policies and codes or South African law.
- Parents/guardians are requested to assist the school in its adherence to this policy by, for example, informing the school of dietary and other necessary requirements relating to a learner’s religion.
- No learner, staff member, parent or visitor may attempt to impose a religious belief or opinion on another person.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SGB

- The SGB, in conjunction with the SMT, is responsible for developing and monitoring the implementation of the SRP and must do so in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including leaders of the school's faith-based societies.
- The SRP will be reviewed every three years and when there are changes in legislation or interpretation of the legislation.
- Where necessary, the SGB will assist the principal when action must be taken following breaches of the SRP.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL

- The principal must ensure that the school community is educated regarding the SRP and that the policy is implemented and adherence to it is monitored.
- The principal is responsible for instituting action against any person who acts in contravention of the SRP using the appropriate disciplinary and/or legal remedies. Where necessary, the SGB's assistance will be sought.

8. POLICY STATEMENTS

8.1 Formal appraisal/evaluation and religion

- Wherever feasible/practicable, the school will ensure that its timetables concerning formal evaluation/appraisal of learners' work, as well as major, whole-school cultural and sporting activities, take cognisance of the holy days of the various religions to which learners at the school are known to be adherents.
- It will further ensure that no learner is disadvantaged in their appraisal/evaluation outcomes, as a direct consequence of them having observed a religious holiday or carried out a religious practice expected of them by their religion.

8.2 Religion education

- Religion education will take place in accordance with the NPR. This education forms part of the learning area Life Orientation.
- Teaching should, at all times, engender a sense of acceptance, security, and respect for learners with differing values, cultural backgrounds, and religious traditions.
- The school believes that by teaching learners about the role of religion in history, society, and the world, a unified, multi-tradition programme in the study of religion forms an important part of a well-balanced and complete education.
- At no time may any educator in any subject or learning area promote any particular religion, except where an educator is merely affirming their personal religious identity and/or is asked to expand on matters related to their personal identity. Instead of promoting a religious position, there should be, at all times, a balanced approach to teaching and learning about religion.
- The teaching of religion education must be sensitive to religious interests by ensuring that individuals and groups are protected from ignorance, stereotypes, caricatures, and denigration.
- The teaching of religion education is to be done by appropriately trained professional educators registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE).
- Representatives of religious organisations who are registered with SACE could be engaged and, as with other learning areas, subjects and societies, occasional guest facilitators from various religions may be utilised, provided that this is done on an equitable basis. Such guest facilitators need not be registered with SACE, provided they and the class/ society remain under the authority of an educator.

8.3 Religious observances

- In recognition of the diverse religions and denominations found among the school community, the school's religious observances in the main must be conducted to accommodate the diversity of religious faiths and beliefs on an equitable basis.
- The school will make its facilities available for religious observances by staff or learners of any representative faith group in the school that upholds the values of the school. Such observances may only be conducted outside school contact time, but may not infringe upon the school's formal education objectives, and are subject to the conditions that the SGB may impose.
- Religious observances may be conducted on the school premises provided that such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and that attendance by learners and members of the staff is free and voluntary.
- This policy makes allowance for meetings of religious societies or groups, outside the formal school curriculum, on school premises, provided that opportunities be afforded in an equitable manner to all religious groups represented at the school, that no denigration or caricaturing of any other religion takes place, and that attendance at such meetings be voluntary.

8.4 Educator participation in religious observances

- Educator participation in religious observances is free and voluntary.
- Educators have to be objective about religion while carrying out their duties as educators. They must treat all different religious and cultural traditions with fairness and respect.
- Educators should not engage in or lead religious activities of learners during contact time.
- Educators may neither reward nor punish learners because they agree or disagree with their personal religious views.

8.5 Religious instruction

- By arrangement with the principal, religious organisations and school religious clubs are permitted, on an equitable basis, to conduct extra-curricular religious instruction activities on the school premises.
- By arrangement with the principal, religious instruction activities, religious societies and gatherings may be permitted on the school premises during break times on condition that they do not extend beyond the break times.
- Religious instruction may be conducted by external persons accredited by faith communities who have been cleared to work with children. If a teacher is not present in the venue where the instruction takes place, each learner in attendance must have produced a consent form from their parent to support their child's participation in the instruction.
- Participation in religious instruction must be free and voluntary.

8.6 Freedom of conscience

- No person employed at the school shall attempt to indoctrinate learners into any particular belief or religion nor denigrate any religion during school contact time.
- In this regard, the school shall respect the right and duties of the parents to provide direction to their children in the exercise of their rights as learners, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacity of children concerned.
- The SGB recognises the right of educators and non-educators to freedom of conscience.

8.7 Freedom of religion

- Learners are allowed to participate in religious holidays/festivals.
- Arrangements should be made to make sure that the affected learners are able to catch-up with their academic work/schedule.
- Parents of learners and members of staff may request leave of absence to observe religious holidays/holy days/festivals.
- Learners are not required to produce an absentee letter on the day they return to school, parents may just inform the school via email or phone.
- Educators and non-educator staff who wish to observe a religious holiday/festival must complete the leave form, and indicate that the leave applied for is special leave for religious observance.

8.8 School Calendar

- The school will ensure that religious holidays of all religions represented in the school will be included on the annual school calendar to ensure that during the setting of examinations and tests, pupils are not prejudiced by their attendance at religious observances.
- As far as possible, educators will inform learners in advance of what will be covered and provide learning materials and reasonable assistance to help them catch up with any missed work on religious holidays/holy days/festivals.
- As far as possible, formal assessments will not be conducted on religious holidays/holy days/festivals and testing, and examination timetables will take account of these days.
- Major school events, parent meetings, and whole-school sporting and cultural activities will not be scheduled on religious holidays/holy days/festivals unless this cannot be avoided.

8.9 Closure of School

- Where a religious holiday/festival will result in large numbers of learners and educators being absent from school on a particular day, the school may consider closing for that specific day.
- The school would need to apply through the WCED District Director to get permission to close the school for that specific day.

8.10 Display of religious symbols

- Religious symbols may be displayed for educational or artistic purposes on an equitable basis and there should be no denigration of any religions.
- Religious groups that have been permitted to use the school facilities for religious instruction of learners during break or after school must remove any religious symbols or religious material from the venue after use.
- Groups hiring the school facilities must adhere to the terms of the use agreement which will include the removal of all religious material after use of the facilities.

8.11 School times

- The times of the school day have been determined to ensure that the required number of hours teaching time per week are met and to enable members of the school community to perform their religious duties.

8.12 Additional concessions for religious or cultural reasons

- This policy and the Code of Conduct for Learners provide as far as possible, for the necessary religious observances of learners and staff members.



- Where a person requires further concessions, the staff member or parent of a learner must apply to the SGB or principal (if delegated by the SGB) stating the grounds for requiring additional concessions.
- The principal will not unreasonably withhold permission but will do so if the concession is likely to disrupt the disciplined and purposeful school environment or impact on the quality of the learning experience.

8.13 Religious attire and symbols

- The school uniform rules provide for learners to select from a choice of clothing items such that members of all religions will be able to comply with uniform rules.
- The dress code for staff places no restrictions on staff members wearing appropriate attire relating to their religion, including the wearing of religious symbols, having due regard to the school's values reflected in the school's Diversity and Inclusivity Policy.
- Learners may apply for the necessary permission from the Deputy Principal in charge of discipline to deviate from the official school uniform for religious and cultural reasons.
- The school will regulate any attire associated with a particular religion, in accordance with the school's values reflected in the school's Diversity and Inclusivity Policy and the school's Uniform Policy.

8.14 Catering

- The school tuckshop will endeavour to provide food suitable for all religious groups.
- Where it is possible, the dietary needs of different religions will be catered for at all school events and tours.
- Parents representing religious groups may be asked to assist the school so that relevant catering requirements are understood and can be catered for.

8.15 Religion and admissions

- Criteria for admission of learners to public schools should not unfairly discriminate against learners on the basis of their religion, thought, belief and opinion.

APPROVAL

This SRP for Westerford High School was adopted by the SGB at a meeting held at the school on 21 September 2022

Recommended by: (Principal) (print name)		Signature:	
Date:			
Approved by: (SGB Chairperson) (Print name)		Signature:	
Date:			
Verification by WCED: (District Director) (Print Name)		Signature:	
Date			