

Friday 11 October 2019

Education Updates

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Government considering views on religious freedom bills

The Australian Government is reviewing responses to its draft religious discrimination bills, with a view to introducing legislation into the parliament by the end of the year.

Christian Schools Australia's (CSA) submission to the government seeks to expand the bill to include 'the right of parents to access an education for their children in conformity with their faith'.

It wants legal religious activity be protected by the bill, and to ensure that 'any conduct or statement which is made with genuine conviction that the conduct or statement is in accordance with, or in furtherance of the relevant doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings' is protected.

CSA wants protections for 'corporate entities' in line with those proposed for the [Marriage Amendment \(Definition and Religious Freedoms\) Bill 2017](#) by Senators David Fawcett and James Paterson. Senators Paterson and Fawcett had unsuccessfully moved to amend that bill to protect people who hold 'traditional marriage beliefs'.

Further information about the submission can be found on the [CSA website](#).

The Australian reported that the Association of Independent Schools NSW's (AISNSW) submission warns that exceptions relating to 'inherent requirements' in the draft bill do not allow schools to preference employing teachers of their faith.

According to the report, AISNSW says that the exceptions do not 'provide the necessary certainty and protection for faith-based schools who seek the right to select staff as they deem appropriate'.

It wants the exceptions replaced with a positive statement allowing religious institutions to 'appoint, or prefer to appoint, employees from the religion upon which the ... institution is based'.

AISNSW's submission raised similar concerns about the enrolment of students. *The Australian* quoted the AISNSW CEO, Mr Geoff Newcombe, as saying:

Parents would be concerned if this right to preference [students of the same faith] was undermined by the legislation. Similarly, it would be concerning if the legislation could be invoked to prevent schools requiring students to attend religious observances conducted by the school.

The *Saturday Age* reported that National Catholic Education Commission executive director, Ms Jacinta Collins, said that Catholic schools must retain their legal right to employ staff and enrol students based on how well they fit into the ethos of the school.

She said:

If someone doesn't fit within the ethos of a religious school, they have the opportunity ... to attend a different school. It's that unique Australian pluralist approach to delivering services that has fostered that environment. People have those choices.

The general manager of the Independent Education Union in Victoria and Tasmania, [Ms Debra James, said](#) that religious schools already had 'sufficient exemptions' and that the government was working to further entrench them by providing 'a suite of new rights to employers aimed at enabling them to publicly marginalise LGBTI teachers and students'.

The consultation period for submissions on the draft bills closed on 2 October. Australian Attorney General [Christian Porter said in August](#) he expects the bills will 'be introduced in October and considered by both the House and Senate before the end of the calendar year, allowing time for a Senate inquiry'.

- Independent schools losing faith. Rosie Lewis, *The Australian*, 3 October 2019
- Catholics demand wider concessions. Michael Koziol, *The Saturday Age*, 5 October 2019
- If only we listened to the poor as much as religious people. Michael Koziol, *The Sunday Age*, 6 October 2019

Federal / state rivalries must not 'stand in the way of reform' – Tehan

The Australian Minister for Education, [Mr Dan Tehan, says](#) that the Eastern states have used a 'dead cat strategy' to divert attention from their stagnating National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results.

Mr Tehan told the audience at *The Age* Schools Summit that Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland had announced a review of NAPLAN (See [Weekly Briefing 13 September](#)) to keep news about their students' results from newspaper front pages 'and it worked'.

He said the states were spending 'more time blaming the test and not enough time talking about the results', arguing that they wouldn't be pushing for a review if their school systems were returning 'outstanding results'.

Mr Tehan strongly endorsed NAPLAN, saying it 'doesn't get the credit it deserves', but said the government was willing to review the program 'once it has fully and successfully transitioned to online'.

He said that the Australian Government was delivering on its commitments, but that many factors were out of its control. He said that if he was Victoria's Education Minister, he would give 'greater autonomy to parents, teachers and principals' by:

- giving school boards real power to influence change
- empowering teachers to improve their practice
- allowing principals to employ the best teachers and reward those that perform well.

'We cannot let Federal v State rivalries stand in the way of reform, we cannot let our federated model of government become a chokepoint for change,' he said.

- Tehan lashes states for 'dead cat strategy' in attacking NAPLAN, Rebecca Urban, *The Australian* 9 October 2019
- NAPLAN paradox: the states resent honest data. Editorial, *Australian Financial Review*, 10 October 2019
- Critics of NAPLAN 'asking too much'. Rebecca Urban, *The Australian*, 11 October 2019

New incentives to fill 'hard-to-staff' positions in government schools

The Victorian Minister for Education, [Mr James Merlino, has announced](#) funding to improve the quality of teaching in government school classrooms, saying 'great teachers change lives'.

The \$245 million package includes \$90 million promised last month to increase support for regional schools and encourage teachers to work in them. (See [Weekly Briefing 6 September](#).)

The package includes:

- grants of up to \$50,000 to encourage teachers to work in 'hard-to-staff' positions and schools, and payments of up to \$9000 for three years to encourage teachers to stay in these roles
- more than \$40 million to help skilled school leaders turn around underperforming schools
- more than \$25 million for learning specialists to support teachers in government schools
- more than \$5 million for employment-based pathways into teaching for high-achieving university graduates and people with career experience
- almost \$70 million to provide teachers in all government schools with access to professional learning communities.

Teach for Australia, a non-profit organisation which recruits 'high calibre people from all walks of life' to teach in disadvantaged communities, said it was 'delighted' by the announcement. Teach for Australia CEO, [Ms Melodie Potts-Rosevear, said](#) that the funding would allow them to attract 155 of the 'best and brightest' to work in the classroom.

Australian Education Union Victorian branch president, Ms Meredith Peace, said that while the AEU supported initiatives to attract new entrants into the teaching, it remains concerned about the funding of programs such as Teach for Australia.

Ms Peace said that the government needed to address the underlying problem contributing to staff shortages: teacher workload.

- Education union welcomes new investment in the workforce, but urges state government to address workload issues. AEU Media release, 9 October 2019
- Teachers offered \$50,000 cash incentive to work at Victoria's toughest schools. *ABC News*, 9 October 2019
- Regional schools in focus. Charlotte Grieve, *The Age*, 10 October 2019

Merlino calls for review after attack on Jewish student

The Victorian Minister for Education, Mr James Merlino, has condemned anti-Semitism and ordered a review into how a government school in Cheltenham dealt with incidents of racist bullying.

According to media reports, a Year 7 Jewish student was made to kneel and kiss the shoes of a Muslim classmate, before being beaten so badly that he needed to be hospitalised. Police are also investigating incidents of alleged online bullying later directed at the student.

It was also reported that a five-year-old student was allegedly called a 'Jewish cockroach' and harassed in the school toilets by his classmates.

The chairman of Anti-Defamation Commission, Dr Dvir Abramovich, wrote in the *Saturday Age* he was worried that government schools were becoming 'no go' zones for Jewish students. He described anti-Semitism in schools as a 'deeply entrenched problem that is being swept under the rug and brushed aside by principals'.

The [Herald Sun reported](#) that the Australian Treasurer, Mr Josh Frydenberg, said that the Holocaust should be included in the curriculum 'so that we cannot repeat any of these mistakes of the past'. He said that if people 'understood and comprehended the atrocities of the Holocaust then they would be as insulted as anybody, including me, about these recent attacks'.

Mr Merlino released a [statement on Twitter](#) saying that the government had 'done a lot' to address racist bullying in schools, including investing almost \$10 million in its [Anti-Bullying and Mental Health Initiative](#), but that it was prepared to do more to stop anti-Semitism, if needed.

- An anti-Semitism crisis in our schools. Dvir Abramovich. *The Saturday Age*, 5 October 2019
- School bullying review ordered. Adam Carey, *The Saturday Age*, 5 October 2019
- Vile messages sent to student. Andrew Koubaridis, *Herald Sun*, 10 October 2019

School marketing white washed, says study

A Deakin University study says that schools' marketing material generally looks the same, because it is usually 'directed toward attracting the same white, middle-class parents of daughters'.

The thesis, [Schooled into Place: A Mixed Methods Social Semiotic Analysis of School Marketing Materials](#), by Deakin research fellow Trevor McCandles, analyses the marketing material of Independent, government and Catholic secondary schools. It looks at the way the social location of schools, in terms of gender, social class and ethnicity of the students, impacts on the ways schools market themselves.

According to the thesis, marketing materials 'systematically skew how students will be represented in terms of their gender, class and ethnicity'. He says that students are being constrained by:

the stereotypes attributed to whole groups in society: whether the students from low SES schools that are never referred to as being creative, or the children of colour never shown helping a white child, or the girls who are never the recipients of praise if the image contains a mixed gendered group.

Mr McCandles believes such representations aren't chosen consciously. Rather, he says, they are the automatic product of our social stereotypes'.

He says:

If schools are to provide equity of opportunity for their students then the constraints imposed by such representations must first be seen if there is to be any hope they can then be removed.

- Marketing a school is in the colour coding. Madeleine Heffernan, *The Age*, 4 October 2019

RACV calls for 40kmh limit for all schools

The [RACV is calling for 40 kmh speed zones](#) to apply outside all schools at school drop off and pick up times.

RACV's senior manager transport, planning and infrastructure, Mr Peter Kartsidimas, says that there are 148 Victorian schools alongside roads where the speed limit is 60kmh when children are being dropped off or picked up. The normal speed limit outside these schools is 80kmh or above.

The campaign has the support of the Royal Children's Hospital, Kidsafe Victoria, the Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals and Parents Victoria.

The president of the Victorian Principals Association, Anne-Maree Kliman, said there needs to be a consistent rule across the state 'so everyone knows that every school zone is 40kmh'.

- Push for speed limit for all schools. Timna Jacks, *The Age*, 9 October 2019
- RACV bid for 40kmh, Kieran Rooney, *Herald Sun*, 9 October 2019