



# **RUSTENBURG HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**

## **RELIGION POLICY**

February 2009

### **PREAMBLE**

Rustenburg High School for Girls recognises the particular value of the rich and diverse religious heritage of our school community. While we acknowledge that the school has an educational responsibility for teaching and learning about religion and religions, and for promoting these, we understand that we should do so in ways that are different from the religious instruction and religious nurture provided by the home, family, and religious community.

This policy has been based on the *National Policy on Religion and Education of 2003*, and covers the different aspects of Religion Education, Religious Instruction and Religious Observances. The spirit of the policy is to embrace the religious diversity of South Africa.

### **RELIGION POLICY**

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

Within this constitutional framework, and as a public school, we have a responsibility to promote the core values of a democratic society, through the curriculum, through extra-curricular activities, and in our approach in general. These core values include equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability, and social honour.

**Equity:** The education process in general, and this policy, must aim at the development of a national democratic culture with respect for the value of all of our people's diverse cultural, religious and linguistic traditions.

**Tolerance:** Religion in education must contribute to the advancement of inter-religious tolerance and interpersonal respect among adherents of different religious or secular worldviews in a shared civil society.

**Diversity:** In the interest of advancing informed respect for diversity, as an educational institution we have a responsibility to promote multi-religious knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of religions in South Africa and the world.

**Openness:** Schools, together with the broader society, play a role in cultural formation and transmission, and we must promote a spirit of openness in which there shall be no overt or covert attempt to indoctrinate into any particular belief or religion.

**Accountability:** As systems of human accountability, religions cultivate moral values and ethical commitments that can be recognised as resources for learning and as vital contributions to nation building.

Social Honour: While honouring the linguistic, cultural, religious or secular backgrounds of all learners, we cannot allow the overt or covert denigration of any religion or secular world-view.

## **A. RELIGION EDUCATION**

Religion Education includes the common values that all religions promote, such as the human search for meaning and the ethic of service to others, as well as the desirable social ends, such as expanding understanding, increasing tolerance, and reducing prejudice.

Religion Education has been introduced into various learning areas and subjects, especially Life Orientation, in both General and Further Education and Training. The teaching of Religion Education is encapsulated in the relevant outcome and assessment standards showing how the outcome is to be achieved in the Life Orientation learning area. (*See Appendix*)

The Learning Area statement for Life Orientation directs that learners should develop the capacity to respect the rights of others and to appreciate cultural diversity and different belief systems. In the Senior Phase they learn about how spiritual philosophies are linked to community and social values and practices. Opportunities and possibilities for further development of the principles and practices related to religion education are also found in other learning areas.

Religion Education should place adequate emphasis on values and moral education. The policy of the Revised National Curriculum Statement is to offer education about religions for the purposes of achieving “religious literacy”. It is therefore an educational programme with clearly defined and transferable skills, values and attitudes as the outcomes. It is a programme for teaching and learning about religion in its broadest sense, about religions, and about religious diversity in South Africa and the world.

Religion Education should enable learners to engage with a variety of religious traditions in a way that encourages them to grow in their inner spiritual and moral dimensions. It must affirm their own identity, and allow them to affirm their own identity if asked to expand on matters related to such, while leading them to an informed understanding of the religious identities of others.

We believe that by teaching learners about the role of religion in history, society, and the world, a unified, multi-tradition programme in the study of religion can be an important part of a well-balanced and complete education.

Teaching should, at all times, engender a sense of acceptance, security, and respect for learners with differing values, cultural backgrounds, and religious traditions.

At no time may any educator in any subject or learning area promote any particular religion, except where an educator is merely affirming his/her personal religious identity and/or asked to expand on matters related to his/her personal identity. Instead of promoting a religious position, there should be, at all times, a balanced approach to teaching and learning about religion.

Educators must ensure that all, irrespective of race, creed, sexual orientation, disability, language, gender, or class, feel welcome, emotionally secure, and appreciated.

## The Teaching of Religion Education

The teaching of Religion Education in schools is to be done by appropriately trained professional educators registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE). Representatives of religious organisations who are registered with SACE could be engaged and, as with other learning areas, occasional guest facilitators from various religions may be utilised, provided that this is done on an equitable basis. Such guest facilitators need not be registered with SACE, since they and the class remain under the authority of the educator.

The teaching of Religion Education must be sensitive to religious interests by ensuring that individuals and groups are protected from ignorance, stereotypes, caricatures, and denigration.

The Revised National Curriculum Statement for Schools (Grades R-9) assumes that any educator, regardless of his or her personal religious orientation, is called upon to teach in a pluralistic public school in which learners can be expected to belong to different religions. Professional educators are expected to accommodate this reality in an impartial manner, regardless of their personal views.

## Contents and Assessment of Religion Education programmes

Despite the significant attention paid to Religion Education in this policy, it is only a small component of one out of eight Learning Areas that are studied in the General Education and Training band. A learning programme in Religion Education, if offered as a discrete module, would constitute no more than a few lessons in each year. The principle of curriculum integration would suggest, however, that the matter would not usually be dealt with in such a way.

*[The relevant Assessment Standards for the Religion Education aspect of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Grades 8 and 9) is attached as an appendix.]*

## **B. RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION**

Religious instruction is understood to include instruction in a particular faith or belief, with a view to the inculcation of adherence to that faith or belief.

Religious instruction of this sort is primarily the responsibility of the home, the family, and the religious community. Religious Instruction would in most cases be provided by clergy, or other persons accredited by faith communities to do so. Religious Instruction may not be part of the formal school programme, as constituted by the National Curriculum Statement, although schools are encouraged to allow the use of their facilities for such programmes, in a manner that does not interrupt or detract from the core educational purposes of the school. This could include voluntary gatherings and meetings of religious associations during break times.

This policy, therefore, makes allowance for meetings of religious societies or groups, as well as the provision of religious instruction by religious bodies and other accredited groups outside the formal school curriculum on school premises, provided that opportunities be afforded in an equitable manner to all religious bodies represented in a school, that no denigration or caricaturing of any other religion take place, and that attendance at such instruction be voluntary. Persons offering Religious Instruction would do so under the authority of the religious body, and would not be required to be registered with the South African Council for Educators.

## **C. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES**

Rustenburg High School for Girls will, where possible, make provision for important holy days in regard to the setting of examinations and tests, to ensure that learners are not prejudiced by their attendance at religious observances.

In accordance with the Constitution, the South African Schools Act, and rules made by the appropriate authorities, the Governing Body may make the school facilities available for religious observances, in the context of free and voluntary association, and provided that facilities are made available on an equitable basis.

Although such religious observances may take place on the school property, they are not part of the official educational function of the school. There are various types of religious observance implied in this instance:

- voluntary public occasions, which make use of school facilities, for a religious service on a day of worship or rest
- voluntary occasions when the school community (educators and learners) gather for a religious observance
- observances held in a voluntary gathering of learners and/or educators during a school break
- an observance which may be ongoing, and entail other dimensions such as times and diets, which must be respected and accommodated in a manner agreed upon by the school and the relevant faith authorities.

The School Governing Body will determine the nature and content of religious observances for educators and learners, such that coherence and alignment with this policy and applicable legislation is ensured. It may also determine that a policy of no religious observances be followed.

Where religious observances are held, these may be at any time determined by the school, and may be part of a school assembly. An assembly, however, is not necessarily to be seen as the only occasion for religious observance, which may take place at other times of the day, and in other ways. Where a religious observance is organised as an official part of the school day, it must accommodate and reflect the multi-religious nature of the country in an appropriate manner.

As this forms part of the Monday school assembly and the annual Carol Service, learners may be excused on grounds of conscience from attending the religious observance component, provided that this request has been made in writing. Equitable arrangements will be made for these learners.

## **CONCLUSION**

This policy firstly establishes a broad, religion-friendly basis for Religion Education, taken care of by professional educators. It also encourages the equitable practice of Religious Observances at school, and the involvement of clergy in the extra-curricular Religious Instruction of learners and as guest facilitators for Religion Education.

Our policy for religion in education, therefore, is designed to support unity without uniformity, and diversity without divisiveness.

## **DEFINITIONS**

**Religion Education** describes a set of curriculum outcomes which define what a pupil should know about religion.

**Religious Instruction** refers to a programme of instruction which is aimed at providing information regarding a particular set of religious beliefs with a view to promoting adherence thereto.

**Religious Observances** are those activities and behaviours which recognise and express the views, beliefs and commitments of a particular religion, and may include gatherings of adherents, prayer times, dress and diets.

**The School Day** entails that portion of each day in which it is compulsory for educators and learners to be at school. The seven hours of contact time that is expected of educators is part of the school day, but the latter also includes breaks and compulsory activities, including assemblies, designated extra-mural activities and possible disciplinary sanctions. No learner or educator may be absent from school during the school day, without permission.

## **APPENDIX TO THE POLICY ON RELIGION AND EDUCATION**

### **The Revised National Curriculum Statement (Grade R – 9) and Religion Education.**

Religion Education forms one part of the Life Orientation Learning Area of the National Curriculum Statement. This Learning Area has five broad Outcomes:

- Health Promotion
- Social Development
- Personal Development
- Physical Development and Movement, and
- An Orientation to the World of Work (Senior phase only).

Religion Education is contained within Outcome 2, in relation to Social Development, which requires that:

***The learner will be able to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to constitutional rights and responsibilities, and to show an understanding of diverse cultures and religions.***

The **Assessment Standards** for this part of the Learning Area are as follows:

- Grade 8: Discusses the contributions of organisations from various religions to social development.
- Grade 9: Reflects on and discusses the contributions of various religions in promoting peace.