

Dear Australian Law Reform Commission,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposed changes to anti-discrimination laws and their impact on religious education institutions. I am deeply concerned that these changes may limit the freedom of faith-based schools to uphold and teach their values, ultimately affecting their ability to provide quality education for their students.

First and foremost, it is essential to note that no student should be harassed or bullied for any reason. There are no cases of religious schools allowing such behaviour. However, this does not mean that religious schools should be required to abandon their core values and beliefs. It is reasonable for schools to be allowed to operate in accordance with their religious beliefs and values, and it is unreasonable for the government to prevent schools from teaching and operating in accordance with their beliefs.

One of the fundamental principles of a liberal society is the freedom of choice, and this includes the freedom to choose a school that reflects one's values. As the philosopher John Stewart Mill stated, "The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it." Allowing schools to operate according to their religious beliefs and values enables students and parents to exercise their freedom of choice and choose a school that aligns with their values.

Moreover, schools do not just teach knowledge; they shape the person you will become. As someone who valued learning about Christianity at my school, I can attest to the fact that a faith-based education instils valuable Christian values such as compassion, empathy, and respect. These values help shape a student's character and build a strong moral foundation that lasts a lifetime. It is unfair to limit the ability of schools to provide these invaluable lessons to their students.

Finally, schools that are faith-committed need to have staff who uphold their faith. Faith is a fundamental worldview that impacts all of life for a believer, and staff who work in faith-based schools and colleges should expect to be asked to share the values of their faith community, not only in their teaching but also in the modelling of their faith. It is unreasonable to require schools to allow active opposition to their beliefs or to consent to campaigns that call for the abandonment of their beliefs.

In conclusion, the freedom of faith-based schools to uphold and teach their values is essential to the success of the education system in Australia. These institutions provide an invaluable service to their communities and play a vital role in shaping the character and moral foundation of their students. I urge you to consider these points as you continue your work on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Daniel MacCulloch