

GROOTE SCHUUR HIGH SCHOOL

Religious Observances Policy Document

Preamble

This religious observances policy acknowledges the fundamental values entrenched in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996; the application provisions of the South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996; and other relevant provincial legislation, including all applicable Western Cape Provincial Education Department laws and regulations.

Section 15(1) of the Constitution provides that every person has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.

Furthermore, Section 15(2) provides that religious observances by state or state-aided institutions may be conducted, provided that:

- (a) such observances adhere to the rules stipulated by the relevant public authority;
- (b) they are conducted equitably; and
- (c) attendance is free and voluntary.

Groote Schuur High School acknowledges that the abovementioned rights are not absolute and may be restricted by Section 36 of the Constitution.

Section 7 of the South African Schools Act vests the governing body with the power to determine the rules in terms of which religious observances must be conducted. This power is subject to the Constitution and any other applicable provincial legislation. Religious observances must be conducted on equitable bases and attended voluntarily by educators and learners.

Based on the above, the governing body of Groote Schuur High School has drafted this religious observances policy with due regard to the religious composition of the school community and to give effect to the mission and vision of the school.

Definitions

'Religion' – refers to the comprehensive and fundamental orientations in the world, with specific reference to sacred, spiritual and non-secular beliefs; requires dedication; includes organised forms of faith and certain world views, and is collectively used to refer to those organisations that have been established in order to protect and promote these beliefs.

'Religious education' – refers to a curricular programme with clear and age-related educational objectives that the Department of Education prescribes for the teaching and learning of religion, religions and religious diversity in South Africa and the world. The study of religion must be aimed at achieving identifiable educational objectives that are in accordance with the objectives and outcomes of other learning areas and, as with other learning areas in the curriculum, programmes in Religion Education

must contribute to the development of fundamental observation, listening, reading, writing and reasoning skills.

'Religious instruction' – refers to a programme consisting of information with regard to a specific religion, aimed at promoting adherence to that specific religion. The governing body regards the family and the faith community as the primary providers of religious instruction. The school is an educational institution and, therefore, religious instruction does not form part of its formal programme. However, the school will make its facilities available for such programmes, provided that religious instruction does not interfere with the school's formal education objectives.

'Religious observances' – refer to activities or actions that give expression to the values of a particular faith or belief, and inter alia include prayer meetings, reading from the scriptures, meditation, religious festivals, dress requirements, and dietary observances.

'Equitable basis' – means fair, just and impartial treatment of all religious groups, ensuring equal access to facilities, time allocation, and resources without discrimination based on the size or prominence of any religious group.

Mission and Vision Alignment

To give effect to the school's vision and mission, the religious observances policy of Groote Schuur High School is not based on a single faith. As Groote Schuur High School acknowledges and respects the values entrenched in the Bill of Rights, the governing body ensures that the observance of all practiced religions is respected, accommodated, and treated equitably.

Policy Principles

1. Non-Discrimination and Inclusion

The school welcomes all learners, irrespective of their individual religious beliefs, and will endeavour to create opportunities for the observance of such beliefs at all reasonable times, whether as a group or on an individual basis.

2. Voluntary Participation

Educators and learners will be able to attend particular religious observances voluntarily. The school will in no way compel educators or learners to participate in religious activities against which they object. No learner shall be penalized academically, socially, or in any other manner for choosing not to participate in religious observances.

3. Equitable Treatment

All recognized religious groups within the school community shall receive fair and equal treatment regarding access to facilities, time allocation, and school support.

Rules for Religious Observances

4. Types of Religious Observances Permitted

Religious observances may be conducted in the following ways:

- Voluntary public events where the school's facilities are used for religious observances outside school hours
- Voluntary events during designated break times
- Individual observances that do not disrupt the educational programme
- Special religious calendar observances with prior approval

5. Application and Approval Process

Religious groups wishing to conduct observances must:

- Submit a written application to the Religious Observances Committee at least two weeks in advance
- Specify the nature, duration, and requirements of the observance
- Confirm that attendance will be voluntary and open to all interested learners and staff
- Provide details of supervision arrangements for the event

6. Facility Allocation and Resource Management

- The Religious Observances Committee will allocate facilities based on availability, group size, and equitable rotation
- All religious groups will have equal access to appropriate venues
- Resources will be allocated fairly, considering the needs and size of different religious communities
- Requests for special equipment or arrangements must be submitted with the initial application

7. Supervision and Safety Requirements

- All religious observances must have adequate adult supervision
- Emergency procedures and first aid arrangements must be in place
- The principal or designated representative must approve all supervision arrangements
- External religious leaders must be vetted according to the school's visitor policy

Alternative Arrangements for Non-Participating Learners

8. Supervision During Religious Observances

When religious observances occur during school time:

- Alternative educational activities will be provided for non-participating learners
- Qualified staff will supervise non-participating learners
- Alternative activities will be meaningful and educational, not punitive

- Study periods, library time, or educational enrichment activities will be offered

9. Opt-Out Procedures

- Parents must provide written notification of their child's non-participation in specific religious observances
- Learners may change their participation status by providing written parental consent
- Confidentiality will be maintained regarding individual participation choices
- No learner will be questioned or pressured regarding their participation decisions

Religious Accommodations

10. Dietary Requirements

- The school will accommodate religious dietary requirements where reasonably practical
- Parents must inform the school of specific dietary needs in writing
- The school nutrition programme will provide suitable alternatives where possible
- Learners may bring meals from home to meet religious dietary requirements

11. Religious Dress and Appearance

- Religious dress requirements will be accommodated within the school uniform policy
- Reasonable modifications to uniform requirements will be considered for religious purposes
- Requests for religious dress accommodations must be submitted in writing with appropriate religious authority confirmation
- The safety and educational environment must not be compromised by dress accommodations

12. Religious Calendar Observances

- The school recognizes major religious holidays of represented faith communities
- Learners may be excused from school for significant religious observances with prior written request
- Arrangements will be made for learners to make up missed academic work
- Religious observances during examination periods will be handled on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Religious Observances Committee

Religious Education Programme

13. Curriculum Integration

Religious education will take place in accordance with the National Policy on Religion and Education as part of the Life Orientation subject. Such education will:

- Present multiple religious perspectives objectively

- Promote understanding and respect for religious diversity
- Align with the school's educational objectives
- Be taught from an academic rather than devotional perspective

14. Educator Rights and Responsibilities

- No educator will be compelled to provide religious education content that conflicts with their conscience
- Educators with conscientious objections must notify the principal in writing
- Alternative teaching arrangements will be made where necessary
- All educators are expected to respect and accommodate religious diversity in their classrooms

Governance and Implementation

15. Religious Observances Committee

The school will establish a Religious Observances Committee comprising:

- The principal or deputy principal (chairperson)
- Two governing body members
- Representatives from major religious groups in the school community
- Two educator representatives
- Two learner representatives (Grades 11-12)
- One parent representative per major religious group (minimum three)

The committee will:

- Meet quarterly and as needed
- Review and approve requests for religious observances
- Monitor the equitable implementation of this policy
- Handle complaints and disputes
- Recommend policy updates to the governing body

16. Complaint and Dispute Resolution Procedures

- Complaints regarding religious observances must first be addressed to the Religious Observances Committee
- If unresolved, complaints may be escalated to the governing body
- External mediation may be sought if necessary
- The appeals process outlined in the South African Schools Act will be followed for unresolved disputes

Community Partnerships

17. Faith Community Engagement

- The school will maintain respectful relationships with local faith communities
- External religious leaders may be invited to participate in observances with proper vetting
- Community partnerships will support the school's educational objectives
- All external involvement must comply with the school's visitor and child protection policies

Monitoring and Review

18. Policy Review and Updates

- This policy will be reviewed annually by the Religious Observances Committee
- The governing body will approve any policy amendments
- Changes in provincial legislation will trigger immediate policy review
- The school community will be consulted during major policy revisions

19. Feedback and Evaluation

- Annual surveys will assess the effectiveness of religious accommodation measures
- Feedback from parents, learners, and educators will be actively sought
- The religious composition of the school community will be regularly assessed
- Policy implementation will be evaluated against compliance requirements

20. Staff Training and Development

- All staff will receive training on religious diversity and accommodation requirements
- New staff orientation will include religious observances policy briefing
- Regular professional development sessions will address religious sensitivity
- Updated training will be provided when policy changes occur

Record Keeping and Reporting

21. Documentation Requirements

- All religious observance activities will be properly documented
- Attendance records will be maintained for participating learners
- Incident reports will be filed for any issues arising from religious observances
- Annual reports on policy implementation will be submitted to the governing body

Enforcement and Compliance

22. Policy Compliance

This policy is binding on all members of the school community. Non-compliance may result in disciplinary action according to the school's disciplinary policies and procedures.

23. Legal Compliance

This policy will be updated as necessary to ensure continued compliance with:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa
- The South African Schools Act, 1996
- Provincial education legislation
- Relevant court decisions and legal precedents

Effective Date and Communication

This policy takes effect immediately upon approval by the governing body. All members of the school community will be informed of the policy through:

- School website publication
- Parent communication letters
- Staff meeting presentations
- Learner assembly announcements
- New parent orientation sessions

Policy Approved by Governing Body: Date: 13/08/2025 Chairperson Signature: E. AVONTUUR

Next Review Date: August 2026

Contact Information: For questions regarding this policy, contact:

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