



[REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter of 18 March 2019 requesting the following information:

1. *How many schools in New Zealand provide a religious education program as part of their curriculum?*
2. *Of these schools, how many include education about the Sikh Faith (Sikhism)?*
3. *What curriculum guides does the Ministry provide to schools in regards to education about Sikhism?*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

The Ministry considers there to be significant differences between religious education, religious instruction and religious observance, and explaining these differences is necessary to help understand the way religion is taught in schools.

Religious education, when children are taught about different cultures, customs and religions in a neutral way, may be taught as part of the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) or Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (TMOA) and is often undertaken as part of other subjects, such as social studies or Tikanga-ā-lwi. Secular teaching about Sikhism and other religions may occur in this way.

Religious instruction is when a particular religion or faith is taught or given preference. Religious instruction is not part of the New Zealand Curriculum or Te Marautanga o Aotearoa.

Religious observances are the things that are done to practice a religion, such as singing hymns or saying prayers. Religious observances are not part of the New Zealand Curriculum or Te Marautanga o Aotearoa.

The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) sets the direction for teaching and learning in New Zealand Schools. The NZC reflects New Zealand's cultural diversity, and values the histories and traditions of all of our people.

While the curriculum itself does not require that religion be included, each school's Board of Trustees can decide, independently of the Ministry, whether to include religious education as part of their curriculum. Boards also decide whether to close to allow religious instruction programmes at their school. It is good practice for boards to consult parents, caregivers and their school communities before allowing religious instruction to take place and it is a legal requirement that schools allow parents and legal guardians to opt their children out of religious instruction and observances.

With limited exceptions, the Education Act 1964 imposes strict parameters on the provision of religious instruction in state primary and intermediate schools. While schools are required to be entirely secular while open, they are permitted to close for up to 60 minutes per week, and no more than 20 hours in the school year, for the purposes of religious instruction and observance. Religious instruction must be led by volunteers who are not school staff.

State secondary schools are not regulated by the Education Act 1964, and may provide religious instruction or religious observances as they consider appropriate. The Human Rights Act 1993 and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 apply to all New Zealand schools, including secondary schools, meaning religious instruction and observances need to be delivered in a way that does not discriminate against anyone who holds different beliefs.

Although there are no specific guidelines for religious observance in secondary schools, both the Human Rights Commission and the Ministry have developed guidelines for state primary and intermediate schools based upon principles that are also relevant to secondary, integrated and private schools. The Commission's guidelines can be found at the following link: <https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/9414/2387/8011/HRC-Religion-in-NZ-Schools-for-web.pdf>

You may also be interested to know that the Ministry of Education is currently reviewing its guidelines on religious instruction in state primary and intermediate schools.

Private schools are not obliged to provide a wholly secular education. Some State-integrated schools have a special character that is religious in nature. The boards of trustees of these State-integrated schools may provide religious instruction and observances as they consider appropriate.

The Ministry does not hold data on how many schools offer religious education or religious instruction. I am therefore refusing parts one and two of your request under section 18(g) of the Act, because the Ministry does not hold this information, nor do we have any reason to think that any other single agency holds this information.

I am also refusing part three of your request, under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information you have requested does not exist because the Ministry does not provide curriculum guides specifically related to Sikhism to schools.

I hope that you find this information helpful.

Please note that the Ministry might proactively release this response on our website within five working days. If this happens, your personal information will be redacted.

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You have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. You can do this by writing to info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Yours sincerely



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Early Learning and Student Achievement