

ALRC report is at odds with religious freedom and the high-regard parents place in faith-based schools

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) said the Australian Law Reform Commission's (ALRC) recommendations to remove exemptions for religious educational institutions would severely limit the ability of faith-based schools to operate and teach according to their ethos.

National Catholic education executive director Jacinta Collins said the ALRC's predictable recommendations were not only at odds with the Inquiry's terms of reference, but with the desire of families to choose a faith-based school for their children.

"The ALRC's recommendations are unsurprising given the draft report last year," Ms Collins said. "It's disappointing that they overlook the concerns of religious leaders and the high regard parents hold for the ethos and nature of their schools.

"Religious freedom is a fundamental human right and the Parliament has a responsibility to enact Australia's international commitments to ensure parents can continue to choose a school in line with their values and beliefs and provide faith-based schools with the certainty to employ staff that support their ethos."

Ms Collins said the Albanese Government has made clear commitments in both the ALRC's terms of reference and their national party platform.

"In making their recommendations, the ALRC has critically neglected the Attorney General's third term of reference to ensure that religious schools can 'continue to build a community of faith by giving preference, in good faith, to persons of the same religion as the educational institution in the selection of staff'.

"The Albanese Government also committed to religious freedom in its 2023 party platform to 'support the right of all Australians to have and to manifest their religion or beliefs, and the right of religious organisations to act in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of their faith'.

"Any path forward must include a broad community and political consensus that protects religious freedom and respects the rights of Australian families to educate their children according to their faith."

Catholic education is the largest provider of education in Australia outside of government, enrolling one in five, or 805,000 students and employing over 109,000 staff in 1,756 schools.

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