



23 February 2023

The Hon Mark Dreyfus MP
Attorney General
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA, ACT 2600

Dear Attorney General

ALRC Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws Consultation Paper

I write to you on behalf of the Member Schools of the Islamic Schools Association of Australia, which was established in 1983. One of the purposes of ISAA is to advocate on behalf of its network of member schools.

ISAA has endorsed the "Letter from Faith Leaders re: ALRC Consultation Paper on Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination law". I would like to draw your attention to ISAA's views of the proposed reforms, as being:

- An attack on religious freedom and the right of future generations to enjoy the faith and spirituality that has been enjoyed by previous generations of Muslims
- An attempt to repress faith / spiritual beliefs thereby eroding the ability to have faith that is a way of life that provides guidelines and boundaries for followers of the faith
- Detrimental to Australia and its people by further marginalising faith and turning people of "faith" into a ridiculed and isolated minority.
- A way of devaluing and demoralising beliefs associated with one's faith including increasing selfishness, anxiety, depression, mental illness and suicidal tendencies of future generations, many of whom will undoubtedly lose a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.
- A way of forcing some faith-based schools, who already face discrimination in the workplace, to have to justify why they gave preference to a member of their faith when recruiting. This is untenable given how difficult it is for many Muslims, especially women who wear Hijab, to find work outside of their own faith-based institution.

For faith-based schools to continue to exist, they must be allowed to demonstrate to parents that their teachers are not only suitably qualified to provide their children with a high quality education, but that from all the candidates who applied for the position the school chose the person who best fit the job, which should be allowed to include that the person at least held a fundamental belief in the existence of God. Islamic schools are committed to providing an education that promotes Islamic values and teachings while also upholding Australian laws and regulations. It is our firm opinion that schools should be able to provide education that is consistent with our faith-based teachings without fear of discrimination claims or legal repercussions. We believe that any anti-discrimination law reform must carefully consider the unique needs and challenges faced by religious educational institutions to ensure religious schools are not unfairly targeted or subject to undue scrutiny.

We believe it is extremely important that any law reforms do not unduly restrict Islamic schools from teaching and upholding Islamic values and beliefs. Islamic schools should be able to teach Islamic concepts in a way that is consistent with the faith, without fear of accusations of discrimination or prejudice. The Islamic faith is a way of life, and therefore it is important that there is a whole school approach to the integration of Islamic values across all curriculum areas to ensure the ethos of the faith-based school is upheld and promoted. To uphold their beliefs, Islamic schools already have a responsibility to promote respect and tolerance towards all people regardless of their background or beliefs and do not therefore believe religious schools should be unnecessarily targeted.

We urge you to ensure that what emerges from the ALRC consultation process demonstrates a genuine process of consultation and dialogue with representation from faith-based schools including Islamic, and other faith-based schools, a cross-section of religious leaders, religious education experts, parents and other experts in the field. We would be happy to nominate a suitably qualified person to assist in this task to represent ISAA.

Yours sincerely



Abdullah Khan
CEO / Executive Principal