

ALRC submission re Religious institutions' Exemption

In order to provide for the different needs of different people in our pluralistic society, different schools and tertiary institutions and early childhood centres have developed.

Some of these cater specifically for students with a moderate to severe disability, others for those of impressive sporting ability, or talent in the creative and performing arts, or with a particular philosophy (like Montessori or Steiner) or for those of a particular faith.

Of course, all schools are obliged to follow the government's curriculum as well regulations concerning the well being of children, adults and staff in each of these institutions. But within this framework, much diversity can be achieved and should be encouraged.

It is entirely appropriate for schools to develop their own "flavour" and to seek families and staff who share their vision so as to develop a harmonious school community. This is respectful of our community's diversity. We have diversity of needs, backgrounds, talents and world outlook expressed in faith.

It is the role of the parent to find the most suitable school for each of their children and considering their family background. Many parents have moved house in order to better serve the needs of their child(ren) or their preferred outlook.

Selective schools develop criteria for school entry and choose staff appropriately. Therefore, I believe it is totally appropriate for faith based schools to be exempt from the national anti-discrimination laws in order to achieve a school community in keeping with the faith of the school.

Each faith based institution should develop a charter of beliefs and a code of conduct and then be free to use these to determine, as far as possible, who would be best suited to becoming a part of that institution's community. Parents would have the opportunity to know up front what the flavour of each school is and can determine if it would be a good fit for their child. And the parents can choose a different school if it seems appropriate for each child. Parents already do this in regard to outside school activities like sporting teams and music teachers - try to get the best fit for the child but if one doesn't work out swap to something else.

This is not unfair since a harmonious educational institution depends on common aims. It would actually facilitate smoother running of the institution. Where parents and staff are on the same page, expectations concur more, collaboration of home and school to achieve the school's aims is facilitated more easily and presumably a more happy and satisfied school community can be achieved.

Thankyou for the opportunity to make this submission.