

Catholic schools seek religious freedom, not the right to discriminate

National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) rejects the notion by Equality Australia that Catholic schools discriminate, or are seeking to discriminate, against staff or students on the basis of sexuality or gender.

National Catholic education executive director Jacinta Collins said the mission of Catholic schools is to uphold the dignity of each individual.

“Catholic schools are not seeking the right to discriminate based on personal attributes, but rather to maintain their religious identity and mission,” Ms Collins said.

“The current exemptions are designed to ensure that discrimination legislation doesn’t impinge on religious freedom and enables faith-based schools to continue to build a community of faith by preferencing the employment of individuals who share and support the ethos and mission of our schools.

“In the absence of religious freedom legislation these exemptions safeguard the internationally-protected religious rights and freedoms that Australia has committed to. They do not endorse discrimination,” she said.

“Catholic education’s mission is to promote inclusivity and diversity, welcoming individuals from all backgrounds while preserving our distinct ethos.

“If individuals do not support our ethos, they are able to choose another school for enrolment or employment. This is what a free, pluralistic society is about.

“Catholic education remains committed to advocating for legislative frameworks that respect the religious identity and mission of Catholic schools while ensuring a fair balance with other protected rights.

“There is little evidence to support the claims by Equality Australia that Catholic schools are discriminating against staff or students. Catholic schools can maintain their religious character without engaging in unjust discrimination, as we have done for over 200 years.”

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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