



# Report on the Review of the *Connect* Religious Instruction Materials

August 2016

## Executive Summary

In June 2016, the Minister for Education announced a review of the *Connect* materials used by various Christian faith groups for the delivery of Religious Instruction (RI) in some Queensland state schools. This move was precipitated by a number of reported concerns in the media and the decision of a principal to suspend the program at a Brisbane state school.

RI is a program of instruction approved and provided by a religious denomination or society in state schools according to the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* and *Education (General Provisions) Regulation 2006*.

*Connect* is intended for delivery as a three-year program presented across three phases of schooling:

- Infants, for students aged 5 to 7 years;
- Lower Primary, for students aged 7 to 9 years; and
- Upper Primary, for students aged 10 to 12 years.

The review focused on the consistency of the materials with legislation and departmental policies, procedures and frameworks; the developmental appropriateness of the materials for the relevant age groups; and other general concerns raised by community members.

In summary, the review has found:

- the vast majority of *Connect* materials align with the Department of Education and Training's legislation, policies, procedures or frameworks;
- a small number of concerns that warrant removal or amendment of content from the *Connect* materials due to its inappropriateness for the target audience, for example references and/or activities that relate to animal sacrifice, murder and gender roles;
- some content that may encourage undesirable child safe behaviours, such as the keeping and intentional hiding of secrets and the formation of 'special friendships' with adults;
- examples of advice to instructors that is not consistent with contemporary education practices particularly in relation to how to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with disability; and
- evidence that some instructors may be using outdated editions of the *Connect* materials, that have not undergone recent review and therefore contain more examples of inappropriate content and advice.

While the review has found the *Connect* materials are, in the main, aligned with legislation and departmental policy, procedures and frameworks, it is recommended that advice regarding these concerns is communicated to Christian faith groups as soon as practicable to enable negotiations to occur with the publisher to address these issues and for processes to be implemented to ensure instructors only use current materials.

It is also worth noting that the current legislation governing RI in state schools does not enable centralised regulation of RI content. Further consideration of the legislation may be warranted to examine whether it meets contemporary community and government expectations.

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## 1.0 Background

### 1.1 Provision of RI in Queensland state schools

RI has been available in Queensland state schools for over 100 years following the outcome of a referendum conducted in April 1910.

RI is a program of instruction approved and provided by a religious denomination or society in state schools according to the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* (EGPA) and *Education (General Provisions) Regulation 2006* (EGPR) and is delivered by faith group volunteers. Classroom teachers do not deliver the materials, however staff are allocated to supervise each group of students while RI is being delivered<sup>1</sup>.

Section 76 of the EGPA states that schools must allow provision of RI for a period of up to one hour per week if approached by a faith group seeking to provide RI when students of that faith group attend the school.

Participation in RI is not compulsory.

Parent consent is currently obtained via the Application for Student Enrolment Form (Version 6)<sup>2</sup> and the nomination of a religion. The relevant section from the enrolment form is specified below.

<b>RELIGION – RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION</b>	
<p><b>From Year 1, your child will be placed in this nominated religious instruction class if it is available.</b></p> <p><b>If this section is marked 'no religion' or 'no religion nominated' or a response is provided that is not represented within the school's religious instruction program, your child will receive other instruction in a separate location during the period arranged for religious instruction.</b></p> <p><b>Parents may change these arrangements at any time by notifying the principal in writing.</b></p>	

RI is only available to students from Year 1 in state primary, secondary and special schools. Section 76 (6) of the EGPA stipulates that RI shall not apply or extend to students enrolled in the preparatory (Prep) year at a state school. While there are legislative amendments underway to make Prep compulsory from 2017, there is no intention to expand RI to the Prep year.

When students progress to Year 1, they are allocated to RI classes based on the faith group nominated by their parents on their enrolment form or if their parents have provided other written permission for their child to attend RI classes.

<sup>1</sup> <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/school-operations/ri-considerations-principals.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://ppr.det.qld.gov.au/education/management/Procedure%20Attachments/Enrolment%20in%20State%20Primary,%20Secondary%20and%20Special%20Schools/Student%20App%20-%20Enrol.PDF>

If a parent has indicated on the enrolment form 'no religion' or 'no religion nominated' or a religion that is not represented in the school's RI program, then the student will receive other instruction in a separate location at the school while RI classes are taking place.

In accordance with s.76 (5) of the EGPA parents may withdraw their child from RI by notifying the principal in writing.

RI is not provided with a Queensland curriculum or syllabus. The Department has no involvement in the selection of content for RI programs. However, as with any program or activity delivered in a school as set out in the Department's *Managing Risks in School Curriculum Activities* procedure, the principal has a responsibility to promote a safe, supportive and productive learning environment and ensure the safety of all those at the workplace under the *EGPA, EGPR and Work Health and Safety Act 2011*.

Under s. 27 of the EGPR, an authorised RI program is a program of religious instruction approved by the faith group for delivery to students of that faith group in a single or cooperative arrangement. The religious leader/s of the faith group authorises the program of instruction. The Department's RI policy, specifically the *Considerations for principals establishing and implementing religious instruction*, provides the following advice to principals regarding RI content (i.e. Authorised program/s):

- *Authorised program/s of RI are reviewed to ensure they do not contravene legislation or departmental procedures, and are made available to school community on request.*
- *Authorised program/s of RI may be reviewed to ensure they are developmentally appropriate for the intended target audience and feedback provided to the religious instruction coordinator.*

Within Queensland state schools, RI classes are juxtaposed with a multitude of cultural, religious and non-religious viewpoints. While schools seek to respect the background and beliefs of their students and school community and respond to the wishes of parents, neither legislation nor departmental policy requires consultation with the School Council, Parents and Citizens' Association or the parent community more broadly regarding the content of RI programs.

The Department's policy advises that parents are to be provided with information on RI when they are completing the Student Enrolment Application and that authorised programs of RI are made available to the school community on request.

## 1.2 Data on RI in Queensland state schools

The Department does not and has not ever collected data on the number of students participating in RI, the schools which offer RI programs, the faith groups providing RI in schools, or the materials used by faith groups to deliver RI.

In April 2014, the 'Religion – Religious Instruction' question was made mandatory on the Application for Student Enrolment Form (Version 6).

While data on religion nominated on students' enrolment forms is captured by OneSchool, this is only a proxy measure for participation in RI classes. This data is not considered an accurate indicator of the number of

students actually participating in RI because, for example, the RI program nominated by parents may not be available at the school and parents can change their preference for their child to participate in RI (or not) at any time. The Department is investigating possible mechanisms to obtain this data.

Noting the current limitations of the OneSchool data, the percentages of students who have a religion recorded in OneSchool at points in time over the past five years is identified below.

Table 1: Percentage of students with a religion recorded in OneSchool

Date of data collection	Percentage of all student enrolments with a religion recorded
August 2012	12.7%
October 2013	20.0%
June 2014	25.2%
July 2015	29.8%
May 2016	32.4%

The increase in the number of students with a religion recorded is primarily the result of the religion question on the enrolment form becoming mandatory in 2014, to enable the enrolment form to be the primary data source for allocating RI classes in a school.

### 1.3 Recent RI changes at Windsor State School

On 3 June 2016, the Principal of Windsor State School wrote to parents of students at the school advising that he was unable to permit continued use of the *Connect* program at the school and was obliged to suspend RI lessons immediately.

The Principal explained that it had only recently come to his attention that none of the programs, such as *Connect*, used by faith groups to deliver RI are approved or endorsed by the Department. In accordance with the Department's RI policy, he had undertaken a review of the *Connect* materials and found that they contravene the policy that prohibits proselytising. He explained that:

*"Connect lessons go beyond imparting knowledge of Biblical references, and extend to soliciting children to develop a personal faith in God and Jesus to become a Christian or 'Kingdom Kid'."*

The Principal also wrote to the RI Coordinator at the school confirming a previous discussion about his decision to suspend the program.

In correspondence to the RI Coordinator, the Principal explained that he had reviewed the *Connect* program which was being used at the school and found it to be in contravention of the Department's RI policy. He considered that the *Connect* program appeared to be "based on the premise of trying to solicit them

[students] for a decision to become the kind of Christian prescribed in the materials". The Principal identified more than 30 examples of what he considered proselytising in the *Connect* materials.

Further, the Principal advised that he would review any alternative RI programs presented to him and resume RI classes if he found the materials to be consistent with the Department's requirements.

The changes to RI provision at Windsor State School resulted in the Minister requesting a Departmental review of the *Connect* materials.

## 2.0 Review methodology

The review of the *Connect* materials focused on the 18 teacher manuals and accompanying student workbooks. The key aim of the review was to determine whether these materials are consistent with:

- legislation (specifically s.76 of the EGPA and Part 5 of the EGPR);
- departmental policies, procedures and frameworks, including but not limited to:
  - religious instruction
  - health and wellbeing
  - managing risks in school curriculum activities
  - inclusive education
  - student protection and
  - safe, supportive and disciplined school communities; and
- developmental appropriateness of the materials for the relevant age groups.

The Terms of Reference for the review are at **Appendix 1**, along with a description of the review team at **Appendix 2**.

A moderation process was used to support consistency of assessment and mitigate any potential personal bias.

A main focus of the concerns raised by the Windsor State School Principal in relation to the *Connect* materials centred on the view that the materials contained proselytisation. Therefore, the review also examined the legislative and policy advice regarding proselytising within RI and the content that could be viewed as proselytising within the *Connect* materials.

As many of the examples cited by the Windsor State School principal could not be located by reviewers in the current *Connect* materials, the Department contacted the publisher of the *Connect* materials for assistance in

locating the references. The publisher advised that these references were in relation to superseded *Connect* manuals.

### 3.0 The *Connect* materials

*Connect* describes itself as a Christian Education curriculum. It is produced by Christian Education Publications and Youthworks Media, which are linked to the Sydney Anglican Diocese.

*Connect* is presented across three levels of schooling:

- Infants, for students aged 5 to 7 years (noting that RI is not offered to Prep students in Queensland state schools);
- Lower Primary, for students aged 7 to 9 years; and
- Upper Primary, for students aged 10 to 12 years.

Each level is intended as a three year program with each year of the program labelled with a series i.e. “A”, “B” or “C” and proposed semester. Youthworks has advised that about 90 per cent of instructors are teaching from the “C” series in 2016 and will teach from the “A” series in 2017. The Department has no data source from which to verify this information.

Updates are made in the year prior to the series being used in the majority of schools. Therefore, the “A” series is currently being updated for use in 2017. Youthworks has also advised that major updates (such as the removal of a David and Goliath lesson earlier in 2016) are posted on *Connect*’s web portal and advice emailed to all known customers.

RI instructors may or may not purchase new manuals from year-to-year. It is therefore possible that some instructors are currently teaching from outdated materials. Youthworks has advised that when major changes occur, such as in 2013, all instructors were required to purchase new teacher’s manuals.

Further contextual information on the *Connect* materials is at **Appendix 3**.



## 4.0 Defining Proselytising

The Department's RI policy statement defines 'proselytising' as *soliciting a student for a decision to change their religious affiliation*.<sup>3</sup>

There are a number of factors to consider when assessing whether proselytising has or may occur during RI.

For instance, where a parent has identified a particular religion on their child's enrolment form, and the student is subsequently allocated to an RI class of that faith, it would seem unlikely that content taught in the class that relates to that faith could be considered proselytising.

However, where a student's parent has nominated a particular religious denomination on their child's enrolment form (e.g. Anglican), and the student participates in a cooperative arrangement (e.g. Anglican and Baptist), any soliciting by an RI instructor for the student to change their denomination (e.g. from Anglican to Baptist) would be viewed as proselytising.

While parents may nominate a religion for their child on the enrolment form, the child may not have personally accepted that religion and, therefore, RI could be viewed as trying to solicit the child to follow a particular religion.

The RI policy's *Considerations for faith groups establishing and implementing religious instruction* refers to proselytising in relation to cooperative arrangements where two or more faith groups are working together, stating that a RI Coordinator must: *Advise religious instructors that they are not to proselytise in a cooperative arrangement*.<sup>4</sup>

The RI policy does not provide advice as to whether proselytising is considered to occur when students who don't identify with a Christian faith are being placed into Christian RI classes by their parents.

The Department's Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Services policy statement<sup>5</sup>, separate to the RI policy, prohibits the engagement in evangelising or proselytising, given the general interaction between students and the chaplain within the school.

Although outside the scope of this review, it is noted that legal advice provided by faith groups has indicated the view that there is no legislative basis for prohibition of proselytising in the EGPA or EGPR. The Department's Legal and Administrative Law Branch supports this view.

<sup>3</sup> <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/school-operations/ri-definitions.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/school-operations/ri-considerations-faith-groups.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/healthy/chaplaincy-student-welfare.html>

## 5.0 Findings

Following are the findings of the Review of the *Connect* program conducted in June 2016.

### 5.1 Christian historical beliefs, concepts and terms

Throughout *Connect*, the Bible is represented as a factual, historical document. An example of this is in Lower Primary, C1, Teaching Techniques and Hints, p. 93: *“Emphasise that these events are historical and true ...”*.

The use of Christian historical beliefs, concepts and terms is unavoidable in a Christian RI class. However, some of these Christian historical beliefs, concepts and terms may not be considered appropriate for discussion with primary school students, even in the context of a Christian RI class or as direct quotes from the Bible.

Each lesson within the *Connect* teacher’s manuals provides background information under the heading “Bible background” to help the instructor contextualise the lesson. There are references to events, concepts and terms discussed in these sections such as rape (Infants, C1, p. 70), murder (Upper Primary, A1, p. 55), and animal and human sacrifice (Lower Primary, C2, p. 62). While these concepts are not developmentally appropriate to be discussed with primary school students, this section is not for the purposes of discussion with students and is only for the instructor’s background.

However, in a very small number of instances, some of these concepts and terms *are* referred to in the speaking points for discussion with the class or in materials for distribution to students as direct Bible quotes. Examples include:

- Upper Primary, C1, Lesson 4, p. 46 (Student Worksheet) includes a Bible quote on animal sacrifice: *“Finally, Saul commanded, ‘Bring me some animals, so we can offer sacrifices to please the LORD and ask for his help’. Saul killed one of the animals...”*
- Upper Primary, A2, Lesson 7, p. 13 (Student activity book) includes references to wasting money on women (which could be referring to prostitution) in a Bible quote: *“This other son of yours wasted your money on [women]”*. While not explicit in its description of the meaning, this reference is not considered appropriate for 10-12 year old students and does not align with the Government’s approach to encouraging respectful gender relationships.

Events and concepts such as animal sacrifice and ‘wasting money on women’ are not considered developmentally appropriate for the target age group and their continued use in primary schools is not considered appropriate.

Terms such as sin, punishment, death, and Jesus being nailed to the cross, found throughout the *Connect* program are a reflection of the Bible's content on which Christianity is based. While some non-Christians may take offence to the use of these terms, it would be difficult to provide Christian RI without reference to such terms and concepts.

## 5.2 Proselytising

Throughout the *Connect* teacher manuals a small number of examples of possible proselytising were found.

In recent editions of the *Connect* manuals it appears there has been a significant reduction in the amount of material that may be considered proselytising. For example, unlike previous versions, in the more recently updated teacher's manual (Upper Primary, C1), the whole-class "Concluding prayer" is prefaced with instructor's speaking points: *This is how Christians talk to God. If you would like to pray with me please join me. If you don't then please lower your head so we don't get distracted while praying this short prayer.*

It is understood that all class prayers will be prefaced by this message in future.

Within the manuals opportunities are identified for instructors to provide information or advice to students about attending church services or youth groups, however, it is usually (but not always) clear that the information should only be provided to 'interested students'. It is not specified how the instructor determines whether students are interested or not. This is an area where the content in the manual may benefit from amendment.

Below are some examples of possible proselytising identified in the manuals, however it should be noted these examples encourage attendance at church, not necessarily soliciting for students to change their religious affiliation to the Christian faith:

- *Hand out the flyers for local church services if you have them* (Upper Primary, C1, Lesson 10, p. 100).
- *How about asking your parents if you could come along to kids club or kids church. (This would be a good time to hand out flyers.)* (Upper Primary, B2, Lesson 17, p. 181).
- *Students are asked to write a newspaper article for inclusion in a newspaper to be distributed at the Christmas assembly. The newspaper could have details about the local church's Christmas services at the back* (Upper Primary, B2, Lesson 18, p. 187).

Direct quotes from the Bible were not considered as proselytising on the basis that parents of children attending these RI classes have indicated an affiliation with Christianity or a desire for their child to learn about it.

## 5.3 Evangelising

The Department's Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Services policy statement defines evangelising as "*preaching or advocating a cause or religion with the object of making converts to Christianity*"<sup>6</sup>. While not explicitly prohibited by the EGPA or EGPR, nor referenced in the RI policy statement, the Department would expect schools to take appropriate action if aware that evangelising is occurring outside of an RI class given it could adversely affect the school's ability to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for students.

<sup>6</sup> Chaplaincy and student welfare services: Definitions <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/healthy/chaplaincy-student-welfare.html>

Although proselytising was not common throughout the manuals, evangelising was frequently identified in all teacher manuals – both in terms of teachers evangelising to students, and students being encouraged to evangelise to others.

Examples of activities that may encourage students to evangelise:

- *Students could compose a poem, song, drama to communicate the gospel to others* (Upper Primary, B2, Lesson 18, p. 190).
- *Students could make beaded bracelets or necklaces and give them to their friends as a way of sharing the good news about Jesus* (Lower Primary, C2, Lesson 17, p. 153).

## 5.4 Consistency with legislation and departmental policies, procedures and frameworks

### 5.4.1 RI policy statement

#### Consent

The RI policy statement notes that parents are provided with information on RI when they are completing the Student Enrolment Application<sup>7</sup>. The relevant section on ‘Religion – Religious Instruction’ in the enrolment form does not explicitly seek consent for participation in RI from Year 1, however it is clear that if the section is marked ‘no religion’ or ‘no religion nominated’ that the child will receive other instruction.

As per the legislation, parents can change the arrangements noted on the enrolment form at any time by notifying the principal in writing. In the EGPA (s. 76 (5)) this is referred to as ‘withdrawing’ a student from RI.

There is no specified requirement for any updating of information on consent for RI, although schools may seek revised/confirmed information from parents as part of their normal annual business. This process was part of a strategy to reduce administrative burden for schools and parents.

#### Content of authorised programs

The RI policy statement specifies the process for establishing an RI program in a state school, and the implementation of the program by religious leaders. The *Connect* materials are consistent with the RI policy as there are no legislated requirements stipulating the content of RI program materials.

The Department’s RI policy, specifically *Considerations for principals establishing and implementing religious instruction*, states that authorised programs<sup>8</sup> of RI are to be reviewed [by principals] to ensure they do not contravene legislation or departmental procedures, and may be reviewed [by principals] to ensure they are

<sup>7</sup> <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/school-operations/ri-considerations-principals.html>

<sup>8</sup> A program of religious instruction approved by the faith group for delivery to students of that faith group in a single or cooperative arrangement. The religious leader/s of the faith group authorises the program of instruction (s. 27 EGPR).

developmentally appropriate for the intended target audience and feedback provided to the religious instruction coordinator.

There are no other provisions guiding the assessment of content for the programs.

### **Creation of artefacts**

Some lessons propose making artefacts such as art works that could be used for classroom displays, or greetings cards and messages to give to family and friends. To be consistent with the Department's RI policy which requires that faith group publications are not accessible to other students, all displays would require removal from the classroom at the end of the RI lesson. It would be of benefit to instructors for this information to be included in the manual. It would also strengthen the materials' compliance with legislation for instructors to be advised to tell all RI students not to give any materials used or created in RI lessons (including greeting cards) to students who do not attend RI classes.

Examples of artefacts and activities where the display or provision of materials to other students may cause concern include:

- Creating a wall mural of God's creation (Infants A1, Lesson 3, p. 37).
- Folding paper to make Arks. (Infants A1, Lesson 7, p. 69).
- Making Easter greetings cards for family and friends (particularly if cards have religious messages). (Infants A1, Lesson 10, p. 100).

### **5.4.2 Student Protection**

Some of the advice and activities in the *Connect* teacher's manuals were identified as being inconsistent with preferred student protection practices. Of particular note was an activity to share and keep secrets; mentions having 'special friends'; and a suggestion that teachers meet one-to-one with students who are interested in finding out more about Christianity. Encouraging and practising behaviours such as these does not align to current approaches in teaching children protective behaviours.

It is worth noting however that more recently published manuals suggest another adult should be present for any one-to-one discussions.

Examples include:

- *"Just as Jesus used everyday events to disguise his secret, ask each pair to discuss and then write a story to disguise their own secret"* (Upper Primary, A2, Lesson 2, p. 28).

For a wide range of reasons, including that students of all ages should see teachers and school staff as trusted adults and feel safe to share information, this content is not appropriate. In general, activities should not teach or encourage students to keep secrets, particularly secrets between a child and an

adult. Creating secrets with a child is identified as an example of possible grooming behaviour within the Department's Student Protection Guideline.

- Use of the term 'special friends' – *"Jesus was asking Matthew to be one of his special friends" and "Jesus calls us to become one of his special friends"* (Lower Primary A2, Lesson 10, p. 92-3).

When considered in a protective behaviours context, the use of the term 'special friends' should be avoided where possible and where there is a suitable alternative. Whilst the context in this instance is understood, in terms of student protection, adults creating 'special friendships' with children is viewed as an example of possible grooming behaviour.

- 'Helpful teaching techniques' provides advice on 'Talking one-to-one with a student', indicating that instructors should talk to students in full view of other students or teachers, even though the conversation is private (Upper Primary, A2, p. 197).

Best practice would be for instructors to ensure that all discussions with students (including whole class, group or individual discussions) take place in full view of a school based staff member and other students.

### 5.4.3 Student Health and Wellbeing, and Safe and Supportive School Communities

There are a number of lessons, particularly in the Upper Primary materials, that have the potential to affect the social and emotional wellbeing of particular students who may be vulnerable to depression or experiencing depression, be in a fragile state, or who may blame themselves for things happening around them such as a family break up or death of a loved one. These lessons also have the potential to upset some students. These lessons talked about deserving punishment, the consequences of your sin on others, and specific Bible events.

Examples include:

- Upper Primary, B2, Lesson 3, p. 35 – drinking tomato juice to represent blood.
- Upper Primary, B2, Lesson 4, p. 53 – "The punishment for sin is death".
- Upper Primary, Activity book, p. 29 (Student activity book) – indicates "If you live to satisfy your desires, you will die".
- Upper Primary, B2, Lesson 15, p. 161 – Teacher asks: "What is the end result for someone whose goal is to please themselves?" Accept responses: They will die.
- Lower Primary, B1, Lesson 9, p. 94 – Class debate regarding whether it was right or wrong for the disciple to cut off the servant's ear.
- Lower Primary, C1, Lesson 17, p. 146 – So these leaders met together to try and think of a plan to get rid of Daniel. With a partner, spend one minute thinking of ways they might get rid of him.

- Lower Primary, A1, p. 86 – Sad day activity: asking students to write a letter to a friend, expressing their feelings and confusion about all they saw and heard when Jesus was arrested and killed.
- Upper Primary C1, Lesson 8, p. 72 (Domino effect lesson) – which tells students their sin will have consequences for others around them. Examples are given of sinners and how this then led to babies dying, unhappiness, and other events.

**Potential health and safety concerns were also raised with a small number of lessons.**

Within the materials there are lessons identified where a Curriculum Activity Risk Assessment would be required or beneficial to ensure risks are controlled and the safety of students is a priority. This highlights the importance of principals being aware of lesson materials and staff being present within classrooms as the principal is the accountable officer within the school responsible for ensuring student and staff safety.

Examples include:

- Upper Primary, A2, Lesson 13, p. 119 – adding bleach to a glass of coloured water.
- Upper Primary, B2, p. 236 (and elsewhere) – handing out lollies and eating as much ice-cream as you can in one minute. This activity would appear inconsistent with the *Department's Smart Choices – Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy*.

The *Help with classroom management* section of some manuals (for example Upper Primary, B2, p. 236) discusses punishment for misbehaviour stating “*Do not let the students' off after promising punishment*”. In all circumstances, behaviour management is the responsibility of the school and classroom teacher and under no circumstances should a volunteer RI instructor ‘punish’ children. Within the manuals it would be preferable for RI instructors to be directed to discuss any behaviour concerns with the classroom teacher, as a staff member from the school is present during all RI classes.

#### **5.4.4 Inclusive Education**

The *Connect* materials contain sections common to each manual that provide certain information for instructors, for instance:

- *The special needs of indigenous students*
- *Understanding the student: the learning theory undergirding Connect*
- *Help with classroom management.*

Some of the language contained within these sections, particularly in the older publications, is not consistent with contemporary education practices, particularly inclusive education practices and valuing diversity.

The Department's Inclusive Education policy states *Inclusive education provides all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation,*

*pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability or socio-economic background or geographic location*<sup>9</sup>.

Some of the instructions appear to be directed towards students solely based on their culture and disability.

Examples include:

- Teacher information that refers to students with special needs in the *Is your class different?* section advises, “*Teachers should not jump to the false conclusion that these students are unintelligent*” (Upper Primary, A2, p. 202 and other manuals).
- Similarly, the section on *The special needs of indigenous students* (also in Upper Primary, A2, p. 204 and other manuals) suggests: “*Aboriginal students are most teachable when sitting in small groups outside under a tree.*” Again, this language is inappropriate and not consistent with departmental policies, as is the assumption that “*(S)HE followed by a barbecue lunch on Friday, then an afternoon’s sport would be the most pleasurable experience Aboriginal Primary students could imagine*”.<sup>10</sup>

Both of these examples are also included in what appears to be one of the later editions of the manuals – Upper Primary, C1, pp. 217 and 219.

The materials provide for discussion in some lessons that may be upsetting and inappropriate for students with disability. For example, activities asking students to speculate as to the limitations of a person with a disability and other activities suggesting that a disability may have been imposed as a punishment for sin.

For example:

- Lower Primary, C2, Lesson 8, p. 74 - “*Some of the people from that village wondered why this man was born blind. Was it a punishment from God because his parents or someone else had done something wrong.*”
- Lower Primary, C2, Lesson 6, p. 54 - “*...he had 38 years of not being able to walk, run, jump... invite the students to suggest other things the man would not be able to do*”.

### 5.4.5 Animal Ethics

The materials contain a small number of references that may present concerns in relation to animal ethics considerations, for example referring to sacrificing animals. The pedagogic value of these exercises is unclear and in relation to dissecting animals, instructors would need to ensure animal ethics approval was gained and that there were educational benefits derived from the activity that could not be delivered through an alternative activity.

<sup>9</sup> <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/inclusive/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> When media coverage occurred regarding these examples from the *Connect* materials during the course of the review, Youthworks contacted the Department acknowledging that the instructions/guidelines were ‘dated and clunky’ and provided a revised document.



The *Connect* materials would benefit from having these references removed unless there is a strong educational rationale for their continued inclusion.

Examples include:

- Upper Primary B2, Lesson 17, p. 183 which suggests that the instructor “bring in a dead animal to dissect”.
- Lower Primary C2, Lesson 15, pp. 128 and 133 suggests the teacher bring in some “pretend sacrifices” which are used for two activities during the lesson. However it is unclear what kind of ‘pretend sacrifices’ will be used e.g. food or animal sacrifices.

## 5.5 Delivery cycle and version control

*Connect* is delivered as a three-year program. The A, B and C labelling of each manual indicates which year of the program it belongs to. Youthworks has advised that, with a few exceptions, most instructors should be working on the same stage of the program (A, B or C) in any given year. However, there does not appear to be any overarching governance to ensure the majority of instructors are using the same cycle or the same version of the manuals.

Youthworks has advised that manuals are reviewed and updated every three years, although essential updates can occur at any time, and that, most instructors would be delivering lessons from C manuals. Youthworks has advised it is currently reviewing and updating the A manuals for use by most instructors in 2017.

Through the review of *Connect* materials it is noted that there is no clear labelling of the manuals to identify the whether the manual is the current version. It appears the copyright date on the last page is the only information showing the version/date of publication. This may result in a large number of materials being used in schools which are significantly outdated and contain inappropriate content.

## 5.6 Age appropriateness

Unless they have a teaching background, it is unlikely that RI instructors would have the expertise to know what children of a particular age can and cannot do prior to undertaking an activity with students, and would rely on the manuals to guide them.

There are some suggested activities, such as a crossword puzzle in the Infants A1 manual, which may be too difficult for many of the younger students in the grouping. However, the teacher manuals provide a level of flexibility that instructors could work on these activities as a whole class or skip activities that seem too complicated for the students.

For some lessons, the teacher manuals provide specific advice on elements that would be inappropriate for the target age group and advise teachers to avoid these.

Examples include:

- Infants A1, Lesson 7, p. 65 which suggests that instructors show students pictures from a children's Bible when discussing the story of Noah's ark. However, the teacher's manual specifically states that instructors should not show pictures of people perishing in the flood.
- Infants A1, Lesson 9, p. 85 – In a lesson on the Easter story about Jesus dying on the cross, instructors are warned that “some students may be upset by this story of the death of Jesus. Do not go into details of Jesus' suffering with students of this age group”.
- Infants A1, Lesson 7, p. 67 – In a lesson on Noah's Ark, instructors are advised that: “*If a student asks about the fate of people who didn't go on board the ark, you may point out that the ark was for all of the people who chose to follow God*”.

## 5.7 Revising content

The publishers of *Connect* advise they are continuing to review the materials to ensure they remain relevant. It seems that substantial work has gone into removing the perception of proselytising from the publications (for example, through the preface added to the whole class concluding prayers which provide the option to participate).

Youthworks has advised the Department on several occasions in correspondence, and in the media, that the publishers are willing to work with the Department to improve the *Connect* resources.

While outside the scope of this review, it is recognised that RI materials (other than *Connect*) being used in state schools across Queensland may not align with departmental policies, procedures and frameworks, may not be developmentally appropriate for the relevant age groups or could raise other general concerns.

Under Part 2 Management of State instructional institutions in the EGPR, principals have a legislated responsibility to promote a safe, supportive and productive learning environment<sup>10</sup>, as well as a common law duty of care for students, and must ensure that any programs delivered in their school, including RI, do not contravene legislation or departmental policies.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/CURRENT/E/EducGenPrR06.pdf>

## 6.0 Conclusions

The review of the *Connect* materials did not find major inconsistencies with departmental legislation, policies, procedures or frameworks. It is envisaged many of the issues identified could be addressed through negotiation with the publisher and advice for instructors about departmental requirements.

The current requirement for school staff to be present in RI classes will continue to provide a safeguard and should ensure that any inconsistencies with departmental requirements are actively monitored.

There are some concepts and lessons within *Connect* that deal with issues such as sin and punishment that could potentially affect an at-risk student's wellbeing if not delivered in a sensitive way. However, concepts such as sin, punishment, forgiveness, and "Jesus as a saviour" are at the core of Christianity and their removal from Christian RI lessons would significantly impact on the instruction being provided. RI program developers, faith groups and RI instructors need to remain sensitive and vigilant to the circumstances of students and the impact specific discussions may have.

The issues raised through the *Connect* program review may point to a much broader issue that the current legislation governing RI in state schools does not enable centralised regulation of RI content. Further consideration of the legislation may be warranted to examine whether it meets contemporary community and government expectations.

## 7.0 Recommendations

### 7.1 Seek amendment of *Connect* materials

It is recommended the Department request the publishers revise the *Connect* materials as soon as practicable to address the relevant findings of this review.

It would also be beneficial for the *Connect* manuals to advise instructors to become familiar with relevant state Education Department policies and procedures (such as student protection, health and safety, student wellbeing).

### 7.2 Audit the versions of materials being used in schools by instructors

It is recommended that an immediate audit of currency of the *Connect* materials being used in Queensland state schools be undertaken to ensure that previous versions of the manuals which include outdated and inappropriate content are disposed of and are not used with students.

### 7.3 Amend the RI policy statement

It is recommended that enhancements be made to the RI policy statement to give principals more clarity regarding their responsibility to review authorised programs of RI to help them satisfy duty of care and legislative obligations. This may include a supporting template for principals to guide their review of RI program/s operating in their school against legislation; departmental policies, procedures and frameworks; and the developmental appropriateness of the materials for the relevant age groups.

It is also suggested that the policy include a recommendation that principals provide details of the authorised program/materials to the Parents and Citizens' Association for feedback.

## 7.4 Consent

To strengthen informed consent, it is recommended that the 'Religion – Religious Instruction' section of the school enrolment form be reviewed with the intent to clarify parent consent to their child participating in RI from Year 1.

## 7.5 Communicate with Principals

Principals have been advised that, once finalised, the outcomes of the review will be communicated. It is recommended that, through these communications, principals be reminded of the need for:

- vigilance about appropriate permission being in place for students to attend RI classes (which may include intermittent updating of information to ensure the school has current approvals)
- ensuring information about RI classes offered in the school is made available to parents (including where co-operative arrangements are established) and that parents have access to more detailed information and lesson materials if requested
- ensuring that school staff members present during RI classes raise any concerns or issues with the principal.

## 7.6 Communicate with faith groups who use *Connect*

It is recommended that communication occurs with the Christian faith groups in Queensland that are known to use *Connect* to advise of the outcome of the review and highlight issues raised, including:

- ensuring RI instructors are using the most recent updated versions of the materials
- avoiding specific concepts and terms (such as rape, incest, bigamy in the teacher's notes) and the need for sensitivity when discussing particular concepts with students (such as animal sacrifice, physical punishment)
- advising instructors to understand and comply with relevant departmental policies and procedures (such as student protection, health and safety, student wellbeing)
- avoiding the provision of food such as lollies and cake at the school to comply with healthy eating behaviours promoted in schools.

## 7.7 Improve data capture

It is recommended that, at a minimum, the number of students participating in RI is captured by the Department. Investigation should also occur regarding collection of the number of students in RI in each of the particular faith groups, the number and composition of cooperative arrangements, and RI programs delivered in each school.

## APPENDIX 1

## Review of *Connect* Religious Instruction Materials

### Terms of Reference

<b>Title</b>	<b>Review of the <i>Connect</i> Religious Instruction Materials</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	The purpose of the review of the <i>Connect</i> RI materials is to determine if they are consistent with legislation and DET policy/procedures, including the Religious Instruction policy statement.
<b>Scope</b>	<p><b>In Scope</b></p> <p>All <i>Connect</i> teacher’s manuals:  Infants, for students aged 5 to 7 years;  Lower Primary, for students aged 7 to 9 years;  Upper Primary, for students aged 10 to 12 years.</p> <p>All <i>Connect</i> student workbooks:  Infants, for students aged 5 to 7 years;  Lower Primary, for students aged 7 to 9 years;  Upper Primary, for students aged 10 to 12 years.</p> <p><b>Out of Scope</b></p> <p>Review of any other RI programs.  Review of the RI policy statement or legislation.</p>
<b>Timeframe</b>	31 July 2016
<b>Risks</b>	<p>Dissatisfaction from stakeholders with polarised views regardless of the outcome.  <i>Mitigation:</i> Ongoing communication with stakeholders.</p> <p>Despite applying the utmost professionalism, reviewers will examine the material through their value system.  <i>Mitigation:</i> Multiple reviewers and moderation of assessments.</p>
<b>Deliverables</b>	Ministerial Report

## APPENDIX 2

### Review Team

A team of reviewers was drawn from across the State Schools Division to review the *Connect* teacher manuals.

A mix of staff with substantial knowledge and experience in teaching, curriculum development, government policy and administration, and departmental policies and procedures including in the areas of RI, student wellbeing, inclusive education, and safe and supportive school communities undertook the review with oversight by an Executive Director.

The reviewers held qualifications in primary and secondary teaching, psychology, social sciences and governance and public policy.

Each reviewer was allocated one or two teacher's manuals to consider.

The reviewers were briefed on their role to read the manuals and identify any inconsistencies with departmental legislation, policies or procedures, with a focus on the RI policy. Reviewers were also asked to identify any areas where the program may be developmentally inappropriate for the target age group, and any issues that caused concern.

Reviewers were aware of the challenges presented by the context of RI in state schools, the *Connect* materials and the very diverse views on the subject within the broader community.

A process of moderation occurred whereby potential concerns as identified by the reviewers were brought to a panel of officers for consideration. Concerns that were verified by the panel were then progressed to the relevant policy owner for consideration of the specific policy ramifications.

This provided quality assurance across the assessments of the *Connect* materials made by individuals and supported consistency of the review.

## APPENDIX 3

### Overview of the *Connect* Materials Format

*Connect* is described as a Christian Education curriculum. It is produced by Christian Education Publications and Youthworks, which are linked to the Sydney Anglican Diocese.

It is understood that *Connect* draws on the educational research of Howard Gardner from Harvard University. It combines eight “kinds of intelligence” to reach different learning styles: word, music, maths and logic, body (e.g. movement), space and vision (e.g. creativity), self, interpersonal, and nature.

*Connect* is intended to be a three-year curriculum presented across three levels of schooling:

- Infants, for students aged 5 to 7 years (noting that RI is not offered to Prep students in Queensland State schools)
- Lower Primary, for students aged 7 to 9 years
- Upper Primary, for students aged 10 to 12 years.

Each level comprises six teaching manuals of approximately 200 pages. Each teaching manual comprises 20 lessons of approximately 25-30 minutes duration.

The *Welcome* section in each manual explains that the “*curriculum has as its foundation the belief that it is important to allow the Bible’s own theological framework to determine what is taught and how it is taught*”. The *Welcome* also talks about linking “interested children” to church-run children’s and youth activities so that they can experience Christian community and learn more about the Christian faith.

Each of the 20 lessons in the teacher’s manuals provide instructors with:

- **Lesson Aim** – the focus concept to be taught in each lesson.
- **Lesson Outcomes** –the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes that the lesson seeks to teach.
- **Memory Verse** – a verse for students to recite and memorise. The same verse is usually used for three to five lessons.
- **Bible background** – notes to give more detailed information to help the instructor to understand the main elements of the lesson, their place in the Bible and their historical background.
- **A list of things they will need** – such as pens, paper, music, visual aids, CD player, blue-tack, activity books.
- **Other resources** – this usually refers to music or an audio-visual that is not part of the *Connect* program and needs to be separately purchased.

- **Before you start** – instructions on how to prepare for the lesson e.g. “If you intend to use an interactive whiteboard, review the PowerPoint slides for the lesson on the CD-ROM that comes with the manual”, or “Photocopy enough Visual aids on p. 19 of the Judges 1 worksheet for each student”.
- **A ‘teacher’s’ prayer** – a short prayer in which the instructor may ask for God’s guidance in delivering the lesson.
- **A ‘Way In’** – such as an icebreaking activity, song or asking some simple questions.
- **Bible Focus** – speaking points that the instructor may use in the lesson, questions to ask the class and examples of responses students may provide to questions. Some lessons include a role play activity or particular Bible verses to read.
- **Connections** – speaking points for the instructor to use to link the lesson to the students own lives.
- **Concluding prayer** – a short prayer for the class to say together e.g. *“Dear God, thank you that you are a faithful God. Thank you that despite Israel’s disobedience you still raised up judges to save them. We pray that we may not be like the Israelites. Please help us to obey you and follow you. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen”* (Lesson 1, Upper Primary C1). Earlier editions of the manuals (which may still be in use) indicate the whole class should participate. Recently published manuals give students an option to not participate.
- **Taking it further** – additional ideas for longer lessons including songs, movement, Bible exploration.
- **‘Teacher’ reflections** – prompting questions about how the lesson went and how to change it next time.
- **For the next lesson** – a guide to preparation for the next lesson in the book.
- **Support materials** – activity sheets that can be photocopied, teaching props.

Two disks are provided with each teacher’s manual: one contains music and drama, and the other provides PowerPoints and PDFs to support each lesson.

In addition, student workbooks are available to support each manual. The student workbooks generally have one page for each lesson and include activities such as colouring-in, Bible verses with letters missing for the students to complete, crosswords. The back pages of the student workbooks include prayers (such as the Lord’s Prayer) and words to songs provided on the teacher’s disk.

As of 1 October 2015, each teacher’s manual costs \$31.95, each student workbook costs \$2.99 (parents are often invoiced for the cost of the workbook) and each visual aid pack costs \$31.95. There are also a range of other material available for purchase from Christian Education Publications, including a ‘preschool curriculum’ designed for children aged 3-5, a ‘Kindy’ teacher’s manual designed for the first year of school and a teacher’s manual titled Big Questions for students in year 6 to explore issues such as ‘What’s gone wrong with the world?’, ‘Does God really care about me?’, ‘What’s the purpose of my life?’ and ‘How will I make choices about my future?’