



education

Department: Education

GAUTENG PROVINCE

LAER VOLKSKOOL HEIDELBERG

RELIGIOUS POLICY



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1. **TITLE OF THE POLICY:** Policy on Religion in Laer Volksskool Heidelberg

2. **EFFECTIVE DATE:** 1 June 2024

3. **REVISION HISTORY:**

As amended on: (Specify date/s)	
a)	6 May 2024
b)	
Date of Next Review:	
c)	May 2027
d)	

4. **PREAMBLE:**

4.1 The Constitution and the South African Schools Act, sets the tone for people of goodwill to work out their own approaches and express them in the religious policy.

4.2 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa emphasizes that there should be balance between freedom for religious belief and expression and freedom from religious coercion and discrimination. It guarantees that "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, religious conviction, expression, and association." The Constitution also explicitly prohibits unfair discrimination on grounds that include religion, belief, and conscience.

4.3 The South African School Act, 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, it allows religious observances to be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and attendance by learners and members is free and voluntary.

- 4.4 The Gauteng Schools Education Act, states that the religious policy of public schools shall be made by the Governing Body of the school after consultation with the Department and subject to the approval of the members of the Executive Council.
- 4.5 The National Policy on Religion and Education, highlights the following underpinning principles in a religious policy, it should:
- a. Recognise the rich and diverse religious heritage of our country
 - b. Adopt a co-operative model that accepts our rich heritage and
 - c. Explore the possibility of creative inter-action between schools and faith whilst, protecting our young people from religious discrimination or coercion.

5. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY:

The primary purpose of this religious policy is to:

- 5.1 Ensure that there are no discriminatory practices amongst learners and staff in based on religious beliefs and orientation to a particular faith or religion.
- 5.2 Promote tolerance and unity among learners and staff through diversity of religious practices and beliefs existing in the school community.
- 5.3 Ensure that minority religions in a school are protected and respected and afforded the dignity and status equivalent to the majority religion in the school.
- 5.4 Describe the nature and content of the following aspects of religion accommodated in the school:
- (a) religious observances;
 - (b) freedom of conscience;
 - (c) freedom of religion;
 - (d) religious education;
 - (e) religious instruction;
 - (f) religious holidays; and
 - (g) religious festivals.
 - (h) Closure of the school
 - (i) Religion and admissions

6. DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS:

6.1 Definitions

Term	Definition
Freedom of conscience	Refers to the freedom of an individual to consider a fact, point of view or thought independent of others.
Freedom of religion	Free from religious expression, coercion and prediduce
Religion	Is used to describe the comprehensive and fundamental orientation in the world belief system with regard to ideas of divinity, spiritual and non-secular beliefs, the organisation thereof which are established in order to promote and protect these beliefs
Religious Education	Describes a set of curriculum outcomes which define what a learner should know about that religion
Religious festival	a day or period of celebration of any cultural or religious activity that is recognised as a feature of a particular cultural or religious community
Religious holiday	Any recognised day of festivities celebrated by cultural or religious communities.
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 the inculcation and adherence thereto.
Religious observance	Activities, behaviours and practices that recognise and express the views, beliefs and commitments of a particular religion
School day	Refers to that portion of each day in which it is compulsory for teachers and learners to be at school. It entails the 7 hours contact time that is expected of educators and learners, including breaks, compulsory activities, assembly and extramural activities

6.2 Acronyms

Acronyms	Explanation
HOD	Head of Department
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
SGB	School Governing Body

7. APPLICATION AND SCOPE OF THE POLICY:

- 7.1 This policy applies to the learners, educators, support staff, the school management and parents of learners at the school.

8. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK:

- 8.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996), as amended.
- 8.2 National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act No. 27 of 1996), as amended.
- 8.3 The South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996), as amended.
- 8.4 Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act No. 76 of 1998).
- 8.5 Gauteng Education Policy Act, 1998 (Act No. 12 of 1998), as amended.
- 8.6 Gauteng Schools Education Act, 1995 (Act No. 6 of 1995), as amended.
- 8.7 National Policy on Religion and Education (General Notice No. 1307 of 2003).
- 8.8 Admission of Learners to Public Schools (General Notice No. 4138 of 2001).

9. RELEVANT POLICIES AND PROVINCIAL CIRCULARS:

- 9.1 Circular 19 of 2004.
- 9.2 National Policy on Religion and Education (General Notice No. 1307 of 2003).

10. POLICY STATEMENTS:

10.1 Freedom of conscience

- a) No person employed at Laer Volksskool Heidelberg shall attempt to indoctrinate learners into any particular belief or religion nor denigrate any religion.

- b) In this regard, the Department shall respect the right and duties of the parents to provide direction to their children in the exercise of their rights as learners, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacity of children concerned.
- c) The School Governing Body recognises the right of educators and non-educators to freedom of conscience and will not impose duties or responsibilities on staff without their consent.

10.2 Religious observances

At Laer Volksskool Heidelberg learners are predominantly of the Christian faith. The following religious groups are also represented at the school Hindus, Muslims and Jews. Few learners regard themselves as traditionalists or do not have any specific religious affiliation.

- a) In recognition of the diverse religions and denominations found among the school community and based on the fact that the majority of learners, parents and staff members at the school are from different religious faiths and beliefs, the school's religious observances in the main must be conducted to accommodate the diversity of religious faiths and beliefs on an equitable basis.
- b) Religious observances may include:
 - (i) occasions which make use of school facilities, for a religious service on a day of worship or rest.
 - (ii) occasions when the school community gather during a school break.
 - (iii) occasions that entail other dimensions such as a specific attire, symbols, prayer times and diet in the manner agreed upon by the school and the relevant faith authorities.
- c) The school may avail its facilities for religious observances in the context of free and voluntary association and provided that facilities are made available on an equitable basis.

10.3 Learner participation in religious observances

- a) Learner participation in these activities is free and voluntary. Learners cannot be forced to attend or to violate the rights of other learners and educators to attend these observances.
- b) Learners who choose not to attend will be involved in other activities approved by the school under supervision and may not interfere with or disrupt school activities.

- c) Parents may seek permission from the school in writing for their children to participate in religious festivities, religious holidays, commemoration days, initiation, mourning rituals and prayer times.

10.4 Educator participation in religious observances

- a) Educator participation in these activities is free and voluntary.
- b) Educators have to be objective about religion while carrying out their duties as educators. They must treat all different religious and cultural traditions with fairness and respect.
- c) Educators should not engage in or lead religious activities of learners during contact time.
- d) Educators may neither reward nor punish learners because they agree or disagree with their religious views.

10.5 Freedom of religion

10.5.1 Observance of religious holidays and festivals by learners

- a) Learners are allowed to participate in religious holidays/festivals.
- b) Arrangements should be made to make sure that the affected learners are able to catch- up with their academic work/schedule.
- c) Parents of learners should notify the principal in writing well in advance of the learners' intentions to take certain school days off for the purpose of observing religious holidays/festival.
- d) Records of these requests will be kept for reference purposes.

10.5.2 Observance of religious holidays and festivals by educator and non -educator staff

- a) Educators and *non-educator* staff who wish to observe a religious holiday/festival must complete the leave form, and indicate that the leave applied for is special leave for religious observance.
- b) Religious observances may not exceed three (3) working days per year for educators.
- c) Planning for absenteeism of educator and *non-educator* staff due to a religious holiday/festival must be completed by the end of the previous academic year and submitted to the District Director.

10.5.3 School Calendar

The school will ensure that religious holidays of all religions mentioned in 10. 2 will be included on the annual school calendar to ensure that during the setting of examinations and tests, pupils are not prejudiced by their attendance at religious observances.

10.5.4 Dietary Requirements

- a) The school tuckshop will endeavour to provide food suitable for all religious groups.
- b) During the hosting of school functions the school will encourage its members (learners, staff and parents) to provide suitable food for their respective communities.

10.6 Religious instruction

10.6.1 Religious instruction will not form part of the official syllabus, but opportunity will be created for religious observances in the form of official openings, invited speakers and discussion groups.

10.6.2 Preachers from different denominations could be invited to address the learners on religious issues. Learners would then be free to ask questions on the issues addressed by these invited guest speakers.

10.6.3 Attendance of such events will be free and voluntary.

10.6.4 The practice of religion could also include:

- a) The singing of devotional songs
- b) The opening and closing of the school activities with scripture reading and prayer.
- c) Inviting guest speakers to speak on religious matters
- d) Showing religious movies and plays of different religions
- e) Wearing of recognised religious attire and symbols of faith may be allowed as determined in this policy.

10.7 Religion Education

- a) Religion education is a programme for studying about religion in all its many forms without promoting any particular religion or faith.

- b) The Life Orientation programme should purposefully pursue the moral and ethical development of learners whilst learning about the various religions and beliefs that exists.
- c) A learner in a public school shall have the right to religion education as envisaged by the (revised National) Curriculum.
- d) Every learner at the school shall have the right not to attend religious education classes and religious practices at the school.

10.8 Assembly

- a) Public schools may not violate the religious freedom of learners and educators by imposing religious uniformity on a religiously diverse school community in school assemblies.
- b) Learners and staff who are not comfortable with the religious part of the assembly are free to decide whether they wish to attend that part of the assembly or not.
- c) Learners will be excused after a written request is received from parents.
- d) Learners who are excused from religious practices will be accommodated as follows:
 - i. They can attend religious practices according to their own religion if their parents request it and if someone is provided to conduct or present them.
 - ii. If they cannot attend religious practices presented by someone from their religion or faith, then they are allowed to sit in an allocated classroom.
- e) The school assembly will consist of reading of universal prayers, songs of praise or a short prayer. This will take place on an equitable basis.
- f) Assemblies should be used as forums for celebrating religious and cultural diversity, in keeping with the values of the Constitution.
- g) If religious materials are used at assembly, they should preferably be presented in the framework outlined for Religion Education, that is, as an educational experience rather than a religious ceremony.

10.9 Closure of School

- a) No learner or educator may be absent from school during the school day without permission.
- b) Early closure of the school to attend a religious service may be permitted, provided it is within regulated contact time and is approved by the District Director.

- c) Where a religious holiday/festival will result in large numbers of learners and educators being absent from school on a particular day, the school may consider closing for that specific day.
- d) The school must apply through the District Director to get permission to close the school for that specific day.
- e) Application for closure should reflect wide and representative consultation with the parent community. The request should include the details of how the school will make-up for the lost time resulting from the celebration of a religious holiday/festival.
- f) If consultation does not result in consensus regarding the closure of the school, then the procedures in respect of withdrawal of individual learners from the school by their parents will apply.
- g) The school must obtain written approval from the Head of Department of the Gauteng Department of Education well in advance.
- h) Granting of permission for school closure will only be considered if the total number of school days for the year is not reduced.

10.10 Religious attire and symbols

- a) The use of religious symbols is acceptable, provided they are used as examples of religious or cultural heritage and/or used as teaching aids in the classroom.
- b) The school should not single out an attire of a particular religion, for prohibition or regulation, provided the attire does not symbolise practices that are in conflict with the Constitution. This includes crosses or crucifixes, hats/topees and head scarves, yarmulkes, dreadlocks, nose rings etc.
- c) Learners may wear religious attire or symbols, provided they apply to the school and provide evidence to the principal regarding the religious significance of the attire and/or symbols.

10.11 School activities during religious holidays/festivals

Consideration should be given to the scheduling of the following activities during religious holidays/festivals to allow for maximum participation at these events and assessments:

- a) sporting activities/competitions.
- b) cycle tests/examination; and

- c) educational excursions

10.12 Religion and admissions

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

11. SHORT TITLE:

This policy shall be called **Religious Policy of Laer Volksskool Heidelberg** .

12. APPROVAL:

Recommended by: (Principal) (Print name)	P Strydom	Signature:	
Date:			
Approved by: (SGB Chairperson) (Print name)	C Krugel	Signature:	
Date:			
Verification by GDE: (District Director) (Print Name)		Signature:	
Date:			
Certified by: (Print Name)		Signature:	
Date:			