

29th November, 2017

To the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Natasha Fyles,

We, as the Araluen Christian College Council, seek to write this letter as a response to the discussion paper regarding the Anti-Discrimination Act of 1993. We wish to argue that exemptions for religious or cultural bodies *not* be removed.

We believe that the current exemptions are of crucial importance to our school and the other schools in NT Christian Schools.

- Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right and should remain so. Our school only exists because of our faith position. It is an inherent part of who we are, the way we operate, and our reason for operating. Our faith is not just an 'add-on'. As a council and college community, we ask our teachers to 'embody' our faith. This faith position is actively encouraged in our council, teaching and community documents and practices.
- Our college exists because there is a large body of parents who actively want Christian schools with Christian values. The only way for this to continue is if the staff share a common set of values and beliefs that are in line with the vision of the college. To be forced to employ those with different beliefs is as ridiculous as forcing a Labor politician to employ a Liberal politician for the sake of not 'discriminating'.
- We are a school council made up of parents (apart from one staff member). We believe that as parents we have the right to choose a Christian education for our children. We want our children to hear about the good news of Jesus Christ. We also know that the school takes its educational role seriously. That is why we send our children to this school and it is why we are on the council of Araluen Christian College.
- Contrary to popular opinion, Christian schooling is not about creating 'narrow fundamentalists'. Our school proudly promotes Christian faith and values. But we do so within a society where these values are not shared. A good proportion (50%) of our students do not come from Christian backgrounds. This means that there is always differences in our classroom; and healthy discussion about these different views. While 50% of the parents do not hold our Christian beliefs, they are positive about the influence of our college, and the values and beliefs it promotes. They are welcome at our school. The diversity (religious, cultural, political) within our school is a highlight and strength of our school. Our college promotes diversity and is thereby already inherently 'anti-discriminatory'.
- Our college promotes good outcomes and good citizens. There is no evidence that the existing exemptions are creating 'discrimination'. No one is forced to send their child to our school, and our beliefs are not forced on others outside of it. In a similar fashion, no teacher is forced to teach here, and there are many other schools where teachers who hold alternate views to us can teach.
- We believe that it is good for our democracy to have open diversity. It is unhealthy for our society to be conformist and shut down respectful dialogue. This would be an unwelcome outcome of taking away our religious freedoms.

Please don't take away the existing rights to exist as a Christian College. It is a negative outcome for our society, and for the parents and children at our school. It takes away our fundamental rights for religious freedom. It reduces our ability as a society to dialogue with care and respect.

In closing, and to promote transparency, we ask you to make sure that a report on the consultative process and outcomes be made public.

Nancy Lunnay,
Araluen Christian College Council Chair,

On behalf of the Araluen Christian Council.

