

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT CHANGES THREATEN FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOL SECTOR IN WA

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The Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACCS) holds grave concerns for the future of the Christian School sector in Western Australia after Attorney-General Hon John Quigley MLA announced “broad support” for recommended changes to the State’s Equal Opportunity Act.

“Sadly, the Attorney-General has announced support for 163 recommendations without consulting with Christian schools affected by these proposed changes,” said Executive Officer Vanessa Cheng.

These amendments will impact the way Christian schools employ staff and enrol students, making it difficult for schools to employ staff and preference families in enrolment who share the beliefs of the school.

“The Christian school model requires that all staff, from the Principal to the Music teacher, share and practice the faith of the school community. We believe this provides the best, holistic learning environment for our students. Surely it is not for the Government to determine how a Christian school should be a Christian school?” said Mrs Cheng.

In addition to these changes, the recommendations supported by the Government:

- fail to adequately protect religious freedom in line with the recommendations of the Ruddock Report (Recommendation 2);
- fail to protect traditional views on sexual and gender expression (Recommendation 54);
- empower the Equal Opportunity Commissioner to self-initiate investigations of “breaches” of the Act without complaints being brought (Recommendation 126);
- allow activists to bring complaints on behalf of individual complainants (Recommendation 127).

“Unless the Government pushes back against some of these recommendations, it will be very difficult to operate a Christian school according to Christian principles and beliefs once they become law,” said Mrs Cheng.

“The sign of a mature and tolerant society is allowing challenging and thought-provoking ideas in the areas of religion, science and the arts to thrive,” says Mrs Cheng, “suppressing religious expression only robs society of its diversity and richness.”

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