

Education Report: Update on the conversation about religion in schools

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
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Purpose of report

This paper provides you with an update on the Religious Diversity Centre-led conversation about religion in schools and seeks your agreement on next steps.

Summary

1. The Religious Diversity Centre's final report: *Promoting a wider conversation on religion in New Zealand's State schools* (attached) makes a range of recommendations relating to religious studies, religious instruction, and the acknowledgement of religious diversity in *The New Zealand Curriculum*. The Ministry has considered these recommendations in light of broader work underway to refresh *The New Zealand Curriculum*.
2. The discussion about the place of religion in schools has strong links to the broader conversation about social cohesion, and the Government's response to the Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019 (RCOI). You and Minister Tinetti reported Cabinet with proposals on how to support whole school communities as they work together to build caring and inclusive culture including how government might respond to the specific request raised in hui for religious and cultural diversity (but not proselytization) to be taught in schools [CAB-21-Min-0049 refers].
3. The Ministry considers that the most effective way to progress the conversation about religion in schools is as part of the response to the Inquiry, noting that funding would be required to progress any initiatives in the short term.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends that you:

- a. **note** the Religious Diversity Centre's final report: *Promoting a wider conversation on religion in New Zealand's State schools* [Annex 1] identifies recommendations across religious studies, religious instruction, and the acknowledgement of religious diversity in *The New Zealand Curriculum*, which may be summarised as:
- i. **religious studies be made compulsory** as part of social sciences for learners in years 1 – 4 and as a stand-alone subject for students in years 5 – 6;
 - ii. the introduction of religious studies is **facilitated by Professional Learning and Development and Teaching Resources** that are supported by religious communities and enhanced and broadened over time;
 - iii. work is led by a **Religious Studies Advisory Group**, consisting of both religious community representatives and professional subject experts;
 - iv. **religious diversity** is fully and explicitly acknowledged alongside other diversities in *The New Zealand Curriculum*; and
 - v. religious instruction can continue on the school site with board agreement and clear communication about the differences between religious instruction and religious studies and their respective relationships with *The New Zealand Curriculum*

Noted

- b. **agree** to proactively release the Religious Diversity Centre's final report: *Promoting a wider conversation on religion in New Zealand's State schools* [Annex 1]

This should happen after the Cabinet report back so we can say what the govt is doing when it is released.

Agree / Disagree

- c. **note** that while the Ministry's work programme responding to the Report of the Royal Commission will be informed by *Promoting a wider conversation on religion in New Zealand's State schools*, we do not recommend progressing the researcher's recommendations in full

Noted

- d. **note** that strengthening social cohesion is one of the considerations informing the refresh of the national curriculum for schooling, and this includes looking at how it can better support learning about diverse religious beliefs and practices

Noted

- e. **note** that work to support schools to grow confidence to explore diverse religions needs to take a collaborative approach and include tangata whenua, Pacific peoples, diverse ethnic communities, non-religious New Zealanders, religious communities and religious leaders

Noted

- f. **note** that the final Aotearoa New Zealand's histories content for *The New Zealand Curriculum* prompts learning about the histories of faith-based communities, religious diversity and the place of religious associations

Noted

- g. **note** that the draft Social Sciences content for the refreshed *New Zealand Curriculum* explicitly acknowledges religious diversity alongside other diversities

Noted

h. **note** that the draft Social Sciences content is being tested in 2022, which will include engagement with the Religious Diversity Centre, and that this engagement may identify further opportunities to clarify expectations for teaching and learning about diverse religious beliefs and practices as part of the refresh

Noted

i. **note** that the refresh of the national curriculum includes the development of teaching and learning resources and professional learning supports for teachers to build their confidence and capability to use the refreshed curriculum, and that the nature of these will be informed by engagement with a wide range of people including the Religious Diversity Centre

Noted

j. **agree** that the intent of the report's recommendations on religious studies is being sufficiently considered through the curriculum refresh, and that a stand-alone religious studies subject is not required

Agree / Disagree

k. **note** that, as with other areas of particular interest to different groups, there is a risk that the level of resources and supports developed through the refresh is perceived as not having sufficient depth and/or coverage but it is too early to advise on whether additional funding specifically targeted at teaching and learning about diverse religions is appropriate

Noted

l. **note** that a proposal for funding to support schools to create school wide inclusive environments that focuses on valuing religious and cultural identity is included in the Budget 2022 bid *Continuing Community Learning Hubs and supporting ethnic communities' engagement in education*

Noted

m. **agree** that further legislative change relating to the provision specifically enabling boards to close their schools to allow religious instruction is not a priority for change at this time

Agree / Disagree

n. **note** that the decisions in this paper will be incorporated into yours and Minister Tinetti's comprehensive report back in 2022 on education and social cohesion and the implementation of recommendation 36 of RCol Report into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain

Noted

Proactive Release Recommendation

o. **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this briefing once ~~it has been considered~~ *Cabinet has noted the report back* ~~by you~~ with appropriate redactions for Budget sensitive materials.

Agree / Disagree

Ben

Ben O'Meara
Group Manager
Te Puna Kaupapahere - Policy
23/11/2021



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

23 /12 /21

Background

In 2020, we started a conversation about religion in schools through the Religious Diversity Centre

1. In October 2019, Cabinet agreed to the Ministry of Education undertaking a broader work programme, in conjunction with the Religious Diversity Centre, to start a conversation about religion in schools, emphasising a shift from religious instruction to religious education [CAB-19-MIN-0559 refers].
2. In September 2019, you invited officials to meet with representatives of the Religious Diversity Centre to discuss and refine their offers of support [METIS 1204786 refers]. Following this meeting we contracted the Religious Diversity Centre to deliver a report on how to progress the conversation. The Religious Diversity Centre's final report: *Promoting a wider conversation on religion in New Zealand's State schools* (the report) [Annex 1] was received on 2 July 2021.

The place of religion in schools has links to the Government's social cohesion priority

3. The Speech from the Throne 2020 committed to continuing to strengthen social inclusion¹ in New Zealand – supporting our diversity and creating a New Zealand where all people feel safe, have equal access to opportunities and do not experience discrimination.
4. The Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019 (RCoI) included 44 recommendations. Cabinet agreed in principle to all 44 recommendations [CAB-20-SUB-0516 refers]. Many of these recommendations are directly and indirectly related to building and improving social cohesion.
5. The Ministry of Education has a broad programme of work underway to implement Recommendation 36, which challenges the government to invest in opportunities for young New Zealanders to learn about their role, rights and responsibilities and on the value of ethnic and religious diversity, inclusivity, conflict resolution, civic literacy and self-regulation.
6. You and Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education recently provided an interim report back to Cabinet on work to progress Recommendation 36. Cabinet noted that you will provide a more comprehensive report back in early 2022 on work to support diverse whole school communities. Your decisions on this paper will be used to inform part of the response to the more comprehensive report back.

Religious Diversity Centre Research Recommendations

7. The report identified eight recommendations across religious studies, religious instruction, and the acknowledgement of religious diversity in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (page 48 of the report). The summary of these recommendations are that:
 - a. **religious studies be made compulsory** as part of social sciences for learners in years 1 – 4 (triallyed between 2022 and 2025) and as a stand-alone subject for

¹ Between 2019 and November 2020, the term 'social inclusion' was used in this work. This term was intended to be used in its broadest sense. In December 2020, the Government accepted the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019's recommendation to use the broader term of 'social cohesion', which has been used throughout this paper.

students in years 5 – 6 (from 2025) integrating into the Religious Studies NCEA subject currently available at levels 1 – 3;

- b. the introduction of religious studies is **facilitated by Professional Learning and Development and Teaching Resources** that are supported by religious communities and enhanced and broadened over time;
- c. work is led by a **Religious Studies Advisory Group**, consisting of both religious community representatives and professional subject experts, that:
 - i. facilitates engagement with churches, religious leaders and communities, Māori, teachers, parents and learners;
 - ii. develops a model of learning about religious diversity in a bicultural context; and
 - iii. monitors implementation.
- d. **religious diversity** is fully and explicitly acknowledged alongside other diversities in *The New Zealand Curriculum*; and
- e. **religious instruction** can continue on the school site with board agreement and clear communication about the differences between religious instruction and religious studies and their respective relationships with *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

Current State

- 8. There are no explicit requirements in *The New Zealand Curriculum* relating to the teaching of Religious Studies, but it has strong links to the Social Sciences learning area. Understanding religions contributes to understanding how belief systems function in societies and to the fostering of an inclusive society in Aotearoa New Zealand that reflects the histories and traditions of all its people.
- 9. While the Ministry does not routinely collect data on learning offered as part of a school's local curriculum, we hear anecdotally that some schools are currently teaching about religious diversity (e.g. the NZ Catholic Bishops' Conference mandates the use of Faith Central which has resources to promote interfaith relations and teach world religions to learners in Year 12).
- 10. We have worked to support the development of teaching resources that contribute to social cohesion. Examples which refer to religion, or a particular religion include the:
 - a. co-development of resources that reflect the role of Muslim women in education and wider society with the Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand;
 - b. sponsorship of the *Not Part of my World* (Years 4 – 8) and *Challenging Racism and Bias* (Years 9 – 10) kits, produced by School Kit, that provides teachers with tools, strategies and resources to lead courageous conversations with students. The *Challenging Racism and Bias* kit includes resources to support the challenging of Islamophobia; and
 - c. civics and citizenship education resources for teachers and students developed as part of the School Leavers' Toolkit, which recognise that discrimination can be based on religious identity.

11. There are also several initiatives underway to improve the inclusive practice and cultural capability of the education workforce. This includes a regionally allocated Professional Learning and Development priority of 'cultural capability'. However, within cultural capability religious diversity is often collapsed into broader discussions of biculturalism, ethnic diversity and superdiversity.

Advice on progressing work on the place of religion in schools

Progressing further work should start with seeking the voices of Māori and diverse Pacific people

12. Māori and Pacific people were under-represented in the Religious Diversity Centre research when compared to the demographic population of New Zealand. We believe that these important voices need to be explored as part of progressing any further work about religion in schools.

Māori religious and cultural beliefs

13. In the NZ Census 2018, more than half of those who identified as Māori also identified as non-religious (53.5%). Of the Māori religions, beliefs, and philosophies, 43,821 people identified with Rātana and 12,336 people reported Ringatū as their religion.
14. Due to the influence of British settlers and missionary workers, traditional Māori beliefs have blended with Christianity. Not all karakia and waiata are religious, however Karakia Karaiti (Christian prayers) and Hīmene (hymns) are commonly used as part of tikanga Māori (protocols). While some Māori see these as religious practices, others see them as cultural practices.
15. The Education and Training Act 2020 requires school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi by working to ensure that its plans, policies and local curriculum reflect local tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori; take all reasonable steps to make instruction available in tikanga Māori and te reo Māori; and achieve equitable outcomes for Māori students.
16. As school boards move towards embedding these obligations in their plans, policies and local curriculum, school boards and community members may have questions about the place of karakia in secular instruction. Including a Māori-led conversation about the nature of karakia, hīmene, and Māori religions (e.g., Ratana) and how they best fit in a secular schooling environment as part of further work could help answer these questions.

Religious and cultural beliefs for Pacific families

17. The NZ Census 2018 shows that Pacific people are less likely to identify as non-religious (22.9%) than the overall New Zealand population. Many Pacific people identify as Christian (67.9%). For many Pacific families, churches are the centre of social life, providing health and education services, sport, music and social activities. It is likely that religion will need to be acknowledged as part of the affirmation of many Pacific learners.

The appropriate place to consider expectations and supports for teaching and learning about diverse religions is through the refresh of the New Zealand Curriculum

18. The Ministry is undertaking a refresh of the national curriculum over the next five years to make *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* and *The New Zealand Curriculum* clearer, more

relevant, easier to use, and more explicit about what learners need to understand, know and do. Work is being undertaken collaboratively with a wide range of people.

19. While participants in the Religious Diversity Centre research generally supported teaching about diverse religions in schools (84%), there was not consensus that this should be done as a stand-alone subject. However, no one opposed teaching about diverse religious beliefs and practices from a social studies perspective.
20. Strengthening social cohesion is one of considerations informing the refresh of the national curriculum for schooling, and this includes looking at how it can better support learning about diverse religious beliefs and practices.
21. This has already started with the Aotearoa New Zealand's histories work. For *the New Zealand Curriculum*, this is adding new content into the Social Sciences learning area. The final Aotearoa New Zealand's histories content being considered by you [METIS 1266719 refers] prompts learning about the histories of faith-based communities, religious diversity and the place of religious associations.
22. We are now working through the refresh of the rest of the Social Sciences learning area. Hon Tinetti has agreed to draft content for testing [METIS 1267995 refers], which explicitly acknowledges religious diversity alongside other diversities. Testing of the draft content will occur in early 2022 and include engagement with the Religious Diversity Centre alongside many others. This engagement may identify further opportunities to clarify expectations for teaching and learning about diverse religious beliefs and practices. We consider that this will be sufficient to address the Report's recommendation on ensuring religious diversity is considered alongside other diversities.
23. 9(2)(f)(iv)

The refresh will need to consider resources and supports for teachers to explore diverse religions as part of their local curriculum

24. The Ministry believes the refreshed *New Zealand Curriculum* will strengthen teaching and learning about diverse religions. However, the findings of the report suggest barriers to exploring religious diversity as part of a local curriculum may be a lack of resources and PLD to build teacher confidence in teaching to this area.
25. One reason that teachers may lack confidence is reflected by the research's finding of diversity in thought about what should be included in religious studies, how it should be taught, and who by. It is therefore unlikely that the status quo sufficiently responds to the specific request heard in hui for religious and cultural diversity (but not proselytization) to be taught in schools.
26. The research also finds that the size of the impact that teaching about diverse religions has on improving social cohesion outcomes is unclear (page 21). This suggests that a nationally supported and evidence-based approach is needed if an objective of exploring diverse religions as part of the local curriculum is to support social cohesion.
27. The refresh of the national curriculum includes the development of teaching and learning resources and professional learning supports for teachers to build their confidence and capability to use the refreshed curriculum. The nature of these will be informed by

engagement with a wide range of people including the Religious Diversity Centre. Note that the Human Rights Commission is strongly connected with the refresh of *The New Zealand Curriculum* as a member of the Curriculum Voices Group, and that they are well placed to guide our wider engagement processes to bring in sufficient diversity of perspectives.

28. In addition, as part of addressing the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry, the Ministry is developing a Budget bid *Continuing Community Learning Hubs and supporting ethnic communities' engagement in education*, which could be used to develop supports for whole-school inclusiveness as it relates to cultural and religious diversity
29. While it is too early to say what resources and supports might be developed, if work progresses the development of targeted support for kaiako and teachers who want to grow their confidence to explore diverse religions as part of their local curriculum, this would take a collaborative approach and include tangata whenua, diverse ethnic communities, non-religious New Zealanders, religious communities, and religious leaders. This is important to balance the need for teachers to neutrally present information using appropriate teaching and learning approaches and the need to accurately represent religious traditions that teachers may not be familiar with.

The provision specifically enabling boards to close their schools to allow religious instruction is not a priority for change

30. The research recommends that religious instruction can continue on the school site with board agreement and clear communication about the difference between religious instruction, religious studies and their respective relationship with the national curriculum.
31. Most research participants (70%) opposed the legal framework which allows school boards to close their school at any time of the day to allow for religious instruction. This aligns with previous submissions during consultation on the *draft guidelines on religious instruction in State primary and secondary schools and kura* and submissions made during Select Committee consideration of the Education and Training Bill.
32. Since the change to education legislation to confirm an opt in approach to religious instruction, we note that the Ministry is not receiving the numbers of religious instruction complaints that we were receiving under the previous legislation. Anecdotally, we understand the number of schools offering Religious Instruction has also declined since the changes to the Education and Training Act, and that parents are finding the new opt-in procedures are helpful. This seems indicative that the intent of the changes is being achieved. Given this, we consider that further legislative change relating to religious instruction is not a priority at this time.

Financial Implications

33. We are confident that our curriculum work programme will help to strengthen teaching and learning about diverse religious beliefs and practices. As with other areas of particular interest to different groups, there is a risk that the level of resources and supports developed through the refresh is perceived as not having sufficient depth and/or coverage. This is because this work will be occurring in the context of needing to strengthen supports across the whole curriculum, and we are managing a range of demands to include different foci. It is, however, too early to advise on whether additional funding specifically targeted at teaching and learning about diverse religions is appropriate.

34. We have currently included 9(2)(f)(iv) to support teaching that focuses on valuing religious and cultural identity within the Budget bid *Continuing Community Learning Hubs and supporting ethnic communities' engagement in education*. Subject to the bid's success, this funding could be used to develop supports for whole-school inclusiveness as it relates to cultural and religious diversity.

Next steps

35. The Ministry will continue work on the *Continuing Community Learning Hubs and supporting ethnic communities' engagement in education* Budget bid. We are also working on your scheduled report back to Cabinet on proposals on how to support whole school communities as they work together to build caring and inclusive cultures (METIS 1275880 refers).
36. You and Minister Tinetti will provide a comprehensive report back on education and social cohesion in early 2022 (METIS 1275880 refers). Your decisions on this paper will be used to inform part of this report back.

Annexes

- Annex 1: *Promoting a wider conversation on religion in New Zealand's State schools, A report to the Minister of Education* – Paul Morris, Religious Diversity Centre (attached separately).

Promoting a wider conversation on religion in New Zealand's state schools

A Report to the Minister of Education

Paul Morris RDC 2021



Religious Diversity Centre
Aotearoa New Zealand



Contents

Executive summary	3
Religion in New Zealand schools and Kura	
The New Zealand context	4
New Zealand schools and religion	7
The international context:	11
Religions in schools in five comparator countries	
England and Wales	13
Australia	17
Canada	23
US	27
Singapore	29
Summary	35
Stakeholder survey	33
Survey results	35
Conclusions	46
Recommendations	47
Bibliography	48
Acknowledgements	58
Religious Diversity Centre	59

Executive summary

E mea ana te Kāwana, ko ngā whakapono katoa, o Ingarani, o ngc

Wēteriana, o Roma, me te ritenga Māori hoki, e tiakina ngatahitia e ia.

The Governor says all beliefs, of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome, and also, the Māori custom, shall be alike protected by him.

(Colenso William, 1890, *The Authentic and Genuine History of the Signing of the Treaty of Waitangi*)

The New Zealand Cabinet agreed to the Religious Diversity Centre of Aotearoa New Zealand working with the Ministry of Education to start a public conversation about the place of religion in New Zealand schools.

This report sets the context for these issues and presents the findings of a stakeholder survey undertaken to explore views on the current situation and the support for change, in particular, concerning a shift from **religious instruction** to **religious education/religious studies**.

The place of religion in New Zealand public schools is explored in terms of five comparator countries – Australia, Canada, the U.K., Singapore, and the U.S. – with a focus on similar and quite different debates, teaching resources, and parallel experiences. The transition from religious instruction (the teaching of a single religion) to religious education/religious studies (the non-confessional learning about different religious traditions) has already taken place in many countries around the world, and is a move increasingly supported by international bodies. It is timely to foster such a conversation in New Zealand.

Similar changes here will need to acknowledge Aotearoa New Zealand's unique history and pattern of religious and cultural diversity, necessitating the development of local curricula and resources within the framework of the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

In New Zealand there is broad and growing awareness of the country's increasing religious diversity, including not only different religious communities but those who understand themselves as having 'no religion', and,

that this diversity should be more fully reflected in teaching and learning in schools and kura.

The stakeholder survey highlighted that for many the question of what role, if any, religion should play in New Zealand public schools can be both controversial and generate intensely felt responses. Participants proffered reasons for and against teaching religion, teaching about religions, and excluding religion from schools. All these are critically explored below.

There was a clear majority in support of the teaching about the beliefs and practices of different religious traditions, particularly of those religious communities present in New Zealand. For some this teaching should sit alongside existing arrangements, while for most it should replace it. There are also a variety of positions on what should be taught, by who, and to whom.

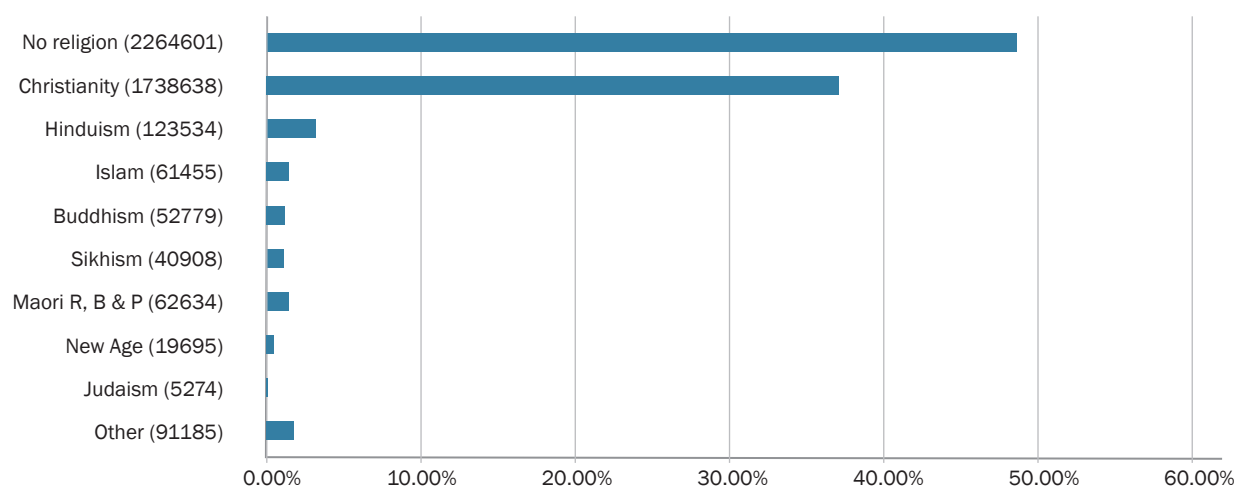
One evident finding from the survey and explored in the follow up meetings was that the teaching about religions in New Zealand schools should be framed in terms of biculturalism.

The Report concludes with Recommendations for advancing the conversation and effecting positive change in consultation with all interested parties.

The New Zealand context

1. The Treaty of Waitangi and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, signed on behalf of Queen Victoria with many Māori chiefs, is widely accepted to be a constitutional document that establishes and guides the relationship between the Crown in New Zealand (embodied by our government) and Māori.
2. At the signing in 1840, Governor Hobson affirmed, in response to a question from Catholic Bishop Pompallier, that ‘the several faiths of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome, and also Māori custom shall alike be protected.’ Some argue that this acknowledged the religious and cultural diversity of New Zealand.¹ Others see it more narrowly, as a protection of both Māori custom and Christian diversity.
3. Christian missionary work is a significant part of New Zealand’s colonial history, with the first missionaries arriving in December 1814. Te Paipera Tapu (The first full Te Reo Māori translation of the Holy Bible) was published in 1868. This led to a population, the vast majority of whom identified as Christian, with a European/Pākehā majority and a significant Māori minority.
4. Although New Zealand has no established or official church: ‘there is no state church here’ (Supreme Court, 1910)² – like all modern nation-states it regulates religion and positions itself in relation to religion. Modern states require an unchallenged sovereignty, but religion offers a potentially older and alternative sovereignty, and so must be regulated to avoid a clash of sovereignties. States, therefore, necessarily legislate religion to ensure that it does serve the interests of the state. Assumptions in favour of the religious traditions of this Christian majority meant Christians and Christianity were often privileged in the process of the formation of the new nation.
5. Since the 1960s there has been change with increasing ethnic and religious diversity and a significant decrease in religious adherence. This change has been particularly dramatic over the last generation. Pew Research’s *Religious Diversity Index* ranks New Zealand as the 15th most religiously diverse nation across 232 nations and recognised territories. The broad patterns of this religious diversity are evident in the most recent NZ Census (2018).

Chart 1: NZ religious diversity (2018 NZ Census)³



¹ This has become generally known as the fourth article of the Treaty (Orange 1989; Walker 2004).

² Carrigan v. Redwood (Supreme Court, Palmerston North, 1910), 30 *New Zealand Law Reports*, 244.

³ NZ Census (2018) <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2018-census-totals-by-topic-national-highlights-updated>. These broad religious-tradition categories include sub-categories. For the 2018 Census there is a new category, ‘Māori Religions Beliefs and Philosophies’ (Ratana, Ringatū, Paimarire, and Māori Religions) replacing the earlier ‘Māori religion’ category. The diverse views of Māori people as to whether or not their beliefs or philosophies are religious, and the way Christian colonisation has shaped the development of both tikanga and Māori religions such as Rātana add complexity to this category.

6. Nearly half the population report having ‘no religion’ (48.2 percent). Those who report ‘no religion’ are disproportionately younger people and are less evident among older age cohorts. Studies indicate that those identifying as having no religion include atheists, agnostics, secularists, and humanists. Many of these ‘nones’ report spiritual concerns and engage in spiritual activities.
7. The largest religious grouping is by far Christianity (37 percent). This umbrella-term embraces a wide array of different streams and churches (Chart 2). The decline in Christian numbers is a continuing trend. In 1991 Christians accounted for nearly 70 percent of New Zealand’s population. Those identifying as Christians fell in number by 120,000 since 2013, at which time 47.65 percent of people identified as Christian.

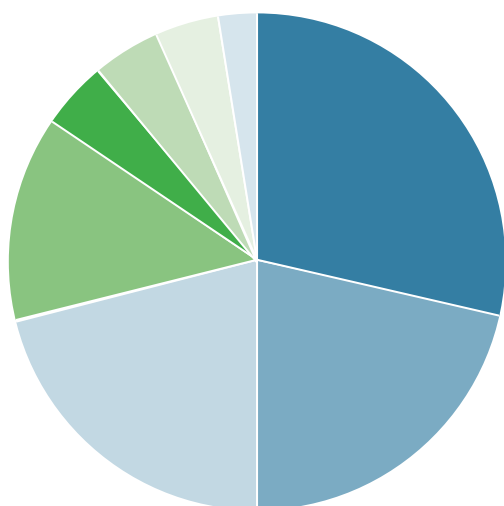


Chart 2: Major Christian churches in NZ (2018 NZ Census)

- Catholic 471,030
- Anglican 314,913
- Christian (not further defined) 307,926
- Presbyterian, Congregational & Reformed 242,907
- Pentecostal 81,624
- Methodist 71,747
- LDS 54,123
- Baptist 39,030

8. There is also a discernible **ethnicisation of the Christian churches**, with significant and growing communities of Christians from the Pacific Islands and Asia. The introduction of culturally inflected theologies and religious behaviours raises new issues for churches that formerly had NZ European/Pākehā majorities.
9. New Zealand is also home to sizeable Hindu (2.65%), Muslim (1.32%), Buddhist (1.13%), Sikh (0.88%), and other religious communities. The Sikh religious community was the fastest growing from 2013-2018. The Buddhist religious community has increased in size since 2013 but decreased as a proportion of the population. These communities are likely to increase in size through future migration.
10. The last two censuses show that the assertion that Christians constitute the majority of New Zealanders no longer holds (Chart 3). The changing religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand is creating new challenges for New Zealanders in public, social and communal spaces, particularly in education, welfare, social policy, workplace relations, and social inclusion.

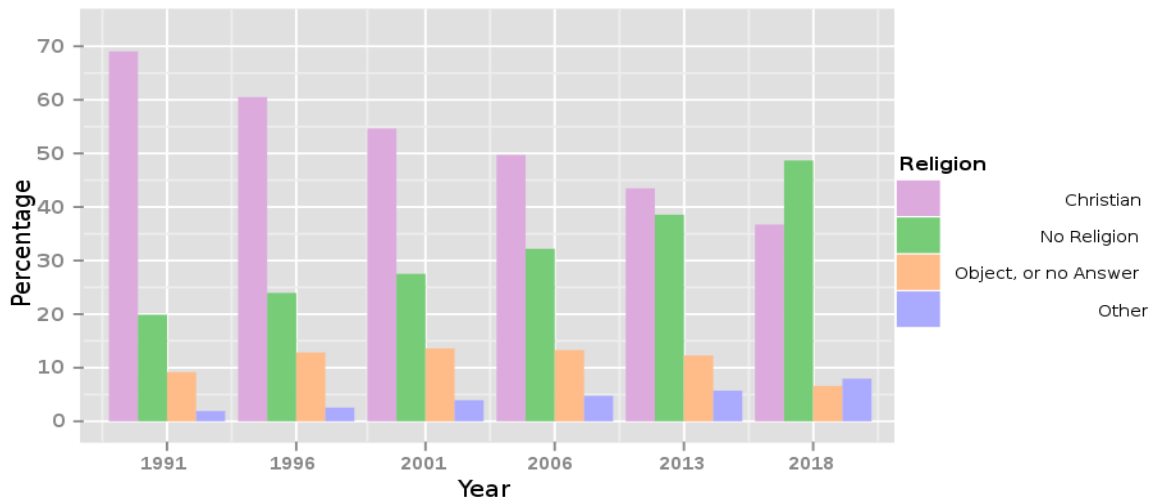


Chart 3: Religious affiliation in New Zealand 1991-2018

11. The importance of these trends for this Report is that parallel demographic shifts in other countries have been a major factor in the transitions from Christian religious instruction to teaching about diverse religious beliefs and practices. Such education, it is argued, is essential for the 21st century global citizen operating in a world of diverse religious and non-religious worldviews, internationally, and at home.

New Zealand schools and religion

The requirement for 'secular' education

12. The issue of religion in New Zealand schools begins as an important public concern paradoxically by its exclusion. The 1877 Education Act established that state education in New Zealand was to be 'compulsory, free and secular', and many hoped universal.⁴ This latter intention remained unrealised when Catholics chose to retain and develop their own separate system of schools.⁵
13. Section 84(2) of the 1877 Act provided that 'the school shall be kept open five days in each week for at least four hours, two of which in the forenoon and two in the afternoon shall be consecutive, and the teaching shall be entirely of a secular character'. Section 84(3), however, enabled school committees to permit the use of school buildings outside school hours for purposes other than regular instruction.
14. The rationale for the secular clause was manifold and included, avoiding religious sectarianism in schools, and for several leading figures a deliberate intention to limit ecclesiastical power in the developing colony. In the parliamentary debate the secular clause became the necessary compromise for its passing.
15. For more than 140 years there have been debates and campaigns defining 'secular' in this context. There were times when Protestants and Catholics sought to join forces to remove this seeming barrier to the creation of a single unified system. There were also scores of legal attempts to redefine 'secular' as non-sectarian, so as to allow religion in schools, or to actually try and ensure that public, primary education was indeed 'secular', understood as without religion. Both sides have had their advocates over the decades, with forty-two unsuccessful attempts between 1877 and 1935 to introduce bills in Parliament to amend the secular education clause to permit religious instruction and observance in schools while they were open.

A tradition of religious instruction and observances in schools

16. Section 84(2) and 84(3) of the 1877 Act created a legal loophole (later known as the 'Nelson system', after the province where it originated in 1897) that allowed the school committee to 'close' the school for religious instruction outside the mandatory hours of secular instruction. This was possible because primary schools routinely had three hours of instruction in the forenoon, one more hour than the Act required.
17. The 'closure' of schools for religious instruction and observances was assiduously contested. On one side were groups like the Bible in Schools League (BSL) who contended that religious instruction should be made part of the curriculum along with other subjects, and on the other the National Schools Defence League (NSDL) insisting on the complete separation of church and state. Many teachers were opposed, as were rationalist and humanist associations. While some school's boards sanctioned such arrangements for religious instruction, others objected.
18. The 1914 Education Act reaffirmed the 'secular clause', denying the formal legal inclusion of religious instruction and observance into the curriculum of state primary schools. It also explicitly allowed School Committees to use school buildings for moral or religious instruction outside school hours.

⁴ Compulsory until 13, and free until 15, administered by twelve regional education boards.

⁵ Protestant-Catholics tensions over education largely ended with the 1975 Private Schools Conditional Integration Act.

19. The *Report of the Commission on Education in New Zealand/Currie Commission (1962)* addressed several major educational concerns, including the need to develop a legal basis for volunteers offering religious instruction and religious observances in schools. The *Report (1962: 676)* reaffirmed that: the official school syllabus could not include any teaching that could be construed as being ‘instruction in the tenets of any religion or sect;’ there was ‘no hindrance to teaching about religion in the present wording of the Act’, that is, if such teaching were non-sectarian and ‘about religion’ and not ‘instruction’. When, the Commission turned to the questions raised by instruction in religion and by religious observances in schools, it found no such unanimity’ (1962: 676).
20. In their submission to the Commission, the New Zealand Council for Christian Education reported that 80 percent of schools offered religious instruction under the Nelson system. This was at a time when more than nine out of ten New Zealanders described themselves as ‘Christian’ (*NZ Census, 1961*) and other religious community numbers were negligible. Education boards gave individual schools permission to delay the beginning of official school hours for thirty minutes one day a week to allow ‘ministers of religion’ or ‘voluntary instructors’ to undertake religious instruction in the school. The Commission found that in practice religious instruction took place at convenient times, before, or more usually after, school, without any legal justification. They recommended that religious instruction and observance would be better legally regulated than not, in line with common practice.
21. Their recommendations were agreed in principle by government and were embodied with several revisions in the *1962 Religious Instruction and Observances in Public Schools Act (1962)* and incorporated in the *Education Act (1964)*. It was reaffirmed that teaching in state primary schools must, while the school is open, be entirely of a secular character (Section 77). The school’s board, after consultation with the principal, could decide that the school, or part thereof, may be closed at any time of the school day up to a maximum of sixty minutes in any week and twenty hours in any school year, for any class, for the purposes of religious instruction given in school buildings by approved voluntary instructors, and of religious observances conducted in a manner approved by the school board (Section 78).⁶ Students were required to attend or participate in religious instruction or religious observances unless withdrawn by their parents in writing to the principal (Section 79).
- Teachers whose free request was approved by the school’s board could be released from school duties for a maximum of half an hour a week to take part in religious instruction or observances at their own school. Teachers who do not take part in religious instruction or observance shall not be pressured to do so, nor shall the position of any teacher and the opportunities for appointments and for promotion be adversely affected because they do not take part in religious instruction and religious observances (Section 80).
22. The role of religion in schools continues to be debated. The minority Labour government in 2006 announced the development of new guidelines for schools to address the evident anomalies and inconsistencies and the new human rights and trustee frameworks (1989 Education Act), however these guidelines were withdrawn following a decision that the Human Rights Commission were better placed to provide advice, leading to the development of *Religion in New Zealand Schools Questions and Concerns*.⁷
23. The government position that the provisions allowing for religious instruction in education law, and human rights legislation is consistent, is coupled with the recognition that there are inconsistencies in how boards apply religious

⁶ In a later addition to the *Private Schools Conditional Integration Act (1975)* the Minister can authorise additional religious instruction if he is satisfied that this was the desire of the majority of parents of students at a school, and that such instruction would not interfere with their normal studies (Section 78A).

⁷ <https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/9414/2387/8011/HRC-Religion-in-NZ-Schools-for-web.pdf>.

instruction provisions, resulting in guidelines being published in 2019 that support schools in making decisions about whether, and how, to close their school to allow religious instruction in ways that also consider human rights legislation.⁸

24. Sections 55 to 60 of the Education and Training Act 2020 carried across the legal framework which enabled religious instruction and observances under some conditions with one significant change. Rather than the requirement of parents to write to the school to withdraw their children from religious instruction, there is a new requirement for parents to write to the principal to show consent for their children to attend religious instruction. A written indication that children should be removed from stand-alone religious observances is still needed. This shift addresses some of the concerns of parents about the suitability or appropriateness of some religious instruction, or religious instruction being the default position for students. However, people who strongly oppose religious instruction and observances do not believe this change goes far enough.
25. Those who oppose religious instruction say that there are also issues about transparency and openness on the part of Christian instruction providers.⁹ Syllabuses and teaching materials are not always available and in recent years have undergone a series of updates. Providers have changed their guidelines to address issues raised in complaints, including proselytising, the teaching of prayer, addressing non-Christian students, the code of conduct for presenters, and the relationship of materials to The New Zealand Curriculum (2007).

Although *The New Zealand Curriculum* is intentionally secular to reflect our education laws, several religious instruction providers claim that their programmes are linked to or endorse *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Some providers claim that they only teach 'authorised values.' However, teaching the Christian interpretation or illustration of these values is no guarantee of consistency with the principles of *The New Zealand Curriculum*, nor are Christian education courses authorised by the Ministry of Education, or other government agencies.

26. During the last two decades the number of participating schools has declined and is continuing to do so, reflecting the changing demographics of religious and ethnic diversity, particularly in relation to the increased 'nones', aging Christians, and the growth of active adherents of other religions than Christianity. The Secular Education Network's 2019 survey of New Zealand's state primary schools reported that single faith (almost exclusively Christian) religious instruction was offered in one-third of schools. It is likely that the legislative change will further reduce the number of students participating in religious instruction.

Religious education within the New Zealand Curriculum 2007

27. *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) does not include the words 'religion', 'religions', 'spirituality', 'Christian' or 'Christianity', and only uses 'spiritual' in the Glossary, as a partial rendering of taha wairua, in a list of developmental requirements: '... taha wairua relates to spiritual well-being; taha hinengaro to mental and emotional well-being; taha tinana

⁸ An attempt at guidelines in 2016 in the Red Beach schools case mediation process was terminated following a breach of confidentiality in this process. Guidelines were commissioned in February 2015 when the Secular Education Network (SEN) alongside a panel of school principals and the Ministry of Education held a mediation meeting which resulted in a draft of guidelines surrounding religious instruction in schools as part of the development of the 2019 Ministry guidelines.

⁹ In 2012 the disclosure of a CEC Newsletter which had advised its followers to join school boards so that they could have 'more influence' on religious instruction and included 'churches by and large have not woken up to the fact that this is a mission field on our doorstep. The children are right there and we don't have to supply buildings, seating, lighting or heating', led to a two-part RNZ programme (August 12, 19, 2012), and to an Anglican cleric insisting that such religious coercion was 'unchristian', <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/7159949/Christians-target-schools-in-mission>. The government's position that religious instruction can be taught when a school is closed and can be done so in a non-discriminatory way within the parameters of New Zealand's human rights legislation can be difficult in practice. Religious instruction presenters are asked to ensure that students' participation in prayer, for example, should be freely undertaken and should not make students from different religions or cultures uncomfortable. While a teacher with a professional intercultural educational training has a basis on which to make a judgement as to whether a student is comfortable participating in a prayer, or identifying with a biblical character, without such training and experience clear lines are often hard to draw and such judgements hard to make.

to physical well-being; and taha whānau to social well-being.’¹⁰ It does, however, include ‘belief’: ‘*The New Zealand Curriculum* applies to all English-medium state schools (including integrated schools) and to all students in those schools, irrespective of their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, **belief**, ability or disability, social or cultural background, or geographical location.’ This inclusivity is often thus considered to embrace religious, non-religious, and ethical or philosophical beliefs, and extends to intending the curriculum to be ‘non-sexist, non-racist, and non-discriminatory’ by ensuring ‘that students’ identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed and that their learning needs are addressed.’ The Curriculum also emphasises learning about human rights which include religious freedoms.

28. The Governing Principles of the curriculum include ‘cultural diversity’; and ‘diversity’ is included amongst the eight Values.¹¹ That this diversity might include religious diversity is reflected in the claims that, ‘(t)he curriculum reflects New Zealand’s cultural diversity and values the histories and traditions of all its people’; ‘diversity, as found in our different cultures, languages, and heritages’; and ‘effective teachers attend to the cultural and linguistic diversity of all their students’.¹²

29. Learning about the practices and beliefs of diverse religions (religious studies) not only can be taught within The New Zealand Curriculum but such teaching strongly aligns with the values, key competencies and learning objectives of the social sciences learning areas – ‘understanding identity, culture and organisation’ - and ‘as they compare and contrast different beliefs and cultural practices, including their own, they understand more about themselves and become more understanding of others’.

The debates about religion, and spirituality, in New Zealand schools raise a series of as yet unresolved issues, that are both discrete concerns in themselves, and part of the larger question of the appropriate role of religion in New Zealand society in the 21st century.

¹⁰ *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007): *Years 1-13*, Ministry of Education.

¹¹ *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007): *Years 1-13*, 48.

¹² *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007): *Years 1-13*, 11, 12, 36. ‘Cultural’ and ‘heritage’ diversity clearly are intended to include religious diversity. This evacuation of ‘religion’ from official documents has served to perplex and confuse and has been understood by some to be a wilful denial of the realities of religious diversity, including those with non-Christian religions and those who declare ‘no religion’. Teachers in New Zealand schools are required to address the moral and spiritual development of students.

The international context

Religions in schools in five comparator countries

Universal Declaration on Human Rights Ngā Takenga Tika Tangata:

Te Whakapuakitanga o te Ao

26 2. *Ko te aronga matua o ngā mahi mātauranga, he whakatipu i te wairua o te tangata, ko te whakapiki i te whakaaro nui o te tangata ki ngā tika tangata me ngā herekoretanga taketake. Mā ngā mahi mātauranga nei, me whakatairanga ko te māramatanga o tātahi ki tātahi, ko te aroha, ko te whakahoatanga ki waenga i ngā whenua, i ngā iwi, i ngā whakapono, me tautoko hoki i ngā mahi a Te Kotahitanga o te Ao e mau ai te rongo.*

26 2. *Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*

Over the last three decades, in a growing number of countries, there has been a major transition from **religious instruction** (devotional or confessional) to **religious studies** (non-confessional religious education).¹³ While the reasons given have divergent emphases in different countries, there are common themes, including migration-driven demographic change, generational religious deinstitutionalisation, cultural change characterised by intensified individualism, publicity given to the past histories of abuse in some religious traditions, and resurgent global religio-politics.

This shift often exposes fundamentally different reasons for wanting to teach religion (religious instruction) or teach about religion in schools (religious studies), frequently generating tensions in these transitions. Many Christian parents have desired that their children learn the tenets of Christianity - basic narratives, vocabulary, and behaviours - and ideally become part of their church. State school systems created religious instruction programmes reflecting the dominance of a particular Protestant, or other tradition, or have offered ecumenical or non-denominational programmes of religious education designed to be acceptable to different Protestant churches.

The rationale for this shift is to reflect: the new demographic diversities; declining church numbers; rapidly growing numbers of religiously unaffiliated people; and the prominence of religion internationally. Besides, simply learning about the diverse beliefs and practices of religious communities at the local, regional, national, and international levels, other broader learning objectives have included: lessening tensions between different communities; fostering social inclusion and cohesion (especially after 9/11); promoting tolerance and respect for diversity; and as necessary preparation for students to thrive as informed, resilient, and engaged 21st century global citizens.

This shift from religious instruction to religious studies has taken place in Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, and Denmark), in England and Wales, in Québec, South Africa, and in parts of Germany. It is interesting, that drawing on similar arguments, religious studies has also been introduced in recent decades in the stridently 'secular' states of France, and the U.S.

¹³ These country comparisons are not comprehensive but are intended to provide sufficient background to give context to religious instruction and religious education in New Zealand in terms of similar and different developments overseas. This shift in Europe is often referred to as 'deconfessionalisation'.

International organisations have endorsed this shift, including the United Nations, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), the Council of Europe, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), and the Regional Asia-Pacific Interfaith Dialogues.¹⁴

Five comparator countries were selected. In **England and Wales** (Northern Ireland and Scotland have devolved systems of religious education) the question of religious education in schools has been the subject of intense recent debates several of which resonate with developments here. **Canada** is a bicultural/bilingual country with indigenous peoples that publicly acknowledges its increasing religious and cultural diversities, that also has a British heritage, and has sought to address concerns about the role of religion in its schools. **Singapore** is another former British colony whose religious and ethnic diversity is reflected in its education system, including a particular model for the study of religions. **Australia** is closest, geographically, and perhaps culturally, and shares with New Zealand an institutional history that goes back to Britain. Like New Zealand, it has developed its own models for religious instruction and education in schools that are challenged by, and are responding to, growing cultural and religious diversity. Finally, the **U.S.**, which has, at least formally, a more overt demarcation between religion and public life, and yet in recent decades has embraced the teaching about diverse religions, amidst debates, controversies, and legal battles.

14 UN (2001), *Final Document of the International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination*, <https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/pdf/asia-s-ed/v05/18appendix2.pdf>; UNESCO (2003), *Perspectives: revue trimestrielle d'éducation compare*, n° 126, 33/2, *Éducation et religion: les chemins de la tolérance*, UNESCO Bureau International D'éducation; UNESCO (1994), *Declaration of the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace*, <https://tandis.odihr.pl/bitstream/20.500.12389/19750/1/02959.pdf>; Council of Europe (2008), *Dimensions of Religions and Non-Religious Convictions within Intercultural Education*, Council of Europe; OSCE (2007), *Toledo Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; see, Morris, Paul (2018); <http://regionalinterfaith.org.au/>.

England and Wales

From church schools to maintained schools

The history of Christian religious instruction (religious education) in state schools in England and Wales begins with the incorporation of church schools into a centralised system of schools. Starting in the 1960s there was a move away from the confessional teaching of Christian religion in publicly maintained ‘community schools’ and a trend towards the compulsory teaching of non-confessional religious education (religious studies). This new mode of religious education was utilised in many schools to later (after 9/11 and 7/7) fulfil the stated government aims of fostering social cohesion through education.

Historically, the Church of England was the dominant provider with around 17,000 schools by the middle of the 19th century, with other churches having much smaller numbers.¹⁵ *The Elementary Education Act* (1870) was the first in a series of acts that forged the way towards a centralised, government funded, national school system, overseen by ‘local boards’.¹⁶ In response to the realities of denominational and sectarian diversity in many schools a new model of non-denominational Christian religious instruction and observance emerged, ‘no religious catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught in the school’ but rather ‘Christian education of a general character’,¹⁷ and that children would not be required to attend religious observances.¹⁸ School education became compulsory in 1876, by 1891 public funds supported most educational costs,¹⁹ and by 1902 all students were state funded until aged eleven.

The *Education Act 1902* legislated that all schools be financed by public funds. Many former denominational schools became ‘maintained sector’ schools, with county council oversight and public funding from government.²⁰ Government funding also supported some denominational, or ‘voluntary’ schools.²¹ Local councils appointed denominational school boards, controlled the secular aspects of education, paid for the maintenance of schools and teacher salaries, whilst permitting these schools to teach denominational Christianity.²² The *Act* itself was objected to from a variety of quarters, including by those who were opposed to the use of public funds to support religious education, and by those who feared that this was indicative of a wider anti-religious agenda.²³ Others were supportive, as the funding of ‘voluntary’ denominational schools would ensure that they would not wither away as a result of unfair competition with fully funded non-denominational state schools.²⁴ Despite wide support and prolonged debate the Liberal party failed to repeal the *Act* in 1906 ensuring that discussion about the role of religion and religious instruction in publicly funded schools, and the funding of denominational schools, was ongoing.

Education Act 1944

This system continued through to the mid-20th century with Christian instruction and observance taking place in maintained schools. The *Education Act* (1944) stated that all pupils at government-maintained schools should take part in an ‘act of collective worship on each school day’ (subject to the parental right of withdrawal) and made mandatory the adoption of Locally Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Education in all fully state-funded schools.²⁵

¹⁵ Newcombe, Suzanne (2012), 369.

¹⁶ *Elementary Education Act* (1870) introduced universal education for children aged 5-13 but left enforcement of attendance to school boards.

¹⁷ *Elementary Education Act* (1870), Section 14 (2).

¹⁸ *Elementary Education Act*, (1870), Section 7 (1).

¹⁹ *Elementary Education Act*, (1876) imposed a legal duty on parents to ensure their children attended school, and the *Elementary Education Act* (1891) provided state funds for each pupil, effectively making school education free.

²⁰ Newcombe, Suzanne (2012), 369.

²¹ Gullifer (1982) 83.

²² Murphy (1968), 4.

²³ Gullifer (1982), 89.

²⁴ Murphy (1968), 4.

²⁵ *Education Act* (1944), see, Jackson (2013), 125.

Education Reform Act (1988)

The *Education Reform Act* (1988),²⁶ the later *Education Act* (1996), and the *School Standards and Framework Act* (1998) drew on the 1944 prescription to develop what became 'compulsory religious education' in England and Wales. Every state-maintained school in England and Wales had to provide a basic curriculum. The basic curriculum was to include the National Curriculum, and the 'other compulsory subjects' (religious education, and, sex and relationships education). These subjects are compulsory for all students, excluding those who have been withdrawn by their parents; and those over eighteen who have withdrawn themselves.²⁷

Religious education content is determined for schools by their Locally Agreed Syllabus (LAS). A LAS is prepared by each of the Local Authorities (*Education Act* (1996), Schedule 31). Every LAS must reflect that 'the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.'²⁸ Syllabuses must be non-confessional, and non-denominational, and include material on various world religions. Local Authorities must set up an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to produce and recommend a LAS for religious education.²⁹

Each county (local authority)³⁰ has a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) comprised of four committees, that in turn constitute the ASC. Each SACRE must include an appointed committee member from the Church of England; representatives of other Christian denominative representatives and religious groups; representatives from the teachers' association; and an elected councillor from the county (LA) itself. The responsibility of each SACRE is to agree on a

syllabus, monitor its quality and overall effectiveness, and advise the LA accordingly.³¹ Once the Syllabus is unanimously agreed upon by the SACRE, it must be taught in all publicly maintained schools under the LA's instruction. Once in every five years the Locally Agreed Syllabus is reviewed.³²

The development of non-confessional religious education, and the removal of obligatory daily acts of Christian worship has in many schools been a major change while in others it has been the legislation catching up with developments that had already taken place in the schools themselves. The debated reasons and explanations for the shift include changing religious and cultural demographics in schools and communities, and the deepening secularisation of society.³³

In England and Wales there are several categories of state-maintained schools, including community schools, and Foundational-Voluntary Aided Faith schools. Community schools are funded by Local Authorities and follow the National Curriculum. Foundational-Voluntary Aided Faith schools are also funded by the local authority but have more freedom in what they teach. During the mid-20th Century, Community schools in England and Wales transitioned from confessional RI to non-confessional RE. However, Foundational-Voluntary Aided Faith schools continued to offer confessional religious instruction.

The *Education Act* (1944) states that all students at government-maintained schools should take part in an act of collective worship on each school day and follow the agreed local syllabus for RI. The *Education Reform Act* (1988) and the later *Education Act* (1996), as well as the *School Standards and Framework Act* (1998) framed the revised non-confessional RE. As part of this

26 *Education Reform Act* (1988) introduced the National Curriculum and Basic Curriculum, making non-confessional religious education compulsory in all state-maintained schools.

27 *School Standards and Framework Act* (1998), Schedule 19.

28 *Education Act* (1996), Section 375.

29 There is an alternative in that the LAS can be outsourced to a third party, such as RE Today, however, it must be agreed upon unanimously by the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE). <http://www.retoday.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>.

30 In 2020, there are 82 metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties in England, excluding Greater London and the Isles of Scilly.

31 *Education Act* (1996) Section 391(1)(a). The significance of having an established church became evident to me as a member of the Lancashire SACRE, where the Church of England has one vote; the teachers one vote; the County one vote; and all the non-Anglican Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and non-religious groups - in a county with a high proportion of both non-Anglican Christians and other religions - also had one vote.

32 *Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory Guidance* (2010).

33 *Education Act* (1996) Section 375, also, Jackson (2013), 121.

transition religions other than Christianity became a necessary part of RE, albeit due to the opt-out clause RE remains outside the National Curriculum.

RE is compulsory at every stage of school, unlike other subjects, however, there is no nationally agreed curriculum. The County level syllabuses range widely in content and approach but reflect that 'the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.' There are ongoing pedagogical debates on the merits of religious literacy, and what are known as interpretative or hermeneutical approaches to RE. Religious literacy explores the beliefs and practices of different religious traditions and provides a valuable framework for learning about Christianity and the other religious traditions in contemporary Britain. Religious literacy, however, is understood by some to be limited if it does not engage with the students' own knowledge and experience, including religious experience, as advocated in interpretative approaches.

Religious education in the early 21st century has increasingly been subsumed under the government aims of 'community cohesion' and the promotion of tolerance in recognition of both diversity, security concerns, and the need to intervene to ensure that relationships between different communities are positive, peaceful, and inclusive. These aims are now explicitly present in legislation. For example, the *Education and Inspections Act (2006)* inserted a new section into the *Education Act (2002)* introducing a duty on the governing bodies of maintained schools 'to promote community cohesion',³⁴ 'Religious Education plays a significant part in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding about the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the U.K. and the need for mutual respect and understanding, enabling pupils to think about topical spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues including the importance of resolving conflict fairly'.³⁵

The radically growing number of 'nones' in Britain subscribing to a range of ideologies, values and worldviews, along with the growth of religious communities other than Christianity in the country, have led to extensive debate with calls for new models and designations to replace 'religious education', that better reflect the need for classroom inclusivity of diverse religious and non-religious students.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on religious education published its report, *Improving Religious Literacy: A Contribution to the Debate* in 2016. Chapter 3 focusses on religious education in schools and recommends that all students have time dedicated to RE; that teacher training in religious literacy be extended; and that all relevant parties should participate in the ongoing discussions about the legal framework for RE in schools, including the Department for Education and faith communities. The APPG understands religious literacy in schools as foundational in raising Britain's general religious literacy, and that this will positively impact on social cohesion and positive and productive inter-communal relationships and increase understanding of contemporary global realities.

The Commission on RE was established by the RE Council of England and Wales in 2016 to review the legal, education and policy frameworks for RE and make recommendations for improving its quality. *Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward (2018)* offers a national plan for RE after a two-year long consultation with parents, teachers, students, officials, and educational policy specialists. There are recommendations for a revised subject, 'Religion and Worldviews', which would encourage students to examine the roles religious and non-religious worldviews play in 'societies and the lives of individuals, including their influence on moral behaviour and social norms.' The recommendations include that all students from Year 1 to Year 11 be taught 'Religion and Worldviews', and that post-16 students have the opportunities for further study of the subject.

A New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools by Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead of the Westminster Faith Debates was published in 2018. This report makes recommendations for RE in state schools, as well as acts of collective worship, and for schools with a religious character. Following the transitions from confessional Christian RE in the 1940s, to multi-faith RE in the 1970s, their current proposals include renaming RE, 'Religion, Beliefs and Values', to allow for intra-religious diversity and the values and beliefs of those who do not identify with a religious tradition. The authors emphasise the urgent need to address religious - non-religious, inter-religious, and intra-religious - divisions in contemporary Britain,

³⁴ *Education and Inspections Act (2006)*, (21(5)).

³⁵ Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *Religious Education*, 17.

via 'Religion, Beliefs and Values', with potentially significant results for the country itself.

Although *The State of the Nation: A Report on Religious Education Provision Within Secondary Schools in England* (2017), by the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE) is focussed on secondary education, the reflections on the place of RE in the country and the curriculum, and the reasons for teaching this subject have saliency for primary RE teaching too.

Religious education is compulsory in England and Wales and continues to be the subject of intense public debate and even though the context is rather different in terms of many of the drivers of the changes that underlie the contemporary discussions in Aotearoa New Zealand, it provides a useful model for possible future changes here.

Australia

The Australian Constitution (1901) forbids religious tests for office, and the establishment of a national religion.

The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.³⁶

With the passing of the *Education Act (1872)* Victoria became the first of the Australian colonies to introduce a free, compulsory, centralised education system built upon secular principles for students from six to thirteen years.³⁷

The remaining states followed, and 'by 1880, all the colonies had ended public funding of denominational schools and set up public primary school systems without the involvement of churches.'³⁸

In the debates over religious instruction in public schools, supporters considered that a form of Christianity should be taught, while opponents considered the requirement that schools be secular was incompatible with religious instruction. For others again it was a practical issue rather than a matter of principle: What possible Christian teaching could be taught without offending some Christian groups?³⁹ So unlike English and Wales, but like New Zealand, the Australian state governments concluded that teaching broadly acceptable Christian religious instruction was untenable, and therefore, government schools were to be secular, and the funding of religious private schools ended.⁴⁰

In practice, however, all the states, except Victoria, allowed Christian confessional religious instruction, albeit with restrictions. The *New South Wales Public Instruction Act (1880)* for example, legislated that every state school was to set aside a maximum of one hour per week for the teaching of confessional instruction. Clergy(men) could enter the school and teach children of their denomination or sect.⁴¹ In South Australia, time was set aside before the beginning of the school day for religious instruction, attendance was not compulsory, and content was non-denominational.⁴²

These 'school scripture' classes evolved across Australia as Special Religious Education (SRE), Special Religious Instruction (SRI), or Religious Instruction (RI), taught in public schools by voluntary Christian instructors. These programmes grew rapidly, as did the Australian population more generally, in the 1950s and 1960s with a wide variety of Christian groups offering SRI or SRE or RI in 'secular' state schools.⁴³

The Australian Government began partially funding non-government schools, in the main Catholic schools in 1963,⁴⁴ based on the recognition of the need for relief for the financially strapped Catholic schools' sector, and the issue of funding equity for all students. These last two arguments resonate with debates in New Zealand in the 1970s.

During the 1970s and 1980s Australian State governments, except for Queensland, responded to concerns from 'secularists', parents, and others by preparing reports on Christian religious instruction in schools. These reports concluded that Christian

³⁶ The Constitution of Australia (1901), Section 116, https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/senate/powers_practice_n_procedures/constitution.

³⁷ https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/vic8_doc_1872.pdf.

³⁸ <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/education-religion-and-the-state-in-australia/5546816>

³⁹ Maddox (2014).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ <https://researchdata.ands.org.au/departments-public-instruction-1989-1997/164348>, and http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/num_act/piao1880n9275.pdf.

⁴² Education Act (1875), Section 10, http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/num_act/piao1880n9275.pdf

⁴³ <https://theconversation.com/time-for-change-a-new-role-for-religion-in-education-6564>.

⁴⁴ Opponents argued that government funding for confessional religious schools contravened the *Australian Constitution*, Section 116, The High Court in (Attorney-General, Vict; Ex rel Black v Commonwealth of Australia (1981), 146 CLR 559, ruled that federal funding of non-government schools operated by religious organisations did not contravene the establishment clause when the funding was for ordinary educational purposes, <https://jade.io/article/66902>. See, Beck, Luke (2014).

confessional religious education might be replaced with 'General Religious Education' (GRE) as part of the school's curriculum, that is, non-confessional religious education (or religious studies), extending to other religions.

So, in **New South Wales**, for example, the *Education Act* (1990) adopted the recommendation from the *Rawlinson Committee Report, Religion in Education in NSW Government Schools* (1980) and distinguished between the two forms of religious teaching, Special Religious Education (SRE) and General Religious Education (GRE), reporting that GRE could be supplemented by SRE.⁴⁵ The 1990 Act permits 'every government school' to allocate time for the 'religious education of children of any religious persuasion'. Schools can use that hour to teach scripture, or since 2011 to teach ethics as a 'secular' alternative. This Act determined that GRE was to be taught by ordinary class-room teachers (Section 30) as part of school's provision of 'secular education'. Section 32 permits qualified voluntary representatives of 'any religious persuasion' to come into the schools and provide religious instruction (SRE) from their own religious perspective to children whose parents are willing to allow this. There were additional recommendations regarding the training of voluntary SRE teachers. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from both SRE, and GRE.

The 2015 review of SRE in NSW government schools reported that 87 percent of schools were delivering SRE classes, 92 percent of them being primary, and 81 percent secondary, schools.⁴⁶ The report, *Review of SRE and Special Education Ethics (SEE) in NSW government primary and secondary schools* (2017) was released after a delay of more than a year and a half. It characterised some SRE lessons as 'inappropriate' and recommended that parents opt-in their children rather than this being the default position. This recommendation was rejected by the NSW government, that permits 101 religious groups to teach scripture in schools, 87 of which are Christian, the others are Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Bahá'í, Vedic and Sikh. Participation rates in scripture classes were approximately 30 percent in secondary schools, but much higher in state primary schools (71 percent).

The recommendations that transparency and accountability on the part of SRI providers be improved, and that there be consideration of the content and age appropriateness of the lessons, were accepted. Provider information and curricula were to be available for online inspection, and there are to be improved complaint procedures. It was also recommended that parents be given 'clear, consistent and easily accessible information (about religious education), their SRE participation choices and processes, including alternative activities.'

The government rejected the recommendation that children who opt out of scripture lessons should be permitted to carry on with their regular schoolwork, because according to its current religious education policy, 'no academic instruction or formal school activities should occur' during the time set aside for SRE. Other issues included the process by which SRE providers could lose their registered status, and the ongoing monitoring of delivery.

The NSW Teachers Federation in 2019 began a campaign calling for the 1990 Education Act to be amended to remove mandatory SRE. Their reasons include that the current policy leaves thousands of students unable to do regular schoolwork if they opt out of scripture classes during the 40 minutes per week set aside for SRE. While they acknowledged that recent changes including removing special religious education (SRE) from school enrolment forms were positive, these did not address the Federation's policy that NSW public schools should be 'secular' to ensure that they can provide for their culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse students.

This follows the 2018 recommendation by the NSW Secondary Principals' Council to the NSW Curriculum Review that SRE (scripture) should be dropped from State's high schools on several grounds, including an already crowded timetable, and, that the secular alternative, Ethics (SEE) is not offered in high schools but only in primary schools.

More recently, Sonia Hornery, the NSW MP, joined the fray (on the side of the NSW Teachers Federation) by asking parents and teachers on Facebook whether they wanted SRE to remain in the curriculum. The

⁴⁵ Keri Phillips, Kerri (2014), 'The history of education, religion and the state in Australia', ABC, 24 June, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/education-religion-and-the-state-in-australia/5546816>.

⁴⁶ *Review of SRE and SEE in NSW Government schools* (2016), Department of Education, 238.

Scripture class



plethora of comments provide a valuable summary of the main positions, with both strong support and opposition.⁴⁷

In **Victoria**, the *Report of the Committee on Religious Education* (1974) recommended that religious instruction be phased out and replaced with ‘a fully integrated religious education curriculum’.⁴⁸ These recommendations while accepted took time to be enacted.

The *Victorian Education and Training Reform Act* (2006), Section 2.2.10 reaffirms that education in government schools is to be ‘secular’, that is, it must not ‘promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect’, however, this ‘does not prevent the inclusion of ‘General Religious Education’ (GRE) in the curriculum of a government school. In fact, a government schoolteacher can only provide religious instruction as GRE in a government school. GRE is defined as ‘education about the major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world’.

The following section (2.2.11) states that ‘special religious instruction’ (SRI) can only be given in a government school ‘during the hours set apart for the instruction of the students’ by persons who are accredited representatives of churches or other religious groups and who have ministerial approval. SRI ‘must be given on the basis of the normal class organisation of the school, with a number of exceptions for special events or festivals.’ Attendance for SRI is not compulsory, and students can be excused by parental request. Ministerial permission is also

required for special events or festivals to take place in government schools. SRI is defined as ‘instruction provided by churches and other religious groups and based on distinctive religious tenets and beliefs.’⁴⁹

The Victorian government decided in 2015 to remove Religious Instruction (RI/SRI/scripture) from the curriculum during school hours, and since 2016 more than fifty schools have cancelled the programmes. The 30-minute religious instruction classes now can only take place during lunchtime or before or after school. This, together with the state government’s policy change in 2011 requiring parents to opt into the classes, has led to SRI providers struggling to keep primary school students in the programme, Access Ministries, the state’s largest provider of SRI anticipates further cancelations.

Victoria has replaced RI/SRI with a new programme, ‘Learning about Worldviews’, and ‘Religions in Humanities and Ethical Capability’, that as part of their ‘Respectful Relationships strategy (2015)’ and is taught by qualified teachers and aims to help children understand global cultures and traditions and appreciate and understand diversity. The State has provided schools with training and guidance to deliver the new curriculum content, and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority has developed resources to support teachers.

Government schools in **Tasmania** may teach GRE as part of the curriculum, understood as education about various forms of ‘religious thought, belief and expression practised in Australian society and other societies, both currently and historically.’ Religious Instruction (RI), with the support of the school community can also be offered. RI is focussed on a particular religion and taught by clergy or other instructors approved by that religious community. Parental permission (opt-in) is required, and such instruction is limited to a maximum of forty hours in a school year. Alternative activities are provided for students who are not taking religious instruction.

Teaching in **Western Australia** is governed by the *School Education Act* (1999), sections 66-71, which reaffirm its ‘secular’ nature by not permitting the

⁴⁷ 25 August 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/SoniaHornery/posts/the-nsw-teachers-federation-is-leading-a-campaign-to-try-to-remove-scripture-cla/3588040884563260/>.

⁴⁸ Report of the Committee on Religious Education (1974), the Russell Report, <https://vichumanist.org.au/wp-content/uploads/russellreport/Russell-Report-Ch-1.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Victoria Education and Reform Act (2006), <https://content.legislation.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/06-24aa082%20authorised.pdf>, Section 2.2.10: 41- 42.

curriculum and teaching in Western Australian public schools ‘to promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect’.

However, both General Religious Education (GRE) and Special Religious Education (SRE) programmes can take place. GRE can be included in the school curriculum as part of teaching and learning activities, with the focus on the study of major forms of religious thought and expression in Australia and beyond. GRE should be aligned with the learning area content described in the *Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline*. Students can be exempted on the grounds of parental ‘conscientious objection’, that is a ‘personal, philosophical, religious or educational conviction’ that taking part in GRE ‘would be prejudicial to their child.’

SRE cannot be taught in public schools as part of the general curriculum. The focus of SRE is on the distinctive religious tenets or beliefs of a particular religion and is provided by volunteers who have been authorised to deliver a particular SRE programme. The decision about whether, or which SRE programme will be provided at the school is made by the principal, in consultation with the school council or board. Consultation and communications are ‘school-based’ matters.⁵⁰ SRE is the default position for all students unless parents exercise their right to withdraw their child from SRE, when alternative arrangements are made. There is also a provision for school activities, such as assemblies to include prayers, songs, and other religious, spiritual, or moral materials, that will be included as part of the general religious education. For these too, parents can in writing request the withdrawal of their children.

Queensland too confirms that its state school education is ‘secular’. Religious instruction (RI) is regulated under the *Education (General Provisions) Act* (2006). The *Education (General Provisions) Regulation* (2017), part 5, permits RI to students (Years 1-12) ‘who are members of a faith group that has approval to deliver religious instruction at the school’ for up to one hour a week. Faith groups can apply in writing to a school principal to set up classes for a single faith group or a ‘cooperative arrangement between more than one faith group working together’, if there are students of that faith at the school. Parents and caregivers are required to provide details of their child’s religious denomination at the time of enrolment. There are alternatives for students whose parents have withdrawn them from RI. There are training and accreditation procedures for providers and voluntary teachers.⁵¹ Currently 750 schools in the Queensland have RI programmes.

Following the Victoria decision to prohibit SRI/RI in school hours, the Queensland Parents for Secular State Schools (QPSSS) began lobbying for Queensland to consider a similar shift. In 2109 QPSSS called for the replacement of RI, taught by religious volunteers, with a curriculum-based programme in which multiple religions and non-religious world views are taught by qualified teachers to all students, and launched a petition to the Queensland parliament to this effect.⁵² They also advocate that funds be redirected from the National School Chaplaincy Program to the provision of more professionally trained secular school counsellors and guidance officers. The removal of RI/scripture from Queensland state primary schools during school hours is also supported by the Queensland Teachers Union and backed by the Australian Education Union (AEU). The Queensland Government has no plans for changes to religious education.

⁵⁰ In Western Australia, SRE, under the rubric of Christian Religious Education (CRE), is offered by two different Christian trans-denominational Protestant groups, and by Catholic, and Bahá’í SRE providers.

⁵¹ <https://education.qld.gov.au/parents/Documents/report-review-of-godspace-religious-instruction-materials.pdf>; <https://education.qld.gov.au/parents/Documents/report-review-of-the-access-ministries-religious-instruction-materials.pdf>; <https://education.qld.gov.au/parents/Documents/report-review-of-the-connect-religious-instruction-materials.pdf>.

⁵² See, Queensland, *Rudock Review on Religious Freedom* (2018), <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/religious-freedom-submissions/8285.pdf>.

In the **ACT**, the *Education Act* (Section 29) allows for religious education (SRE) in public schools in cooperation with recognised religious groups for students whose parents have given consent. Classes are taught by a representative of a religious group and for no more than forty minutes for one lesson or 7 hours per school term. Alternative activities are offered for those withdrawn students.

Another issue of some relevancy to New Zealand is the Australian government's National School Chaplaincy Program, which provided more than four million dollars between 2007 and 2014 to place chaplains - 98 per cent of whom are Christian - in schools, and more than two-thirds of these are religious chaplains in government schools. Parental concerns are that counselling advice is often from an evangelical or Pentecostal perspective have been registered. In New Zealand there has also been a growth of school chaplains, and some Christian providers of Christian religious instruction offer chaplaincy services to state schools.

In 2014, the Australian Federal Government introduced the Australian Curriculum (*National Curriculum, Foundation to Year 10*), the overarching framework for all curriculums and syllabuses in each of the states and territories, including delineating the 'goals of education'. The developments of these goals have a bearing on the teaching about religions in schools. The Australian Department of Education, Science and Training developed the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* in 2005 with nine values for education, the final one of which is 'Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion', focussed on teaching students to 'be aware of others and their cultures, accept diversity within a democratic society, being included and including others'.⁵³ The Curriculum is currently under review (2020), underpinned by the education goals of the 2019 *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (ASMED)*.

The Ministers of Education agreed on educational goals for all Australians with ASMED. This declaration has two principal educational goals. The first is that Australian education 'promotes excellence and equity', including, ensuring that 'education promotes and contributes to a socially cohesive society that values, respects and appreciates different points of view and cultural, social, linguistic and religious diversity'.⁵⁴ And secondly, that 'All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.'

The *National Curriculum (Years 1-10)* promote these goals, with programmes, such as, 'Ethical Capability', 'Intercultural Capability', and 'Personal and Social Capability', that are designed to engage students in developing tolerance and strategies of inclusion. For example, the 'Ethical Capability' programme explores what it means for individuals and societies to live well by asking questions such as 'what ought we do?', and 'what kind of person should I be?', in the context of developing open-mindedness and reasonableness.⁵⁵ The 'Personal and Social Capability' programme focusses on relational skills, emotional skills, self-understanding, feelings of 'self-worth', with the aim of equipping 'individuals to manage their emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being' and preparing them for life and the future roles in the community.⁵⁶ The 'Intercultural Capability' programme is designed to foster in students the 'ability to respect diversity and difference within their immediate community, Australia, and the world, with a stress on the value of 'social cohesion' and becoming 'responsible local and global citizens'.⁵⁷

Religious studies courses can be seen as clearly contributing to these goals although to what extent is as yet unclear. Many States offer a GRE course (Year 11 and on) that positions issues of religion within Australia's diverse society. For example, in Western Australia the 'Religion and Life' course seeks to teach

⁵³ National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (2005), Commonwealth of Australia, http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/framework_pdf_version_for_the_web.pdf, 4.

⁵⁴ Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019), [https://uploadstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public-assets/education-au/melbdec/ED19-0230%20-%20SCH%20-%20Alice%20Springs%20\(Mparntwe\)%20Education%20Declaration_ACC.pdf](https://uploadstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public-assets/education-au/melbdec/ED19-0230%20-%20SCH%20-%20Alice%20Springs%20(Mparntwe)%20Education%20Declaration_ACC.pdf), 5. This replaces the Melbourne Declaration of 2008 and now provides the new basis for the Australian Curriculum.

⁵⁵ <https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/ethical-capability/introduction/rationale-and-aims>

⁵⁶ <https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/personal-and-social-capability/introduction/rationale-and-aims>

⁵⁷ <https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/intercultural-capability/introduction/rationale-and-aims>

students in Years 11-12 about the relationships between society, religion, and individuals. The course seeks to develop skills such as research, observation, analysis, and discussion to give students a broad understanding of religion and how it affects different communities and their understanding of the world.⁵⁸

Other courses such as Queensland's 'The Study of Religion' teach students to 'become aware of their own religious beliefs' and 'the religious beliefs of others', and how people holding such beliefs impact society. 'The Study of Religion' introduces students to the wide range of practices and beliefs of the 'five major traditions' of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as well as Australian Aboriginal spiritualities and Torres Strait Islander religion. The four units of study are the study of religious texts; religious ritual; religious ethics; and religion, rights, and the nation state.

Queensland also offers a course named 'Religion and Ethics' encouraging students to examine their values and choices and see how these compare to their beliefs. Further, it aims to enhance students' understanding of beliefs and values and how they are shaped by community, family, culture, gender, and race.

There is one Australian development that while having no direct counterpart in New Zealand raises important questions about the nature of religious instruction in schools. The lifting of restrictions on state funding for private, mainly Christian, schools, led to their proliferation. There are several thousand private schools in Australia, many established in the last two decades, more than nine out of ten of them are Christian (including several traditional denominations, and sectarian churches), with a small number of Jewish, Muslim, and others. Their public funding ranges from 20 percent to 80 percent. Many are administered by newer Christian associations. There are issues about the teaching of creation science, and concerns about some of the values taught and modelled, based on exemptions from some federal and state anti-discrimination laws. There have been several unsuccessful attempts to address this last issue, as in the *Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Tolerance) Bill* (2005) in the New South Wales Upper House.

Religious education is widely taught across Australia and debate ongoing as to its nature and future, many of these debates resonate with developments in New Zealand, and the post-confessional alternatives bear further exploration.

⁵⁸ https://senior-secondary.scsa.wa.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/10451/Religion-and-Life-Y11-Syllabus-General-2016-GD_pdf.pdf, 5.

Canada

Religious education in Canada has been complex due to the country's colonial history with French-speaking Catholics and English-speaking Protestants settling alongside indigenous peoples.⁵⁹ *The British North America Act* (1867, later, *The Constitution Act*).⁶⁰ placed education under provincial jurisdiction and established the confessional and public school (Catholic and Protestant) systems that developed in Ontario and Québec.⁶¹ Analogous arrangements were developed in Manitoba (1870),⁶² Alberta (1905), and Saskatchewan (1905) as they became part of Canada. Different models developed but all with some support for religious instruction across a range of denominations in public schools.

Non-denominational Christian religious instruction developed to ensure the broad support of the diverse Protestant churches. And, in a similar fashion to debates in Australia, though what was deemed 'untenable' in Australia and led to 'secular' education there, proved to be less of a barrier in Canada.⁶³ By 1890 most provinces had mandatory, free education

systems. For example, British Columbia introduced public education after the *Common School Ordinance* (1869), compulsory free schooling was instituted in Ontario in 1871, and, in Québec in 1920, with separate Catholic and Protestant schools.

Canadians refer to the changes of the 1960s and 1970s in Québec as 'the Quiet Revolution', as a period of extensive modernising reforms, secularisation, and democratisation, which challenged the public role of the Roman Catholic Church, and its involvement in religious education in schools. Parallel developments took place across the Canadian Provinces.⁶⁴

Until the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), particularly Section 2(a), which allowed for the 'freedom of conscious and religion', Canadian schools had been free to offer prayers and confessional religious teachings to their students. The *Charter* provided a foundation to legally challenge the confessional teaching of religion in schools.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Including Anglicans.

⁶⁰ *British North America Act* (1867).

⁶¹ Young (2013), 71. 'Public schools' were those funded by the provincial governments, many of which taught a non-denominational Protestant morality and dogma. Catholic schools were not always funded by provincial governments, as this was dependent upon the size of the Catholic population. Later, schools would be divided on linguistic, rather than on religious lines.

⁶² Manitoba in 1890 created a unitary, public school system ending funding for separate Catholic schools but in 1897 funding resumed.

⁶³ Young (2013), 69.

⁶⁴ **School funding in Canada**

Province	Fully funded public system	Fully funded separate school system	Public funds partially fund independent schools
British Columbia	Yes	No	Yes
Alberta	Yes	Yes	Yes
Saskatchewan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Manitoba	Yes	No	Yes
Ontario	Yes	Yes	No
Québec	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Brunswick	Yes	No	No
Nova Scotia	Yes	No	No
Prince Edward Island	Yes	No	No
Newfoundland & Labrador	Yes	No	No

Four of the provinces fully public-funded 'separate' school systems. Separate refers to Catholic schools in three provinces, and for 'English-speaking' schools in Québec (*Québec Education Act* (1988)) which defined separate schools on linguistic not confessional lines. Three of the provinces publicly fund Catholic schools (Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan) and Québec fully funds English-speaking schools. Five of the provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Québec) also offer part funding for independent schools, the majority of which are confessional schools. (Adapted from Young, John (2013), 71, data from Johnstone, Larry & Swift, Susan (2000) *Public Funding of Private and Denominational Schools in Canada*, Ontario Legislative Library).

⁶⁵ *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), Section 2(a)

In the 1980s through to the 1990s, courts increasingly ruled that religious observance or instruction of a particular faith was not permissible in public schools.⁶⁶

While schools could no longer teach confessional religion in public schools they could teach about religions. Religious education in Canada tilted toward the teaching about diverse religions. For example, Québec introduced the Ethics and Religious Culture programme in 2008, with the aim of encouraging students to 'grow and develop in a society in which different values and beliefs coexist.'⁶⁷

Ontario

The *Constitution Act* (1867) provided both Roman Catholics and Protestants with government funded schools. The resulting dual school system included non-denominational Protestant 'common schools' (later known as 'public schools') and 'separate schools' which included schools designed expressly to serve groups, such as Roman Catholics. The historically Protestant 'public school' system transitioned into a 'secular' public school system.

The *Education Act* 1990 assumed Christianity to be the dominant religion in Ontario as in its duty, 'to provide pupils with a religious context, primarily Christian, in which to develop appropriate responses to life's situations.'⁶⁸ The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), Sections 2 and 15, provided the legal means by which minority religious groups were able to challenge the privileged role of Protestant Christianity in Ontario public education.

Several challenges to religious instruction in schools were launched in the years after the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* came into force. In *Zylberberg v. Sudbury Board of Education*, the Ontario Court of Appeal prohibited the use of the Lord's Prayer

in opening exercises in public schools as having offended the *Charter*, s2(a), (1988). The Court ruled that the regulatory permission infringed religious freedom because schools could use only the Lord's Prayer rather than alternatives. It was argued that the exemption provision effectively stigmatized children and coerced them into a religious observance which was offensive to them. The ruling understood public schools to be spaces free of coercion and intimidation in which all religions were to be treated equally, that is, in a 'secular' fashion.⁶⁹

In 1991 the Ontario Ministry of Education issued Policy Memorandum 112 (PPM 112: Education about Religion in the Public Elementary and Secondary Schools) to all public boards instructing them to cease all religious instruction and any religious accommodation which could be construed as coercive, indoctrination or exclusionary.⁷⁰

In 1999 the United Nations Human Rights Committee condemned Canada and Ontario for having violated the equality provisions (Article 26) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Committee restated its concerns on November 2, 2005, when it published its *Concluding Observations* regarding Canada's fifth periodic report under the Covenant. The Committee observed that Canada had failed to 'adopt steps to eliminate discrimination on the basis of religion in the funding of schools in Ontario.'

Since the 1990s there have been a continuous stream of court cases and complaints addressing religion in public schools. These have ranged over religious accommodation of beliefs and practices without endorsing or sanctioning any in particular or privileging some over others; provision for worship facilities and opportunities for minority groups of students; issues of indoctrination and coercion; ensuring equity

⁶⁶ Young (2013), 73.

⁶⁷ *Ethics and Religious Culture* (2008), Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement Supérieur, http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/education/jeunes/pfeq/PFEQ_ethique-culture-religieuse-primaire_2008_EN.pdf; http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/education/jeunes/pfeq/PFEQ_ethique-culture-religieuse-secondaire_2008_EN.pdf

⁶⁸ *Education Act* 1990. (Regulation 262, s. 28(4).

⁶⁹ http://www.thecharterrules.ca/resources/zylberberg_v_sudbury_board_of_education_1988_canlii_189_on_ca.pdf.

⁷⁰ See also, Ontario, PPM 119, 5, School board policies on religious accommodation must be in accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the requirements stated in Policy/Program Memorandum No. 108, 'Opening or Closing Exercises in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools', and in sections 27–29 ('Religion in Schools') of Regulation 298. As part of their equity and inclusive education policy and implementation plan, Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, 7, boards will include a religious accommodation guideline in keeping with the Ontario Human Rights Code, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of creed (e.g., religion) and imposes a duty to accommodate. Boards are expected to take appropriate steps to provide religious accommodation for students and staff.

and equality; and the rights that students have to participate in their own education.

Ontario offers two contemporary courses on religion for grade 11. The first, 'World Religions and Belief Traditions: Perspectives, Issues, and Challenges' explores various global traditions and investigate how each tradition meets human needs. Students learn about the relationship between belief and action, examine sacred texts, and investigate how different periods influence the shape of religions. In the second, 'World Religions and Belief Traditions in Daily Life' students study a diverse selection of religions in the Canadian context. The focus is on humanity's search for meaning via the examination of religious practices, beliefs, passages, and rites.

Québec

The *Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* (1975) gave parents the right to 'require' a public education for their children 'consistent with their religious and moral convictions.'⁷¹ A task force was set up with the mandate to 'to examine the place of religion in schools, to define relevant guidelines, and to propose methods for their implementation' in 1997. The intention was to promote a wide public debate on the role of religion in the Province's schools. The *Proulx Task Force Report on the Place of Religion in Québec Schools* (1999) recommended the laicisation of Québec schools.⁷² The Québec government in 1988, having secured the abrogation of Section 93 of the *Constitution Act* (1867) - removing the provisions for denominational education in the public education system - replaced the Province's Protestant and Catholic school boards with linguistic ones, namely French and English.

In 2000 Catholic and Protestant public schools were abolished after having existed legally since 1867. *Bill 118*,⁷³ adopted in 2000, conveyed the state's

neutrality toward religion and added various provisions to the *Education Act*.⁷⁴

Catholic religious instruction (religious/moral education) was replaced in 2008 with a non-confessional course, 'Ethics and religious culture/Éthique et culture religieuse (ERC)', taught in all primary and secondary schools in the province, both public and private.⁷⁵ Based on two principles - the Recognition of Others, and the Pursuit of the Common Good - it is aimed to promote among students a 'culture of dialogue' by developing skills that focussed on understanding Québec's religious history and its increasing religious diversity, both religious and non-religious.⁷⁶

This new course was part of the government's electoral promise to promote secularism and pass the controversial *Bill 21, An Act respecting the laicity* (2019).⁷⁷ Laicity entails the separation of state and religions, the religious neutrality of the state, the equality of all citizens, and the freedom of conscience and religion. The law prohibits wearing religious symbols at work in the public sphere, impacting some teachers, lawyers, police officers and others from wearing the hijab for Muslim women, kippahs by Jewish men, and turbans worn by Sikhs. There is (November 2020) currently a case before the Québec Superior Court against Bill 21 filed by the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM), the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) and Ichrak Nourel Hak, a Muslim woman, claiming that her right to the freedom of religion had been violated by these restrictions.

'Ethics and religious culture/Éthique et culture religieuse' (ERC) has been controversial and criticised as being too relativistic, and some Catholic parents, as well as parents of other religions, objected to their children learning ethics and comparative religious beliefs outside of their own moral and religious

⁷¹ *Québec Charter of Human Rights* (1975).

⁷² *Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Québec* (1999), Ministère de l'Éducation, 7; http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/ministere/organismes/CAR_Avis_EduquerReligionEcole_ang.pdf.

⁷³ *Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Québec* (1999), Ministère de l'Éducation, 7.

⁷⁴ *Bill 118: An Act to amend various legislative provisions respecting education as regards confessional matters* (2000), Québec Ministère de l'Éducation.

⁷⁵ http://religionanddiversity.ca/media/uploads/religion_and_education_in_the_provinces_of_quebec_and_ontario_report.pdf_page_11.

⁷⁶ For examples of ERC teaching materials, <https://www.learnquebec.ca/ethics-and-religious-culture1#:~:text=The%20ERC%20program%20allows%20your,in%20which%20Qu%C3%A9bec%27s%20religious%20heritage>.

⁷⁷ <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-21-42-1.html>.

frameworks, and contended that as the programme was compulsory it was unconstitutional and infringed on the right of religious freedom. This led to two high profile court cases.⁷⁸

It was announced in 2020 by the Education Minister there were plans to replace ERC with a new course focussed on students' 'role as citizens', addressing citizen participation, digital-citizenship, democracy, and the ERC section on religions would be examine the cultures of different societies. The new curriculum is to be piloted in 2021 and offered to all students in 2022. The Parti Québécois have already objected that it undermines Québec identity and promotes the federal government's vision of multiculturalism.

In Québec we witness the entanglement of the question of the role of religion with the experience of the loss of the status quo by the diminishing majority religious community defined by their Québécois Catholic identity. And this has taken place under a 'secularist' government who reject the reification of multiculturalism's religious, cultural, and ethnic communities. These tensions are being played out in several major sites, including in the Province's schools over the imposed shift from religious instruction to religious studies.

The *Canadian Charter* states that the Charter "shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians" (Section 27). The Supreme Court of Canada has defined 'religion is one of the dominant aspects of culture which (section 27) is intended to preserve and enhance' and understands Canada to be an 'open and pluralistic society.'

In Canada, the general secularisation of the schooling system took place during the latter half of the 20th century. During the 1990s, major provinces began to prohibit the confessional teaching of religion and religious prayers, and in the 2000s, RE in Canada has moved to the non-confessional (religious studies) teaching of major faiths within Canada and the world, in the acknowledgement of Canada's diverse religious population, and global realities.

⁷⁸ See *SL v. Commission scolaire des Chênes v. Québec* (2012), and, *Loyola High school v. Québec* (2015), which raised concerns over the impartiality of non-confessional teaching, in the latter case, the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed that if religious education is to be taught as part of the curriculum then it must be 'the objective presentation of various religions' and that being taught about religions was not a violation of the right to freedom of religion.

U.S.

The U.S. First Amendment states that ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.’⁷⁹

The first schools in the U.S. were openly religious. America’s first education laws, enacted in Massachusetts in 1642 and 1647, explicitly acknowledged that common schools were to be organized to teach children ‘to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of this country.’⁸⁰

Debates over religion in education began early in America. For example, in 1779 Thomas Jefferson specifically advocated that free common schools be non-sectarian, in arguing that ‘no religious reading, instruction or exercise, shall be prescribed or practiced inconsistent with the tenets of any religious sect or denomination.’⁸¹ Debates between Catholics and Protestants as to the nature of education also developed in this period.

Education in America remained primarily under ecclesiastical control up to the middle of the nineteenth century until state support of sectarian schools was gradually withdrawn.⁸²

By the 1870s most state constitutions expressly divorced religion from the public educational system. Increasingly state courts in the latter part of the nineteenth century espoused church-state separation for the public school.⁸³ For example, ‘in June 1872 the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of New York ruled that no prayers, Bible readings, or religious exercises were to be included as part of the curriculum of a public school.’

By 1890, most states and territories had passed compulsory attendance laws. Beginning with Massachusetts in 1852.⁸⁴ By 1918, when Mississippi enacted a compulsory education law, all U.S. states had legal attendance requirements.⁸⁵

There was a regeneration in confessional religious education in U.S. schools post-1918. Some, such as Donald Boles, argue that ‘the high watermark of the principle of separation of church and state seems to have occurred in the waning days of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth’, and the practice of Bible reading in the public schools substantially increased after World War I.⁸⁶

During the mid-20th century, a series of court rulings forbade the confessional teaching of religion in U.S. public schools, marking the end of confessional religious instruction and the beginnings of the slow and decentralised take up of non-confessional religious education or religious studies. The growth of religious instruction became a contentious issue in the U.S. courts. The U.S. Supreme Court made its 8–1 decision in the *School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp* (1963) ‘to strike down mandatory, coercive, and school-sponsored forms of religious worship in public schools.’⁸⁷

In *McCullum v. Board of Education* (1948),⁸⁸ the Supreme Court declared by an 8 to 1 vote that that ‘released time’, that is, setting aside a portion of each day for religious instruction by representatives of various faiths, was unconstitutional even though attendance in these classes may be regarded as voluntary.⁸⁹ And, in 1962 the Supreme Court ruled in *Engel vs. Vitale*, by a vote of 6 to 1, that the state-sponsored ‘prayer program’ of the schools of New York state was unconstitutional.⁹⁰

79 *The Constitution of the United States* (1789), <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

80 <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

81 <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

82 <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

83 <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

84 Katz, A, *History of Compulsory Education Laws*, 17.

85 *Ibid*, 1.

86 Boles, *The Bible, Religion and the Public School*, 58.

87 *Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. at 225.

88 *McCullum v. Board of Education*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948)

89 <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/333/203>

90 *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962), <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/facts-and-case-summary-engel-v-vitale>.

Importantly, none of these cases forbade the academic teaching of religion in the U.S. as noted in the *Abington Township vs. Schempp* case, ‘nothing we have said here indicates that . . . study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular programme of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.’⁹¹

During the second half of the 20th century several major policy documents were published in relation to the teaching of religion in government schools in the attempt to define what was acceptable and appropriate. For example, *Religion in the Public-School Curriculum: Questions and Answers*, first published in 1988.⁹² These include five documents published by the U.S. Department of Education.⁹³

In 2000, Modesto in California became the first U.S. Schooling District to create a compulsory course on world religions for students. The course intended to convey ‘knowledge of world cultures and promote mutual respect.’⁹⁴ The course had moderate, but positive effects on student tolerance.⁹⁵

The American Academy of Religion published, *Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States* in 2010. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) published an *American Academy of Religion-approved Religious Studies Companion Document to the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* in 2017. This was the first comprehensive framework for the constitutional teaching of religious studies in U.S. public schools.⁹⁶ The document insists that learning about religion within the social studies curriculum ‘is necessary for effective and engaged citizenship in an interconnected and diverse nation and world’, and that this is ‘critical for decreasing religious illiteracy and the bigotry and prejudice it fuels.’⁹⁷

Currently, religious studies (religious education) is taught across the U.S. although the focus is still on Christianity, albeit from a non-confessional or non-denominational approach. There are hundreds of courses on Bible History, Culture, and the Bible as Literature, as well a smaller but growing number on diverse religions.

⁹¹ *Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. at 225.

⁹² “Religion in the Public-School Curriculum: Questions and Answers.” *Journal of Law and Religion* 8, no. 1/2 (1990): 309–12.

⁹³ The five publications in the 2000 Department of Education mailing included (1) *Religious Expression in Public Schools*, (2) *A Parent’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools*, (3) *A Teacher’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools*, (4) *Public Schools and Religious Communities: A First Amendment Guide*, and (5) *How Faith Communities Support Children’s Learning in Public Schools*. They can be found here, <https://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Religion-in-the-Public-School-Curriculum-Questions-and-Answers.pdf>

⁹⁴ Lester and Roberts, “How Teaching World Religions Brought a Truce to the Culture Wars in Modesto, California,” 189.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 195.

⁹⁶ Marcus, Soules, and Callaway, “National Summit on Religion and Education: A White Paper.” 3-4

⁹⁷ *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History*, 92.

Singapore

Singapore does not fit easily in the patterns of the countries discussed above, it is, however, an important example of the attempt to utilize school education for 'harmonious' community cohesion. This has been a deliberate focus in Singapore since the beginning of the State in the 1960s. Singapore has generally high standards of education from primary school to higher education levels. Religious education was compulsory for high school aged students during the 1980's and was seen as a vehicle for moral education. Religious education, or religious knowledge (RK) as it is generally referred to in Singapore, was one of many citizen programmes that were developed to foster 'shared identity and a value system.' However, it was replaced by a secular alternative in the early 1990s.

The policy for universal education was first proposed in the *Ten Years Programme for Education Policy in the Colony of Singapore* in 1947. The Ministry of Education was established in 1955, and in 1957 full aid was extended to Chinese and Tamil schools.⁹⁸ From 1959 to 1978 Singapore began to ramp up its efforts to develop a nationwide education system, a period now known as 'survival-driven education'. The Government replaced ethnic schools with a central system and sought to ensure that each ethnic group was treated equally. The government also built schools, and trained teachers. The schools were bilingual, teaching students in their native languages as well as in English.⁹⁹ The goal of this period was to develop a skilled workforce and decrease unemployment.

Prior to the introduction of compulsory religious education, various moral education programmes had been implemented,¹⁰⁰ including Secular Ethics, and a Civic Values programme.¹⁰¹ Confessional teaching of religion was not allowed in public schools, however,

there were a number of government-funded religious schools of various characters.¹⁰²

The *Report on the Ministry of Education* (1978), known as the *Goh Report* represented the shift from the quantity of education, the building of schools and training of more teachers, to the focus on the quality of education and the beginning of a period known as the 'efficiency phase'. This phase was marked by the introduction of the New Education System (NES), the guiding rationale of which was that all students be allowed to develop at their own individual pace based on their abilities.¹⁰³

The *Goh Report* and the *Report on Moral Education* (1979) were critical of the previous secular moral education programmes, namely the Civics and Education for Living programmes, for the inadequacies of the teaching materials and for not being taken seriously by school students. Both reports reiterated the importance of moral and religious education for learning outcomes, as well as for the development of good citizens.¹⁰⁴ At the time, the education minister Goh Keng Swee believed that religious education was essential for the moral development of students.¹⁰⁵ Based on the findings of these two reports, Religious Knowledge (RK) was introduced as a compulsory programme at the upper secondary levels in schools from 1984 to 1989.¹⁰⁶ The subject taught the history, ethics, practices and beliefs of various religions. However, worship and proselytization were forbidden.¹⁰⁷ 'The move to introduce Religious Knowledge arose out of concern on the part of senior cabinet members that the moral values of the wider society were under threat from modernization and undesirable 'Western values'.¹⁰⁸ A primary western value that was considered dangerous was 'individuality' which was to be consciously countered by fostering

⁹⁸ https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2018-01-17_103146.html

⁹⁹ <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/PISA-2015-singapore.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ *Character and Citizenship Education, Syllabus Secondary* (2014).

¹⁰¹ Tan, Jason (1997), 605.

¹⁰² Tan, Jason (1997), 605.

¹⁰³ Lee, Goh, and Fredriksen, *Toward a Better Future*, 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Goh Report; Report on Moral Education* (1979).

¹⁰⁵ <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19820117-1.2.2>.

¹⁰⁶ Tan, Charlene (2008), 323.

¹⁰⁷ Tan, Jason (1997), 610.

¹⁰⁸ Tan, Jason (1997), 610.

'communitarianism.'¹⁰⁹ The RK programme was also seen as a principal vehicle for the promotion of 'Asian values in education'.

The level to which the academic study of religion was taught in government schools as a part of such programmes has changed over time. In October 1989, the Singaporean Government announced that RK would no longer be taught as a compulsory subject. Due in part to the lack of impartiality and the failure of the programme to be neutral in line with the State's official 'secular' stance, and the way the curriculum could be selectively appropriated by religious communities. The subject became an elective to be taught outside curriculum hours and was not to contribute to university entrance. However, in the late 1980s, the programme was perceived as ineffective due, in part, to proselytising teachers. And from 1991 the RK programme was replaced by the 'Civic and Moral Education Program', which took a secular approach to the teaching of 'Shared Values' and sought to develop harmony between the various religious groups as well as promote tolerance. The programme included materials on the various religions of Singapore.¹¹⁰

The Civics and Moral Education programme was conceived of as the primary driver of Singapore's 'National Values', by focussing 'on the six core values: respect, responsibility, integrity, care, resilience and harmony.'¹¹¹

The *National Education Program* was introduced in Singapore as part of the government's new *Knowledge Based Economy Initiative* in 1997. The programme aimed at developing and maintaining social and

racial harmony as well as preparing students for the 21st century by moving toward a more innovative and creative economy.¹¹² 'The objectives are to develop national cohesion; to raise awareness of challenges and constraints on the country's development; cultivate in students the instincts for survival; and instil in them confidence in the future of the country.'¹¹³

The *Compulsory Education Act* (2000) came into effect at the beginning of 2003, at the time, three percent of primary school aged children were not enrolled in school.¹¹⁴

Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) was introduced as a secondary school subject in 2014,¹¹⁵ with 'the goal to inculcate values and build competencies in our students to develop them to be good individuals and useful citizens.'¹¹⁶ These goals are not seen as being new with CCE but the continuation and development of educational values since Singapore's independence.¹¹⁷

Religion features in the CCE Primary School syllabus as a 'key topic' in the 'Community Domain' section of the syllabus about harmony between religious groups and the knowledge of religious festivals, beliefs, and practices.¹¹⁸ The senior syllabus requires that students 'understand the different systems of belief, religions and practices.'¹¹⁹

In Singapore, there has been no transition from confessional to non-confessional RE. Instead, there have been two parallel systems. The first, fully funded by the government, has remained secular since independence. The second, partially funded, grew to include schools with distinct religious affiliations.

¹⁰⁹ *Shared Values White Paper* (1991), Parliament of Singapore.

¹¹⁰ Tan, Jason (1997), 618.

¹¹¹ https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_542_2004-12-18.html.

¹¹² Lee, Birger & Goh (2008), 29.

¹¹³ Zoe Boon and Benjamin Wong, *Character and Citizenship Education* https://link-springer-com.helicon.vuw.ac.nz/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-74746-0_11.pdf.

¹¹⁴ *Report of the Committee on Compulsory Education in Singapore*, 55.

¹¹⁵ https://link-springer-com.helicon.vuw.ac.nz/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-74746-0_11.pdf 183

¹¹⁶ *Character and Citizenship Education, Secondary Syllabus* (2014), 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 1, and https://link-springer-com.helicon.vuw.ac.nz/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-74746-0_11.pdf, 196.

¹¹⁸ *Character and Citizenship Education, Primary Syllabus* (2014) Government of Singapore, 33. http://curricula-depot.gei.de/bitstream/handle/11163/1493/782720773_2012_A.pdf?sequence=2.

¹¹⁹ *2014 Syllabus Character and Citizenship Education, Secondary*, 23.

Since independence, fully funded government schools in Singapore have had a strong focus on developing community cohesion and cultural/religious awareness through secular means. The primary driver of this focus has been civic and citizenry value programmes. There have been many iterations of these programmes, some focusing on religion more than others, however, the general aims, and secular principles have remained constant within fully funded government schools.

Alongside fully funded government schools are government-aided church schools. Before 1982 they were able to teach a single RK lesson per week outside of class time. These schools, often run by Christian groups, also maintained religious clubs, and conducted prayers before and after each school day. Several Islamic religious schools, madrasahs, also received a small amount of funding from the government and were able to teach Islamic religious knowledge. With the introduction of the 1982 RK programme in government schools, the regulation regarding religion in aided schools was liberalised. Aided schools began to develop more distinct religious identities.

Today, some Government-aided private schools have a distinct religious affiliation. Such schools may teach confessional religious education and hold services. However, the Ministry of Education stipulates that these activities must be optional due to the diverse religious landscape of Singapore. The time devoted to them must also be additional to schooling hours.

Summary

Religious education in and across the selected countries takes on a wide array of different forms. The U.S., for example, exhibits both complexity and variety due in part to its size, and its lengthy history of debates surrounding religion in education. The First Amendment to the Constitution (1791) prevented Congress from passing any law that established or favoured a religion, although it was not until the 20th century that this was applied to schools. A series of court cases in the last century resulted in the total prohibition of religious instruction (confessional religious education) in public schools. Since this period, however, religious studies (non-confessional religious education) has been increasingly acknowledged by the Federal Government as a significant area of study and many school districts have developed religious studies programmes, in part in response to increasing religious diversity. These, in a highly decentralised public educational system, offer a multiplicity of different approaches, curricula and desired learning outcomes.

Canada, though smaller, is also complex as the federal-province system gives a high degree of provincial control over education. The result historically has been overlapping systems of educational laws and developments in religious education across the country. However, The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) dislodged the confessional teaching and religious observances that occurred in many schools, and, by the late 1990s all provinces had declared their public-school systems to be secular. Non-confessional religious education (religious studies) is now compulsory in Quebec, whilst many provinces include RE as an elective subject.

The Australian Constitution declared the Federal Government religiously neutral and guaranteed the free practice of religion. As a result, Australia has a long history of secular education. However, most states allow religious volunteers to enter the classroom in a limited capacity, often for one hour's instruction per week in a programme labelled Special Religious Education (SRE). Most states also differentiate between SRE and General Religious Education (GRE). GRE, or the non-confessional teaching of religion, is commonly available as an elective subject.

England and Wales have a more centralised system of RE than the other countries. For example, since the 1988 *Education Reform Act* non-confessional RE has been a mandatory subject. Schools determine RE content via the

Locally Agreed Syllabus that has been devised and agreed upon by the Local Educational Authorities (LEA) through the Standard Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs). Though content differs, each syllabus must acknowledge that religious adherence in England and Wales is in the main Christian and must also address the fundamental principles and beliefs of other major traditions. The need to include the religiously non-affiliated and the increasing religious diversity of the classroom and the community has led to an array of recommendations for new programmes and approaches.

Singapore is a unique case in that it is significantly more religiously and ethnically diverse than the other selected countries. As a result of this diversity, the Singaporean Government has used education as a tool to promote societal cohesion and tolerance. Many ethics programmes have been developed with these aims since Singapore's independence in 1965. Religious Knowledge (RK) was one such programme. Mandatory for students from 1984-1989, RK was a non-confessional, broad subject that taught information about many religious traditions. It was replaced in 1991 with the Civic and Moral Education Program. RE has, since that time, been an integral aspect of moral or civic education programmes rather than an independent programme.

Across the five countries there has been a recognition that increased religious diversity and cultural change highlight the potentiality for denominational religious instruction to become divisive and at just how difficult, or for some impossible, it is to teach confessional religious formation in a religiously diverse context while fully acknowledging and respecting the rights of diverse students to religious freedom and to not be coerced. While professionally taught religious studies enhances inclusion of cultural and religious difference in the classroom and beyond and fosters community and social cohesion, the precise form that this takes is context-dependent and has often been subject to a series of different framings and models.

This issue has become legal and political in all five polities with opposing constituencies embracing or lamenting demographic religious changes, and enhanced sensibilities concerning non-discrimination and human rights, and religious and cultural diversity and identity. The overall pattern over the last three decades in publicly funded state schools is one of transition from confessional religious education to the non-confessional study of diverse religions and worldviews.

Ka tō te rā i a koe?

Can you make the sun shine?

(Proverb urging humility and any assumption of superiority) ¹²⁰

Stakeholder survey

A list of stakeholders was developed focussed on those who had publicly expressed an interest or concern with the place of religion in public schools and kura, including: representatives of religious communities (concentrated on religious and community leaders and their congregations); interfaith groups; school trustees (parents and teachers); teachers (primary and post-primary, and of social studies and religious education, including those in public, and a number of integrated schools); school principals; academics; and major educational organisations. Additional stakeholders were added on the advice of the Ministry of Education.

Particular attention was given to ensuring that there were participants from the two most organised, vocal, and positioned groups, the Secular Education Network, and the providers, supporters, and presenters of Christian religious instruction in public primary and intermediate schools. These two groups at the time of the stakeholder survey were engaged in a legal case on opposing sides, leading to Launchpad declining an invitation to participate formally, although Christian religious instruction presenters were more than adequately represented. SEN followers were also well represented in the sample.

The RDC presented a report on religious education in New Zealand schools to the 2018 Religious Leaders' meeting in Auckland, following their 2017 meeting when religion in schools was identified as a major, shared concern. The religious leaders expressed their broad support for the teaching about different religious beliefs and practices in New Zealand schools. The ensuing discussion focussed on the situation in public and integrated primary and intermediate schools; on the review of NCEA, including religious studies in secondary schools; and other related issues, including religious instruction in public schools. The preparation for that report had entailed meeting and interviewing integrated school organisation representatives; the leadership of SEN and Launchpad; the New Zealand

School Trustees Association (NZSTA); religious education and other teachers; researchers working on religious education in New Zealand; and interfaith groups around the country. This was supplemented by a series of independent meetings with interfaith groups discussing the impact of the 2018 NZ Census on the National Religious Diversity Statement, including addressing the issue of religious diversity and education. The RDC drew on these existing relationships and evidence, and on a series of faith and interfaith hui around New Zealand in 2019-2020 where religious education was widely discussed, in developing the list of survey stakeholders. These discussions provided a framework for the stakeholder survey questions.

The survey of twenty-five questions was designed to elicit general responses to the position of religion in public primary and intermediate schools, and specific positioning on the existing law, and the possible desire for change, in relation to support for religious instruction outside of normal school hours (the status quo); support for the teaching about different religious traditions (religious studies); and the shift from the former to the latter. In addition, there was a focus on what might be included in future teaching about religion in schools and indicators of the priorities for such teaching, with several more open questions designed to draw out some of the reasoning behind the declared positions.

The survey was prepared on the Qualtrics platform and was made available on the RDC website, with a dedicated email contact address for further details and enquiries. In addition, the survey was sent directly to stakeholder groups with the request to secure participants from the group in question. Responses were accepted from 14 July 2020 to 28 July 2020. Additional publicity was generated by media articles and comment.

¹²⁰ Grove, Neil & Mead, Hirini Moko (2001), *Ngā Pēpeha a ngā Tipuna: The Sayings of the Ancestors*, Victoria University Press, No. 1159: 190.

Survey participants were invited to take part in a follow-up meeting, and six Zoom meetings, including one of religious leaders, took place in August 2020. These allowed participants the opportunity to deliberate on their submitted survey answers and to dialogue and discuss these with others. These meetings, together with several person-to-person meetings with stakeholder groups generated considerably greater depth concerning the participants' underlying experiences and rationale for positions and preferences.

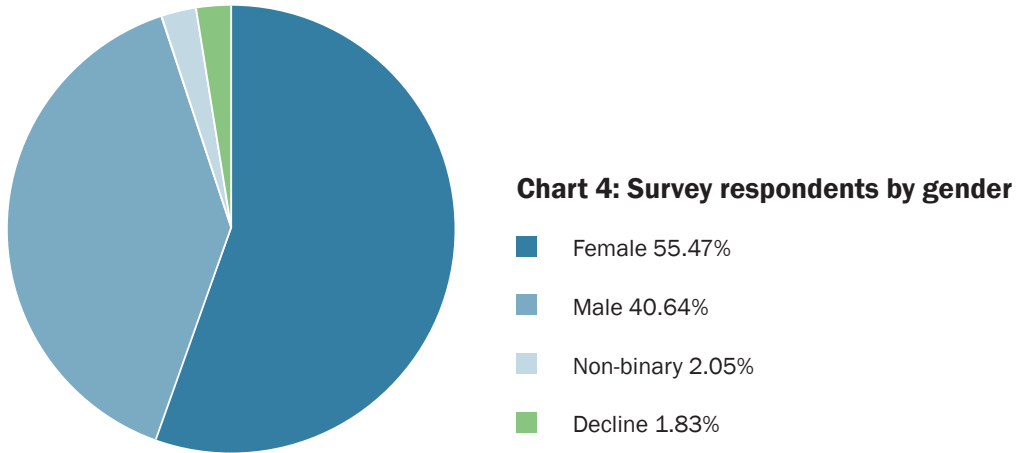
The survey understood 'religious instruction' as 'Christian religious instruction' presented/taught by volunteers as permitted under existing law outside of normal school hours; and, 'religious education' and/or 'religious studies' as the teaching about religions in schools as part of the curriculum.¹²¹ It is important to note that a number of Christian providers of religious instruction have more recently begun referring to their offerings as "Christian religious education" or "values education". Also, "religious studies" has a different meaning for some integrated schools where it refers to distinctive religious teaching, although this can include materials about other religions. Overseas usage differs again. For these reasons, there is an ongoing need for further discussion about terminology.

¹²¹ As found in *Religion in Schools* (2009) and used in *Guidelines on religious instruction in state primary schools, intermediate schools and ngā kura* (2019), NZ Ministry of Education.

Survey Results

Participants There were 671 survey respondents, with responses anonymized.

Gender



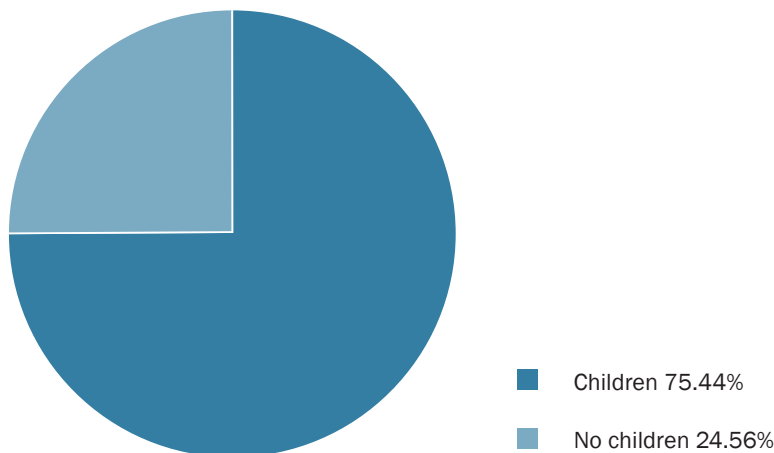
Most of the respondents were female, with a substantial male minority, a small number of non-binary respondents, and an even smaller number of those who declined to answer.

Female participants were more likely than males to understand religion as significant for their identity, while males were inclined to support religious studies.

The non-binary participants were almost exclusively NZ European/Pākehā and expressed opposition to Christian religious instruction and a special role for Christianity in schools, and either did not consider religion important for their identity, or if it was significant, recorded spiritual affiliations, and reflected this in their support for religious studies, and for the inclusion of spirituality and non-religious beliefs rather than the major religious traditions in future education.

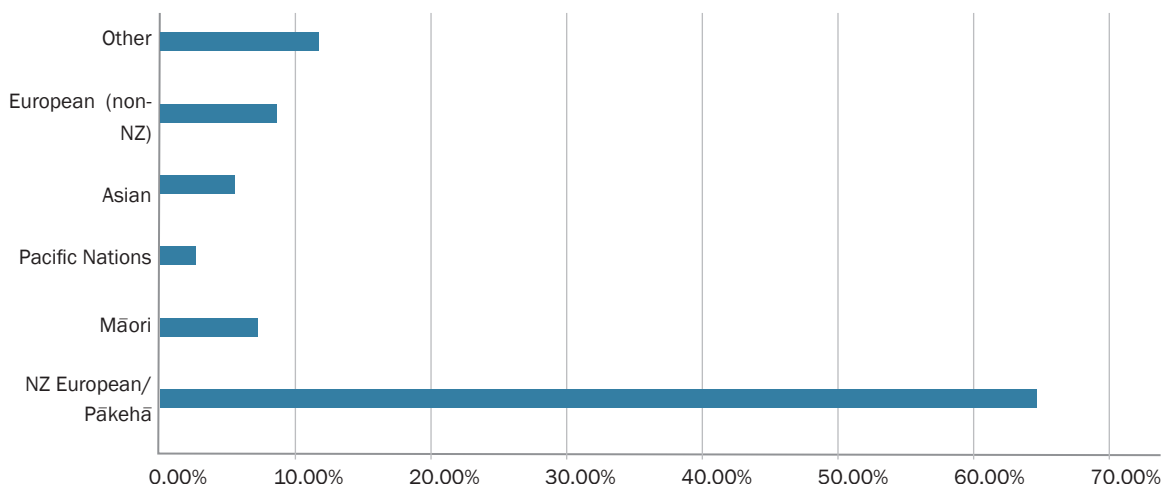
The age profile of participants (average 50 years) was appreciably higher than the general population, reflecting the relatively small number of students, the high numbers of the retired (including several octogenarians and a couple of nonagenarians), and the age profile of some religious communities. This age profile serves to heighten the significance of religion as younger age cohorts are more likely to report themselves as ‘nones’ (2018 Census).

Do you have children?



The average number of children across the whole sample was 2.02, while among those who have children the number was 2.59. This figure is significantly higher than the figure for the country, with a disproportional number of married people with children. The age of their children ranged from two months to forty-five years. The question ensured that parents were included in the sample.

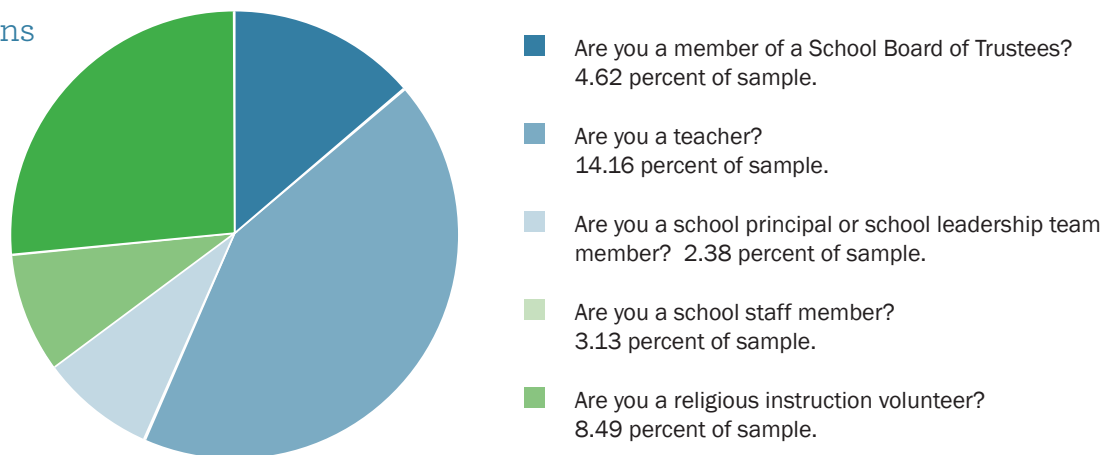
Ethnicity



Two thirds (64.27 percent) of the respondents were NZ European/Pākehā, 7.18 percent were Māori, Pacific Nations accounted for 2.84 percent, 5.68 percent were Asian, European (non-NZ) were a further 8.68 percent, and 11.35 percent reported 'other'. The 'other' category asked participants to specify their ethnicity which included, NZ Asian, NZ Dutch, NZ Pakistani, Chinese, African & Middle Eastern (including North African, Lebanese, and Jordanian), Australian, South African, British (including English, Anglo-Celtic), Malay, Jewish (including Ashkenazi, American and Israeli), Native American, Indian (including Fijian, and Anglo-Indian), South/Latin American, and one Earthling and a solitary 'Klinton'.

The proportionally large European (non-NZ) category included South Africans, English, and those identifying with specific European countries.

School Positions



Nearly a third of the respondents to this question (220 or 32.79 percent) are members of a School Board of Trustees (31); or teachers (95); school principals or school leadership team members (16); or are school staff members (21); or are religious instruction volunteers (57).

These participants indicate the high levels of experience and involvement in policy and decision-making around the issues of religion in schools. In addition, there was a significant proportion of teachers, by training, and past or current professional practice, with a number of these in leadership positions in their schools. Additionally, a further 3 percent were school staff members.

More than eight and a half percent of all respondents were religious instruction volunteers, a higher number than we had originally anticipated but this reflects the efforts we went to ensure their representation.

Overall, nearly a third of respondents are aware of the processes and procedures that determine the role of religion in a New Zealand school. These participants were more likely to have firm positions on religion and religious instruction in schools, in particular, those who are religious instruction volunteers (nearly all of whom are Christian) supported the current system in which they are engaged although a surprising number were open to future change.

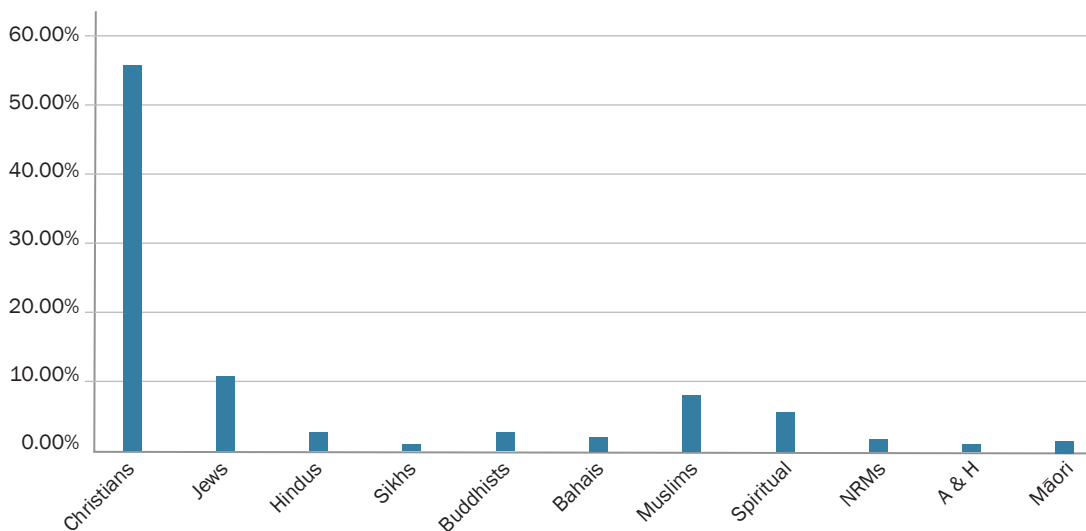
Religion

Do you identify with a religion and/or spiritual group?

More than six out of ten (63.70 percent) participants identify with a religion or spiritual group, while more than a third (36.30 percent) do not do so. Both those with religious and spiritual identifications and those who do not, have positions on religious instruction and religious education in New Zealand schools.

What religion or spiritual group?

Religious or spiritual identification



Of those who do report a religious or spiritual identification:

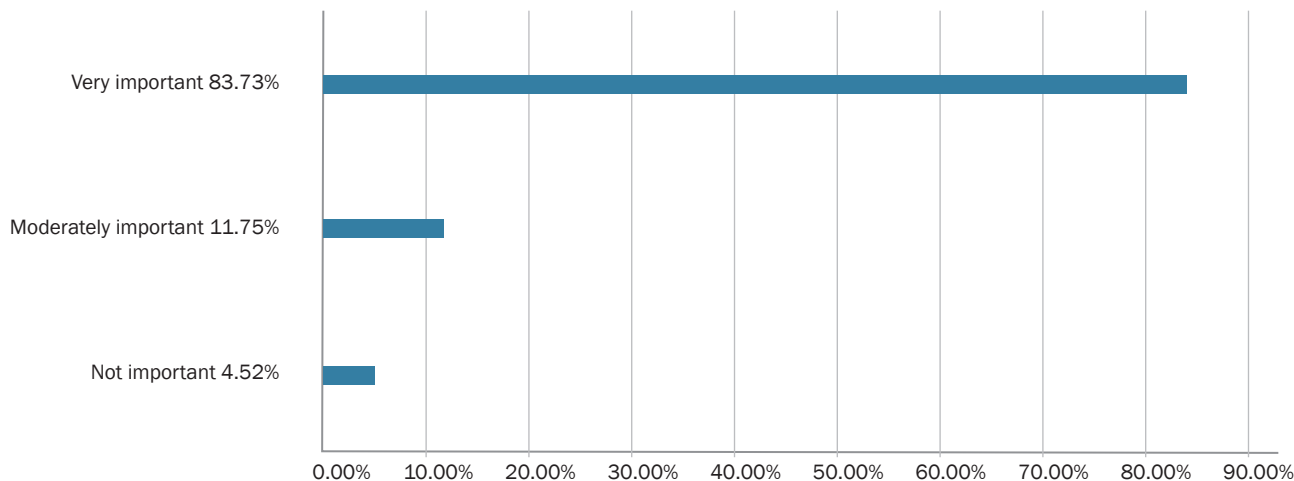
Christians accounted for nearly two-thirds (64.57 percent; comprising of “Christians” (includes Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Quakers, Protestants, Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, LDS; and those that identify as Catholics 8.41 percent). Among respondents the next largest group were Jews at 10.51 percent (including one Jewish Humanist), followed by the 6.91 percent who identify as Muslim. Buddhists are 2.7 percent, and Hindus (including Sant Mat and Hare Krishna) at 2.1 percent, followed by Sikhs (0.6 percent) and Bahá’ís (1.8 percent). Taha Wairua recorded 1.2 percent (includes Io Matua Kore, Tikanga Māori, Hahi Ringatū, and Io). The Spiritual category at 5.41 percent, includes mystics, Wiccans, Pagans, New Agers, meditators, Non-dualists, the Satanic Temple, universalists, and a lone Jedi. New Religious Movements at 1.2 percent, includes Scientologists and Unificationists, and finally the atheists and humanists who register this as their religion or spirituality at 0.9 percent. The evident predominance of Christians was countered by the religious diversity of the other participants, with all the major religious communities of New Zealand included, albeit with disproportionately high numbers of Muslims and Jews.

The 36.30 percent who did not identify with a religious or spiritual tradition reflect a large segment of the wider New Zealand population and included committed secularists, atheists, and agnostics. These respondents are more likely to support ‘secular’ schools and oppose religious instruction while supporting religious studies.

How important is your religion to how you see yourself?

Among those who have a religion, most (83.73 percent) understand their religion as being ‘very important’ for their identity. Of these, a number state that it is their ‘spirituality’, or their ‘faith’ rather than religion that was significant. A few saw their religion as growing in importance as they got older, and one person considered their religion as the basis of their essential Western values. For 11.75 percent religion was moderately important, as in ‘it is part of my life but does not define me’, and 4.52 percent considered that their religion was not important as part of their identity.

Importance of religion for identity



Four substantive issues

1. What should the role of religion in Aotearoa New Zealand schools and kura be?

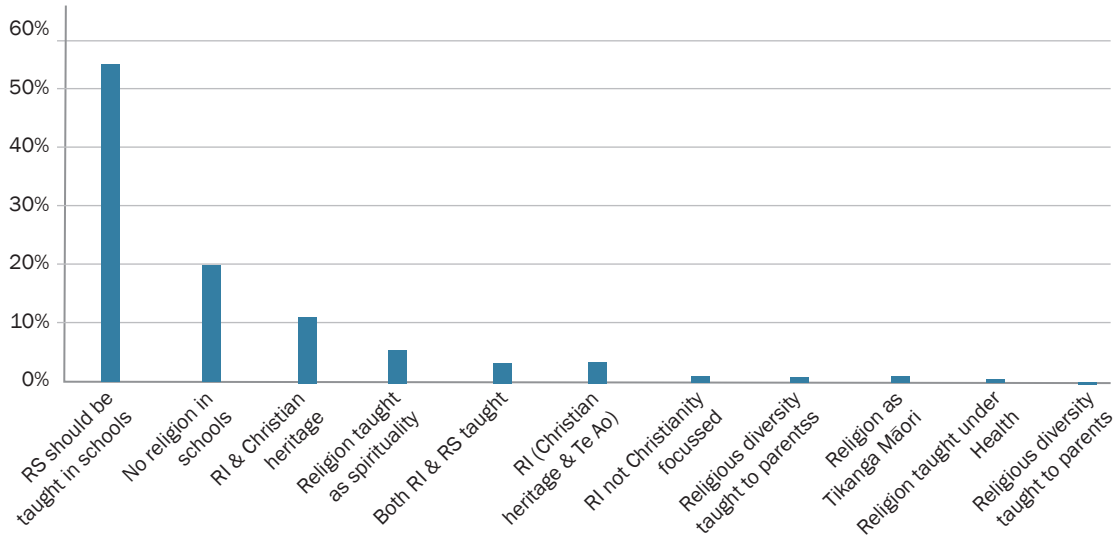
When asked about the role of religion in New Zealand schools, most respondents (54 percent) reported a preference for it being taught as part of the curriculum under the rubric of social studies or religious studies. These responses also included views on the importance of including non-religious beliefs, prioritising Christianity, integrating Tikanga Māori and Te Ao Māori, and views on the optimum age to commence religious studies. Reference was also made to the need for professional development for teachers. The next two most popular options highlighted and confirmed two distinct minority constituencies in the stakeholder sample.

The first group (20%) advocate ‘no religion in schools’ as ‘education in New Zealand is secular’, although this was often qualified in terms of the rejection of any attempted proselytization or conversion of students, with the exception being made for integrated schools where parents had made a conscious choice.

The second group, (11 percent) of the participants, see New Zealand schools as places that should offer ‘traditional religious instruction’ with an emphasis on the country’s Christian heritage and values. Some qualified this by limiting this to schools that had Boards of Trustees that had made this choice for their school. A further 3 percent considered that both religious instruction (Christian religious education) and religious studies should be optional. A small number (4.4 percent) considered the place of religion in schools to be the teaching of ‘spirituality’; and 3 percent reported the view that religions should be taught as part of the education about diversities in New Zealand. Small numbers opined that schools should offer non-Christian religious instruction (1 percent); that religion should be taught as Tikanga Māori (Ao Māori and Māori spirituality), (1 percent); that religions should be included as part of the Health syllabus, focused on morality and Te Ao Māori (0.4 percent); and 0.2 percent wanted religious diversity taught by the school to parents rather than students.

Most participants consider that religion does have a legitimate place in New Zealand schools and kura, understood as the teaching about different religions as part of the school curriculum.

Religion in NZ schools and kura



2. Do you support boards having a choice to close their schools at any time of day for instruction which encourages children to believe in and/or live by a particular religion in Aotearoa New Zealand schools and kura (religious instruction)?

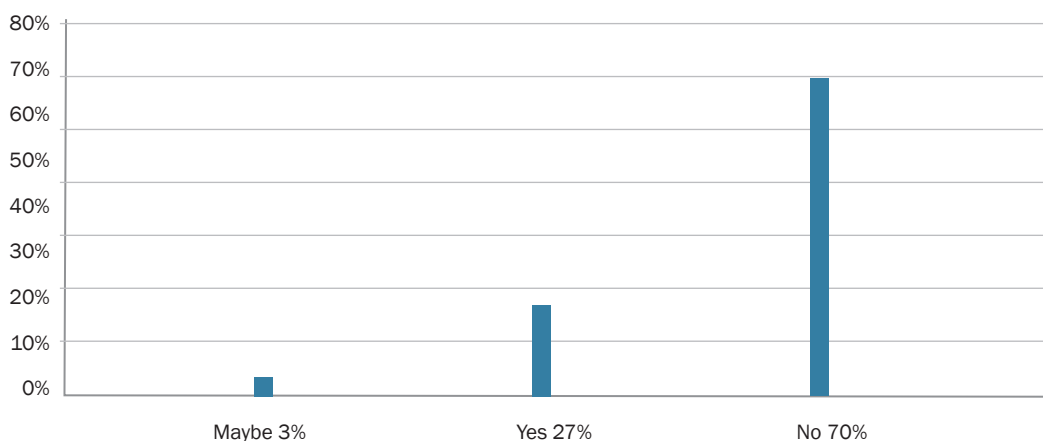
This question was designed to elicit explicit responses to the status quo, that is the current legislation, on religious instruction in New Zealand public primary schools.

On the question of school boards closing schools for religious instruction a clear majority of 70 percent responded that they did not support such closures in public schools (this included 5 percent who reported ‘no’, ‘except in integrated schools’). Of those respondents who reported ‘no’, a sizeable number did so, on the basis that ‘education should be secular’; many others made the point that this system reflected past realities that were no longer the case in the 2020s; and others considered the status quo divisive for students.

More than a quarter (27 percent), did support the existing arrangements, adding their support for boards having the right and choice to close schools and kura by stressing the importance of religious instruction for Christian ‘values’ that align with the NZ curriculum, or with desired positive values, others emphasised that students should be encouraged towards the adoption of these values rather than religious membership. Many of those who responded ‘yes’ to school closures stressed the autonomy and ‘rights’ of parents, schools, and local communities to make this choice.

A small minority (3 percent) answered ‘maybe’.

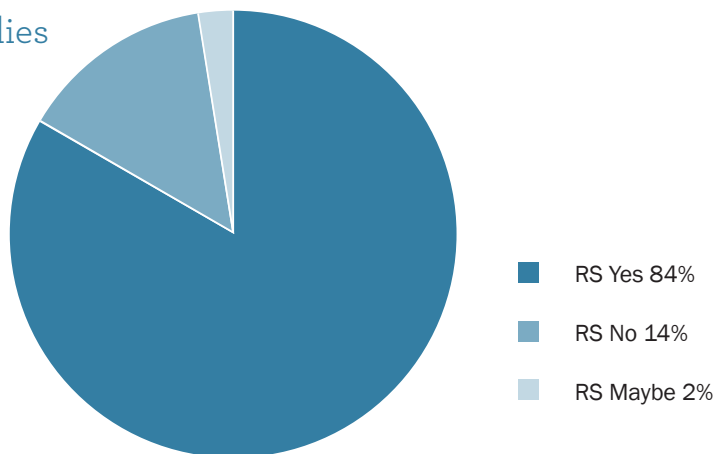
Religious instruction when school closed/existing arrangement



3. Do you support the neutral teaching about the different religions and belief systems found in Aotearoa New Zealand in schools (religious studies)?

More than eight out of ten of respondents reported ‘yes’, supporting the teaching about the different religions and belief systems in Aotearoa New Zealand (84 percent). A minority (14 percent) answered ‘no’, with 2 percent reported ‘maybe’.

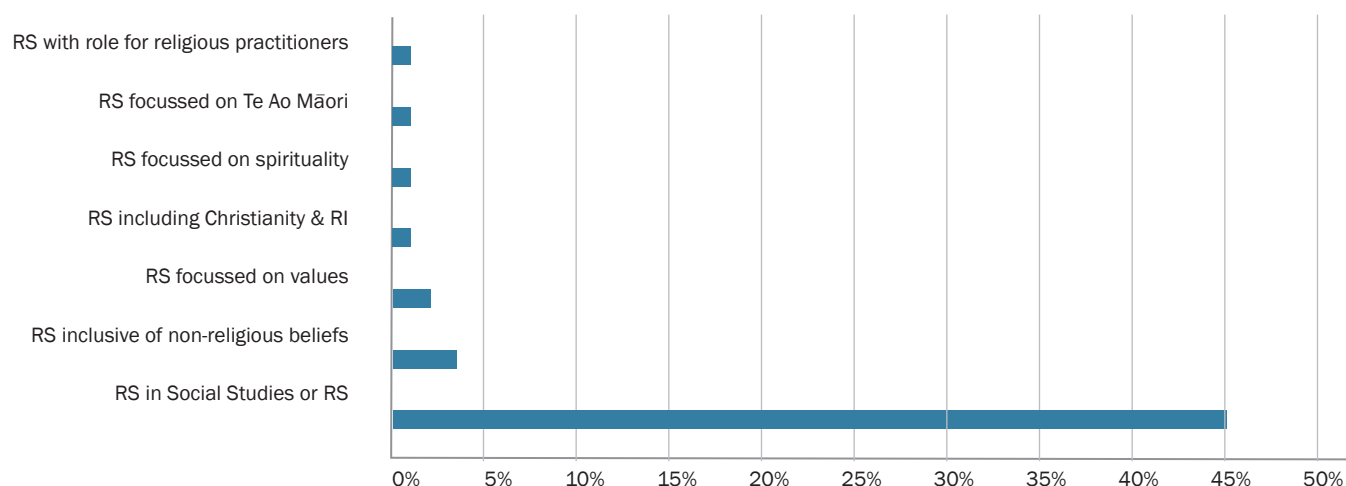
Religious Studies in Schools



Of the responses supporting religious studies, there were some concerned about ‘neutral teaching’, others considered that religious studies should not begin until intermediate level, and a few reported that as a separate subject, secondary school was a better option. A considerable number considered that religious studies teaching should only be undertaken by professional, trained teachers, and raised the issue of the need for more teacher training and professional development in religious studies. This response perhaps reflects the number of respondents who have experience of teaching in New Zealand schools. A minority of those supportive of the teaching about other religions considered that such teaching should involve input from members of those religious communities, as part of the school’s engagement with the wider community.

Further breakdown of the 84 percent of respondents supporting religious studies in schools indicates a range of different appreciations of religious studies.

Religious Studies



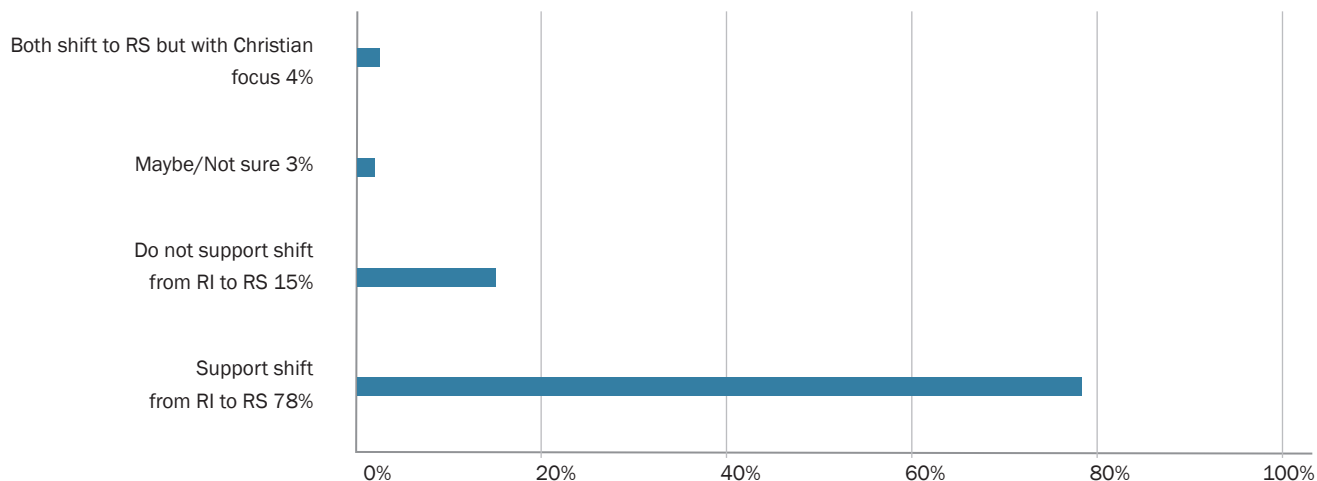
Consistent with the findings for question 1 above, those respondents who wanted the inclusion of non-religious beliefs, listed atheism, agnosticism, rationalism, and humanism, and called for these to be taught alongside the different religious traditions.

Again, a small number of participants who were supportive of religious studies added comments such as, ‘although not to the exclusion of Bible-in-schools’.

4. Do you support changes that would shift the focus of the place of religion in schools from religious instruction to religious studies?

Overwhelmingly (78 percent) respondents supported a shift in the place of religion in schools from religious instruction to religious studies. Those who would not support such a shift accounted for 15 percent of participants, with a further 3 percent unsure or maybe, and a group of 4 percent who appeared to desire some middle-ground by supporting the shift from religious instruction to religious studies, but with a dominant focus on Christianity. Of those in support, several respondents noted the importance of including education on non-religious beliefs, confirming a theme across the survey.

Support for shift from RI to RS in schools

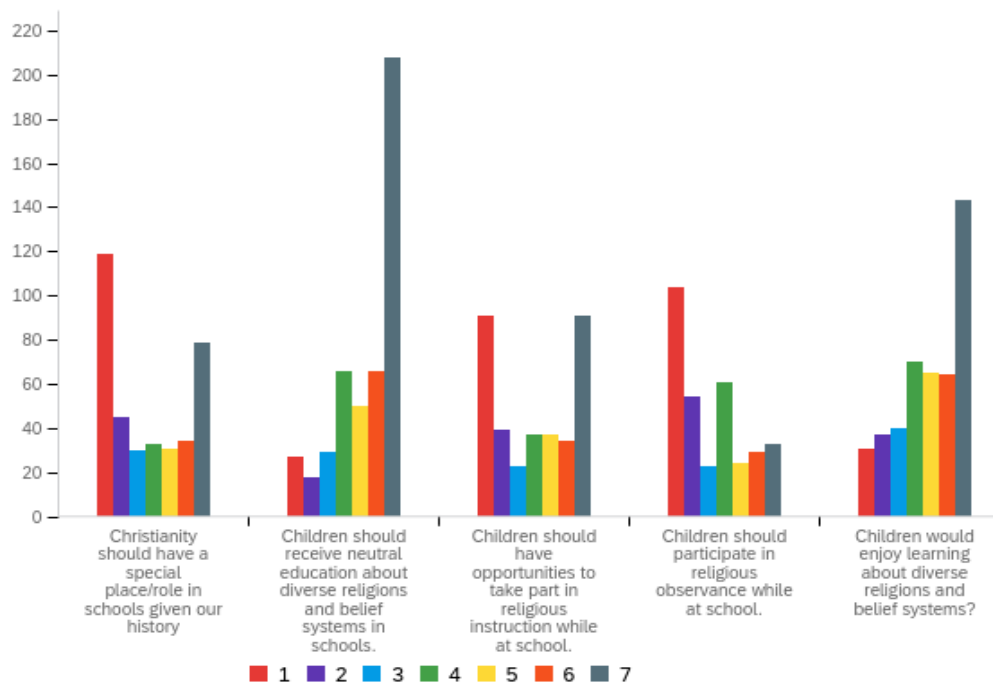


The responses again emphasised that additional training for teachers would be required, and the need for further discussion of the appropriate year and nature of religious studies education at primary and intermediate levels.

Responses also addressed the issue of the context for religious studies in schools, with most who commented on this positioning religious studies under the current rubric of social studies, and a number remarked that the 'shift doesn't need to be made a fuss of.'

Of those who did not support a shift from religious instruction to religious studies, a small number specified that while they would support a shift away from religious instruction, they did not support a shift to religious studies. Likewise, a similar number saw a shift away from religious instruction as legitimate in its own right but considered the discussion about the introduction of religious studies to be a discrete issue.

The penultimate question addressed opinion preferences using a sliding scale (1 to 7) indicating how strongly respondents agreed or disagreed with a set of five statements (1 = strongly oppose > 7 = strongly support).



1. Christianity should have a special place/role in schools given our history.

Mean - 3.62 Standard Deviation - 2.38
 Variance - 5.67

The views of those committed to Christian religious instruction and heritage, and the group strongly focussed on opposition to religious instruction in public primary schools are reflected in the high levels of support and opposition to Christianity having a special role or place in schools. It is important to note that the responses to this question also indicate that support for a focus on Christianity, and for no special role, are broader than their “religious instruction” and “secular education” constituencies.

2. Children should receive neutral education about diverse religions and belief systems in schools.

Mean - 5.42 Standard Deviation - 1.85
 Variance - 3.43

There is a high level of committed support for religious studies in schools and this response shows that there is much less variance and a significantly small number of staunch opponents.

3. Children should have opportunities to take part in religious instruction while at school.

Mean - 4.01 Standard Deviation - 2.38
 Variance - 5.65

Approximately the same number strongly support or strongly oppose religious instruction while at school. It is important to note that those reporting a significant non-Christian religious identity (with the exception of Judaism) are likely to support religious instruction in schools. This issue was followed up in the interviews.

4. Children should participate in religious observance while at school.

Mean - 3.20 Standard Deviation - 2.07
 Variance - 4.28

The majority in support of religious observance in schools came from those who also supported RI but was at a lower level. Respondents from other religious traditions also supported observance in schools although the context was not always clear. The majority are clearly opposed to observance in schools.

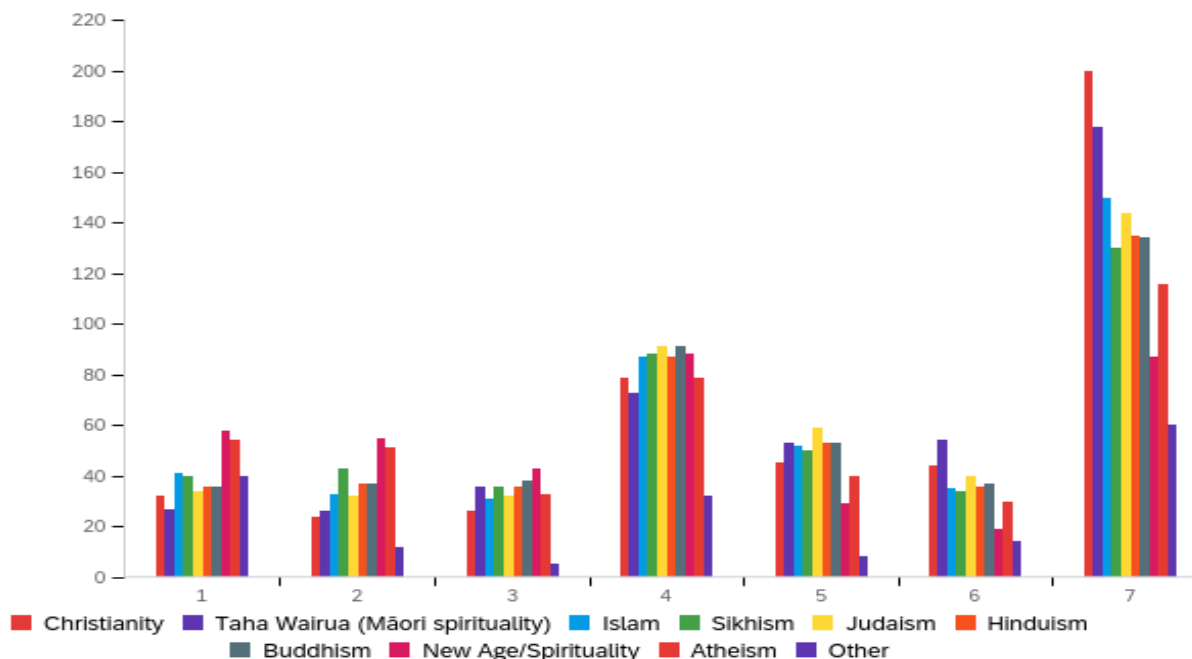
5. Children would enjoy learning about diverse religions and belief systems?

Mean - 3.62 Standard Deviation - 2.38
 Variance - 5.67

The RI traditionalist scored this lowly while it was highly supported by those who advocate RS.

The final question asked respondents to oppose or support a series of options on a sliding scale (1 to 7, where 1 = Definitely no > 7 = definitely yes).

To what extent children should receive neutral education about the following religions or belief systems?



The responses to this question were revealing in that while more than half of those who supported a shift from RI to RS favoured all major religious traditions equally, those who supported RI limited their support largely to the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and reported less interest in Hinduism and Buddhism. Sikhism was particularly lowly rated. Christians report less interest in the New Age or Spirituality, while the non-religious are more inclined to be supportive. While there are discernible patterns, there is an evident need for consultation and further discussion about what might or might not be included in future syllabuses.

Post Survey follow up Zoom meeting

Survey respondents were invited to participate in follow up Zoom meetings to elaborate the reasons for their survey responses. A small number who reported that they did not have the capacity to Zoom were contacted by telephone or email for their comments and concerns. Several Zoom sessions were held in the fortnight after the end of the survey response period and involved more than fifty people. In addition to having the opportunity to express and share their views, engage in discussions, participants utilised the Zoom chat function to communicate informational links, proffer additional material, clarify their positions, and voice their concerns. The Zoom participants included academics, teachers,

business operators, trades people, professionals, home-schoolers, clergy, and carers, and came from Invercargill, Gore, Christchurch, Palmerston North, Paekakariki, Tauranga, Wellington, Hamilton, Dunedin, Gisborne, and Auckland. The discussions were lively and interactive and brought different stakeholders, such as committed supporters of the provision of Christian instruction head-to-head with ardent SEN members, allowing for claims and counterclaims to be challenged. What follows is not a transcript but thematically arranged and selected brief typical comments from different participants that addressed major topics of the survey.

SEN members took part in all the Zoom sessions, sharing personal narratives highlighting what they presented as the harm resulting from religious instruction in schools that had led to their SEN commitments. While for some this was historic, most related their experience as parents and the impact on their children. “My kids were subject to proselytization and invited to church”; “It wasn’t just what we were told, not just Christian values, but prayers and Jesus”; “They say they are not evangelising, but this is not true”; “We were angry at the subterfuge”; “My children’s school was infiltrated by fundamentalists”; “Christian teaching just creates issues for children, and it’s not inclusive and based on an outdated loophole”, and “Let’s not forget the historical evils of religion”. Some comments emphasised practical arrangements

rather than principles, “There was no opt-out option at my child’s school due to lack of supervision and facilities”; “We did choose to withdraw our son from the religious sessions, but he felt marginalised going to the library with one other child, and it only heightened his sense of otherness”; and “the opt-out class was run by a hostile teacher”.

Others understand “secular” to mean the total absence of religion, “In New Zealand, education was originally secular, and it should remain that way, as was intended”; “There should be no place at all for religion in our schools”; “It’s about public funding, we shouldn’t be funding religion, there shouldn’t be any religion in the public sphere”; “No religion in schools, in any shape or form”; “There must be equity, teach them all or none, can’t teach them all, so none”.

Supporters of Christian education on the other hand reported, “I think values are important for children in their formative years and they don’t teach values at school, where else would they get them from?” (A New Zealand primary teacher at the same Zoom meeting responded by referring to the role of values in the New Zealand Curriculum); “It (religious instruction) is a community expression, it reflects our community, they are values worth holding on to”; “My grandchildren come home knowing all about Matariki but not about Easter - it gives some balance”; “Values are important”; “It’s the right of parents to determine children’s education, and that includes religious education”; and I think tongue-in-cheek, “I support Bible-in-Schools, it inoculates you against religion for life. It worked a treat!”.

Even the ‘secularists’ were supportive of religious studies as part of social studies just “not teaching students how to follow one religion”; “religion as history, is O.K. and how it impacts people and societies”. In fact, **no one** was opposed to students learning about different religious beliefs and practices from a social studies perspective as part of public-school education. The advocates of religious studies spoke of the increasing religious and cultural diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand although this was dependent on where you lived, “in our rural South Island town everyone is Presbyterian!”. “I support religious studies because learning about Christianity and religion is essential to colonial and post-colonial history and our understanding of ourselves as New Zealanders”; and “In today’s world it’s important to learn about belief systems, dress codes, practices, histories of those we encounter at home and overseas”, and “As a

social studies teacher we already explore identity and diversity, and touch on celebrations, there is room here for religious studies”.

Supporters of Christian education also supported learning about other religious traditions, “we need both”; “Students should be taught about other religions from a Christian perspective”; and “Christianity and its interactions with other religions”.

Many of those who support the introduction of learning about diverse religious practices and beliefs had overseas experience of religious studies as parents or teachers, “I taught in Australia where we had people of different faiths coming into school and students visited places of worship, it worked very well”; “In the UK my kids had religious studies in junior school, mostly festivals and food, they learnt about Diwali, Eid, and other festivals. And it has had a lasting impact on them, not just a tolerance of difference, more an informed appreciation of the lives of others”. “In South Africa, we learned about different religious traditions and what they believed and did, we miss that here”; “My children did RE in England taught by trained teachers, and I think it reduces conflict and supports conflict resolution”; “I taught in the U.K., and it was really good”; and “I came here from Singapore where I did religious studies, there Muslims, Christians, and Hindus live harmoniously together”.

A number of those who objected to Christian instruction qualified this by limiting it to public schools and most added when asked directly that they did support religious instruction in integrated schools.

The teachers present, both primary and secondary, voiced concerns that the introduction of religious studies would require both training and resources, “many teachers are not confident teaching about religions”; “teachers need professional development to empower them to teach religious studies”. “If teachers are not confident it just will not happen”. This issue of confidence impacts the other way too, “I think she meant well, my religious studies teacher, but I’m Muslim and she didn’t get Islam right”.

On the question of adherents of religion being responsible for the presentation of their religions in the classroom, “Under the guidance of a teacher, religious visitors are valuable in understanding different faiths”; “Don’t trust them, they have a vested interest in that one religion”; “It can all be so abstract, you need human beings to hang values on, to get it, bring them in”; and “There is great value in members of faith

communities being invited in to share the personal meaning of their faith but it must be framed by the teacher and school objectively”.

There were interesting exchanges on the appropriate level to introduce and teach religious studies, “Initially as part of social studies, only later a separate subject”; “higher end of juniors and intermediate”; “Don’t start until secondary, or only with practices, leave the beliefs until later”; “Speaking as a primary teacher, we should start at the primary level, learning about religions through music, dance and practices”.

Supporting religious studies meant different things to different participants, “Teach the main eight religions only” (!?); “Not just religions but non-religious viewpoints, lifestyles and ethics too”; “religious studies must include spirituality”; “religious studies needs to be widened to include non-religious ideologies and values”; “studying religions includes Tikanga Māori”; “Christianity has a special role for settler and Māori”; “Mindfulness must be there too, for students, teachers and the parents!”, and “Don’t we already teach spirituality in the four pillars health curriculum?”.

Other points included, “My parents were Presbyterian, at school as a lesbian I remember being taught in Bible classes about Sodom and Gomorrah, it was personally damaging, and now as a parent I think that it’s vital to point out where religions have, and continue to exclude people, specially GBLTI+ people.”; “We need to have a public conversation about some issues such as the role of Māori religiosity in our country’s public life”; “Are we still a Christian country or not and what role should Christianity play?”; “It’s non-religious where I come from, but here there’s religion. My daughter chose to go to religion classes with her friends but after one year she stopped and is now learning the viola”.

In response to the question, where do we go from here, “We should start by addressing and eliminating the existing situation of Christian bias to create space for religious studies”.

Covid 19 Note

The original proposal had included a series of meetings with different stakeholders and the inclusion of “religion in schools” as an agenda item at national meetings of interfaith and religious groups and organisations. As many of these gatherings were cancelled, during and after the lockdown, these were replaced with Zoom, Skype, telephone, and email contacts. The time frame for the project was also extended to account for these changes.

Kotahi anō te kōhao o te ngira e kuhu ai te miro maā, te miro pango, me te miro whero. Pōtatau Te Wherowhero, Te Kōngi Tuatahi

A needle has one eye, through which the red, white, and black threads each pass.

(The first Māori, King Pōtatau Te Wherowhero made this statement that has become a recognised proverb on the value of diversity and unity.)

Conclusions

1. Aotearoa New Zealand is increasingly religiously and culturally diverse, challenging existing policies and inherited arrangements. The recognition and inclusion of this diversity in the classroom and community is essential for social cohesion.
2. Responses to greater diversity have led to a transition from confessional religious education to religious studies in publicly funded schools in developed countries across the world. This recognition of past religious privilege and its potential for division and exclusion has led to a reconsideration of the context of the study of different religious beliefs and practices in public schools, particularly in relation to colonial histories, social inclusion and cohesion, religious extremism and marginalisation, the religious dimension of politics, religions and contemporary ethical and moral concerns, interactions between religions, and between religious and non-religious citizens.
3. After 15 March 2019 support for learning about different religious and cultural beliefs and practices has been intensified by Muslim communities (*Conversations with Aotearoa New Zealand's Muslim communities*, OEC, 2020); by religious communities and interfaith groups (*Connecting with Faith Communities and Interfaith Groups* OEC, 2020); by religious leaders (RDC Religious' Leaders forum, 2018); in the Recommendations of *Ko tō tātou kāinga tēnei: Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019*; and most recently in the *Report on community hui held in response to the Royal Commission into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019* (2021). All these and the earlier history of calls for religious studies in schools stress the vital role that education plays in combatting bias and prejudice and the benefits for a social cohesive society of the understanding of religious and cultural diversity.
4. The five-country exploration allows New Zealand to be located in the broad international shift from religious instruction in a historically dominant faith to non-confessional religious studies. We are well placed with the new opt-in regime to further advance on this front. The shift has been contested everywhere, and we can learn from this of the necessity of genuine consultations with all parties. It is also clear that these issues of religious education in schools are necessarily part of a broader discussion on the role of religion in the nation. There is no easy on the shelf answer and the New Zealand context needs to be addressed directly and from the getgo.
5. The survey demonstrates levels of residual support by Christians and equally evidences generally poor understanding of the law, the recent changes, or the position of those who disagree. This needs to be carefully managed with effective and widely disseminated communication.
6. The survey clearly indicates high levels of support for religious studies, even by supporters of the current model of Christian education in schools. This indicates that the issue of Christian education transitioning to religious education in schools is not a binary choice but that there are two discrete but related issues. The first is the future of Christian religious instruction in schools and the majority that oppose the status quo. The second question is the appetite for religious studies in schools independently of the religious instruction question. There are high levels of support for the introduction of religious studies in New Zealand schools, starting at the primary and intermediate levels.
7. This support for religious studies still raises issues that bear further discussion, including the inclusion of secular ideologies and values, the provision and training of teachers and resources, the relationship with religious communities, and the bicultural framing of the subject.

Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Education introduce religious studies in junior and intermediate public schools and kura. Reflecting new demographic realities and sensibilities, this transition from confessional religious instruction to religious studies within social studies diversity education is widely supported nationally and is in accordance with international developments and norms. The inclusion and recognition of religious diversity in the classroom and community promotes wider social cohesion.
2. A Religious Studies advisory group (RSAG), consisting of professional subject experts and religious community representatives, to be established to facilitate stakeholder consultations, develop a model of learning about religious diversity in a bicultural context, and monitor its implementation.
3. This unique history and context of this transition in Aotearoa New Zealand will require consultations and discussions with churches, and religious leaders and communities, tangata whenua, teachers, parents, and students. These discussions and consultations to be managed by the RSAG and resourced to reflect these constituencies and their expectations.
4. The transition should be staged, beginning with the introduction of religious studies as part of social studies education in New Zealand's diversity, trialled in 2022-2025 in Years 1-4, and in 2025 religious studies be introduced as an independent subject in Years 5-6.
5. This introduction should be facilitated by the development of initial teaching resources and materials with the support of religious communities in 2022, and professional development for teachers during the same period. The development of additional materials would follow.
6. Religious instruction continue as an arrangement with schools using their premises as an option alongside the new religious studies teaching as part of the New Zealand curriculum. Communication of the distinction between religious instruction and religious studies and their relationship to The New Zealand Curriculum be made publicly available for parents, teachers, and boards of trustees.
7. Religious studies in primary and intermediate schools to be integrated into the New Zealand curriculum and lead on to the secondary school programmes and religious studies at NCEA levels 1, 2 and 3.
8. There should be a formal, full, and explicit acknowledgement of religious diversity alongside other diversities in *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

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(religion in schools in comparator countries, including indicative media references on concerns, debates, and issues).

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Mission

To promote understanding, appreciation, and respect for religious diversity among the religious, spiritual, and secular communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Background

New Zealand has seen a significant and rapid growth in population diversity. In response, a vigorous Interfaith movement has evolved, and now has many members all over NZ. Interfaith groups have initiated a range of activities and diversity education generating many benefits for all of New Zealand society. After 11 years of national and regional interfaith gatherings around the country, and together with the on-going dedicated involvement of respected researchers, educators, faith leaders, and community builders, the Religious Diversity Centre was launched in 2016; a national centre, a credible resource and go-to place for research, information, education, and training.

Our Purpose

A national centre of educational research excellence dedicated to fostering appreciation and understanding of religious diversity among all New Zealanders

Providing high quality religious diversity training and resources for professional development

Providing high quality research and publications

Contributing expert advice for policymakers, media organisations

Encouraging inter and intra religious dialogue

Promoting co-operation, friendship, peacemaking

Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi

<https://rdc.org.nz/>



Religious Diversity Centre
Aotearoa New Zealand