

Re: A school community of care and compassion

Dear Committee Secretary

I am writing to you as a long-standing educator in Catholic schools who has experienced firsthand the complexities of fostering a school community rooted in care and compassion, while navigating the challenges posed by discriminatory practices. As someone who values inclusion and strives to create a safe and supportive environment for my students and colleagues, I am concerned about the ongoing issues of discrimination and unequal treatment within Tasmanian schools. My experience highlights the need for the Committee to address these issues and consider the measures necessary to ensure that all members of our school communities can thrive without fear of harassment or exclusion.

Addressing Discrimination and the Impact on Mental Health and Job Security

As an educator who has taught in Catholic schools for many years, I am concerned about the current climate within Tasmanian schools regarding discrimination and unequal treatment of staff. As a gay person, married to my partner, I have recently felt an increased level of threat from Catholic Education authorities. This fear is not unfounded; it directly impacts my sense of job security and has significantly affected my mental health. The stress of feeling that my employment is under constant scrutiny due to my personal life has added an additional burden to an already demanding job. This situation underscores the urgent need for measures to prevent and remedy discrimination in schools, as outlined in the terms of reference (b), to protect the well-being of staff and ensure a safe working environment for all.

The Culture of Inclusion and the Need for Policy Reform

At my school, there is a strong culture of inclusion among staff and students. The support for diverse individuals, including LGBTQ+ staff and students, is present but must be expressed in ways that avoid attracting the attention of Catholic education authorities. While this discreet support creates a relatively safe day-to-day environment, it also fosters an underlying sense of unease. The inability to openly celebrate and support diverse individuals highlights the need for a thorough examination of current policies. The terms of reference (e) speaks to the necessity of exploring legislative and policy reforms to address this issue, ensuring that all staff and students can be openly accepted and supported without fear of discrimination.

Leadership Contracts and Discriminatory Practices

A specific area of concern lies in the stipulations within staff leadership contracts, which require that individuals awarded these positions live a life in accordance with Catholic teachings. This clause acts as a loophole, allowing for the exclusion of qualified candidates who do not conform to certain aspects of the Catholic lifestyle. Such discriminatory practices not only limit the career development of capable educators but also perpetuate an environment where diversity is not fully embraced. Terms of reference (c) and (d) are particularly relevant here, as they call for an examination of the obligations of schools under the Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 and a recommendation for efforts that should be made to meet these obligations, ensuring equal opportunities for all staff members.

I am confident that with thoughtful examination and the implementation of necessary reforms, we can create an environment in Tasmanian schools where every student and staff member is valued, supported, and able to contribute to a truly inclusive community. I trust that the Committee will take these considerations into account to help foster a brighter, more compassionate future for all.

Kind regards,

A concerned teacher