



Religious Policy



Date of Adoption by SGB _____ Signed: _____

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1. Preamble

The South African Schools Act mandates the School Governing Body (SGB) to determine the religion policy of a school. The said religion policy must be aligned to policy published in terms of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 as well as the South African Constitution. This religion policy articulates the school's commitment to ensuring that all learners have access to quality education without any fear of discrimination on any grounds.

2. The purpose of the Religion Policy

The primary purpose of the policy is to ensure that no religious discrimination of any description is practiced at the school and develop a democratic respect of our country's diverse cultural and religious traditions. The policy covers the different aspects of Religion Education, Religious Instructions and Religious Observances. It will also ensure that all religions in a school are accorded due respect and pride of place in the school. This policy will ensure that the school makes the right religion choices to ensure that everyone involved with the school feels comfortable that their rights are respected. The school's commitment to delivery of the National Curriculum will be prioritized in matters relating to religious observances. Further, this policy recognizes our religious and cultural diversity, and therefore promotes respect for and tolerance of all religions. Where this policy is silent on issues relating to Religion, relevant national and regional policy will be applied.

3. Definitions

- **Learner:** Any person registered to receive education at the school
- **District Director:** Means the officer of the department responsible for the administration of education
- **Religion:** Is used to describe the comprehensive and fundamental orientation in the world belief system with regard to ideas of divinity, spiritual and non-secular beliefs, the organization thereof which are established in order to promote and protect these beliefs
- **Head of Department:** Means the head of an education department
- **Parent:** 'parent' means— (a) the biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a learner; (b) person legally entitled to custody of a learner; or (c) the person who

undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) or (b) towards the learner's education at school

- **Principal:** Means an educator appointed or acting as the head of a school
- **School Governing Body:** Relevant body responsible for Governance issues
- **Religious observance:** Activities, behaviors and practices that recognize and express the views, beliefs and commitments of a particular religion “the
- **School:** Nexus Primary school
- **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:** Free from religious expression, coercion and prejudice
- **Religion Education:** Describes a set of curriculum outcomes which define what a learner should know about that religion
- **Religious instruction:** Refers to a program of instruction that is aimed at providing information regarding a particular set of religious beliefs with a view to promoting the inculcation and adherence to.
- **Religious holiday:** Any recognized day of festivities celebrated by cultural or religious communities.
- **Religious festival:** a day or period of celebration of any cultural or religious activity that is recognized as a feature of a particular cultural or religious community
- **School day:** Refers to that portion of each day in which it is compulsory for teachers and learners to be at school. It entails the 7 hours contact time that is expected of educators and learners, including breaks, compulsory activities, assembly and extramural activities

Acronyms

Acronyms	In full
SBST	School Based Support Team
HOD	Head of Department
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
SASA	South African Schools Act
FSDE	Free State Department of Education
LOLT	Language of Teaching and Learning
SGB	School Governing Body
SMS	Short message service

4. Legislative Framework

- a) All learners/educators shall be accorded full respect, regardless of their religious beliefs.
- b) The Governing Body of the school shall determine the religion policy of the school. The policy must be consistent with the Constitution, the SASA, subject to the approval of the Head of Department.
- c) No form of religious discrimination may be practiced in implementing (applying) the religion policy determined in accordance with the legal requirements.
- d) A learner shall have the right to Religion Education as provided for in the curriculum.
- e) A learner/educator at the school shall have the right to be excused from religious observances should s/he wish to so.
- f) No learner/educator at the school may be penalized in any way for abstaining from the religious observances of the school.
- g) In accordance with Departmental Policy, one school day, per annum, may be used for religious observances and the learner will be marked as 'present' on the school register.
- h) The school's approach to religion is academic and not devotional.
- i) Religion education will be conducted as stipulated by the Curriculum.

5. Application and Scope of the Policy

The Policy applies to all stakeholders (educators, learners & SGB)

6. Policy Statements

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, including religion, in public education institutions.

6.1 Religious Observance (Observance of Religious Holidays)

6.1.1) Observance by educators and administrative support staff:

- a) Educators and administrative staff who wish to observe a religious holiday/festival must complete the standard leave form and indicate that the leave applied for is special leave for religious observance.

- b) Planning for absenteeism of educators and administrative support staff due to a religious holiday/festival must be completed well in advance.
- c) Religious observances absenteeism may not exceed the three (3) working days per annum.

6.1.2) Observance by learners

- a) Learners are allowed to participate in religious holidays/festivals. Only one day, per year is allocated by the Department of Education and therefore, on this day, learners should be marked present provided a substantiating letter is submitted to the school and approved by the principal. Other day requested for religious observance may be granted by the principal, but learners should be marked absent.
- b) Arrangements should be made by educators to make sure that the affected learners are able to catch-up with their academic work/schedule. However, the South African Schools Act is very clear that the final responsibility for catching up on work rests with the parent and learner.
- c) Parents of learners should notify the principal, in writing, well in advance (preferably a month) of the learners' intentions to take certain school days off for the purpose of observing religious holidays/festival. Records of these requests will be kept for reference purposes.
- d) Learners have a right to pray individually or in a group provided this does not disrupt teaching and learning activities or interfere with the regular schedule/program of the school day and provided it is practicable, feasible and conforms to the secular principles of the school.

6.2. Learner participation in religious activities/observances

- a) Learner participation in religious activities/observances activities is free and voluntary. Learners cannot be forced to attend or to violate the rights of other learners and teachers to attend these observances.
- b) Learners who choose not to attend religious services/observances during contact time will be involved in other activities approved by the school.

- c) Parents must seek permission from the school in writing for their children to participate in religious festivities, religious holidays, commemoration days, initiation, mourning rituals and prayer times during contact time.
- d) Learners have the right of freedom of expression but they must not violate the rights of other learners and educators to attend these observances. Learners may not interfere with or disrupt school activities.
- e) The Constitution and South African Schools Act require learners to attend school for the prescribed number of hours per week. To this end, the school is not authorized to approve regular absence or early departure for observances.

6.3) Assembly

- a) The opening of the school assembly may consist, on occasion, of readings from the various religious scriptures, songs of praise or a short prayer. However, as a rule, the assembly begins with the School Song and concludes with the recitation of the Constitution Preamble and the National Anthem. Stories and messages that form part of the assembly are ethos based and the messages are secular in nature.
- b) It is expected that assemblies be used as forums for celebrating religious and cultural diversity, in keeping with the values of the Constitution.
- c) If religious materials are used at assembly, they should preferably be presented in the framework outlined for Religion Education, that is, as an educational experience rather than a religious ceremony.
- d) Learners who are not of the Christian faith are not required to participate in activities such as Prayer should this religious practice be included at a particular assembly

6.4) Religion and admissions

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

7. Promoting Tolerance

- a. Make them feel special, safe, and loved.
- b. Teach them about new places, people, and cultures.
- c. Use positive comments to shape and reinforce behavior.
- d. Model tolerance and respect.
- e. Religion should serve the school policy; they should not perform any rituals.