



Council of Catholic School Parents NSW /ACT

Submission to the NSW Law Reform Commission Review of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)*

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COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS NSW/ACT

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PREAMBLE

This submission has been prepared by the Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT (CCSP), which represents the parents and carers of 271,000 students in 593 Catholic schools in NSW.

CCSP thanks the NSW Law Reform Commission (NLRC) for the opportunity to make a submission into the review of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW).

This submission is made on behalf of the approximately 150,000 families who choose to send one or more of their children to a Catholic school in NSW. Catholic education is highly valued and respected in Australia and is responsible for the education of millions of students over 200 years.

CCSP is the body officially recognised by the Bishops of NSW representing the interests of parents and carers of children and young people in NSW Catholic schools. The work of the Council is guided by the principles of parental choice, equity and social justice. CCSP provides leadership, advocacy and support to the parents and carers of children and young people in all diocesan and congregational Catholic schools in NSW.

The term 'parents', as used in this submission, is intended to cover both biological and adoptive parents and other carers who are the primary carers of children and young people, including grandparents and recognised kinship carers.

This submission is in response to the NLRC's published Consultation Paper of May 2025. In particular, it addresses Chapter 7. 'Wider exceptions', and its section 'Private educational authorities'.

FEEDBACK

Parents are the first educators of their children.¹ A parent's right to choose a school that reflects and supports their values and beliefs must be protected and respected. The rights of the school to engage staff who support, respect and witness those values and beliefs must also be protected if the very core of the system parents have chosen and continue to choose with growing demand is to be sustainable.

CCSP acknowledges that schools must follow the relevant curriculum; however, schools must also have the capacity to engage staff who are able to deliver content according to the Catholic ethos. This means having teachers and staff who respect, uphold and give witness to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Catholic schools are more than an educational institution that exists on the school campus. They are communities including past, present and future students, families, local residents, parishioners, religious and clergy.

Catholic school communities support students and families in their spiritual and moral development. More Christian and Catholic school graduates believe their school has prepared them for finding a sense of meaning, purpose and direction in life than government school graduates (74% Christian, 59% Catholic, 51% Government).²

This is supported by many Australian parents who prioritise their child's socio-emotional development over academic success. A high proportion of Australian parents use wellbeing as a key indicator of success of a school.³

It is widely accepted that early intervention for wellbeing issues can have a better long-term outcome for individuals. The wellbeing support offered by Catholic schools to community members when they are undergoing devastating incidents such as natural disasters and personal tragedies supports positive mental health and wellbeing.

Parents and carers, as primary educators of their children, want to exercise their right to select

an education setting for their child that upholds their values and beliefs. Any reform to the anti-discrimination laws needs to be balanced by the rights of parents and carers to choose an education for their child in a religious institution that reinforces the values they seek to instil in their children.

Catholic school communities are welcoming and inclusive. The ***Life and Dignity of the Human Person*** is a key principle of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). They welcome students and families from all backgrounds and contexts and seek to uphold and promote the dignity of every person, in accordance with Catholic social teaching.

In recruiting staff, who have a privileged role in supporting and shaping young people into contributing, respectful, community-minded citizens, it is vital that schools retain their right to select staff who not only support Catholic Social Teaching but bear witness to this through the expression and upholding of the mission, vision and values of the Catholic school.

Parents have chosen to send their children to Catholic schools so they can be educated in the Catholic faith. It is important to preserve and respect their freedom of choice.

In preparing this submission, members of the Council of Catholic School Parents NSW/ACT (CCSP) were asked to offer their response to the review of the NSW Law Reform Commission Review of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW) Unlawful conduct*.

Parents were united in their views that, as first educators and in recognition of the Education Act 1990 No 8 which states the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child's parents. One member of CCSP stated that *'parents should be free to choose a school that reflects their values, providing that it delivers education aligned with the national curriculum. Schools should be free to appoint staff who will support, not undermine their core values.'*

Along with parental obligations and responsibility to educate their children, they also have choice and an ability to identify a setting that best suits them and the education they are seeking for their child.

For many parents, the ability to identify and select a setting that best reflects the values they are teaching and modelling at home for their children is a strong factor in selecting a school. Another member of CCSP stated, *'Our choice of a Catholic school for our child is firmly rooted in the desire for them to learn in an environment where the staff and leadership embody the Catholic faith, values, and traditions that shape the school's identity. Protecting the right of faith-based schools to choose staff who can genuinely live out this faith is essential to preserving the choice for families to select an education that reflects these values.'*

Parents, as first educators, deeply value their ability to confidently educate their children in a setting that aligns with their family values, fostering a sense of consistency between home and learning environments. This alignment not only reinforces their core beliefs but also empowers children to grow within a framework of trust, stability, and mutual understanding. One of our CCSP members stated, *'We chose a Catholic school for our children because we believe in the power of faith-filled teachers, educators who share our family values and guide our children in both academic learning and living their faith. For us, the Catholic school is an extension of our home and parish, working together to not only nurture their minds, but also their spiritual growth.'*

Catholic schools foster a strong sense of community, moral development, and spiritual growth among students. Allowing these schools to uphold their religious customs, such as prayer, religious instruction, and celebration of sacraments, supports the rights of families who choose a faith-based education for their children.

It is important to us that their schools don't lose the Catholic perspective and traditions. Catholic teachers can pray with the students and help to prepare them for sacraments. We believe that

Catholic teachers can be great role models for our kids, displaying compassion, empathy, forgiveness and service to others.

Parents also expressed concern about perceptions that Catholic schools may somehow discriminate against students who have a disability or identify as LGBTIQ+. One member of CCSP expressed the views of many parents, stating that *'over the years, our children have attended four different Catholic schools, and in each one I have witnessed a warm welcome and inclusion for students with disabilities and those who identify as LGBTQIA+. These schools have not only embraced diversity but have lived out the heart of our Catholic faith, seeing the face of Christ in every child and treating each person with love and respect. This example of compassion and acceptance has made the teachers wonderful role models for our children, showing them what it means to live their faith.'*

CONCLUSION

As the officially recognised body representing the interests of parents and carers of children and young people in NSW and ACT Catholic schools, CCSP requests that the NLRC Review of *the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW) include that the exceptions for religious bodies and private educational institutions remain in the Act to ensure that:

- Catholic schools are free to be Catholic and operate and teach according to their ethos.
- faith-based schools are able to operate, employ and teach according to their faith needs to be consistent in every state and territory to meet the needs of all Australian students.
- Changes to current anti-discrimination laws go hand-in-hand with the introduction of laws to protect religious freedom and the rights of parents and carers to choose education that supports their values and beliefs.

¹ *Code of Canon Law (Canon 793 §1).*

² https://carduseducationsurvey.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Cardus_Australian-schools-and-the-common-good-summary-report_Final.pdf

³ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Family_School_Engagement_Playbook_FINAL.pdf