

AUSTRALIAN LAW REFORM COMMISSION REVIEW MUST PROVIDE CLARTIY FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS

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The Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS) welcomes the referral by Attorney General Mark Dreyfus to the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) to review the religious exemptions for educational institutions in Federal anti-discrimination law.

“We hope the ALRC can take the heat out of the debate and provide a sensible set of recommendations which will fairly balance the religious freedom of schools along with the rights of staff and students,” said Executive Officer Vanessa Cheng.

“Parents who pay for a Christian education expect our schools to provide an authentic faith-based learning environment for their children,” said Mrs Cheng, “and to deliver this our schools require all staff to be active members of a local church who can model and teach the faith.”

“We are calling for a nationally consistent approach to these laws so we can continue delivering quality Christian education as one choice among a variety of educational options for parents,” said Mrs Cheng, “we do not want to be constantly defending our schools’ employment practices to state and territory governments seeking to remove essential protections.”

“AACS is concerned that in stark contrast to the federal Government’s election commitment to maintain the right of religious schools to preference people of their faith in the selection of staff, the Northern Territory Labor government is planning to completely remove this ability through the recent introduction of its [Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill 2022](#).”

AACS hopes the ALRC inquiry will provide clear set of recommendations to the federal Government that will balance the religious freedom of schools and the rights of staff and students, consistent with the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions as protected under international law.

“Any reforms to the delicate framework of existing religious exemptions within anti-discrimination law needs to be carefully balanced with measures to provide religious schools with confidence that they can continue to teach and maintain their religious ethos,” said Ms Cheng.

As a key stakeholder, AACS looks forward to providing input to the ALRC review about the contribution religious schools make to the community to ensure the security of Christian schooling into the future.

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