



Many of you will have been following with interest the Senate inquiry into ‘Legislative exemptions that allow faith-based educational institutions to discriminate against students, teachers and staff based on sexuality and gender identification’.

Given the politicised nature of the debate on religious freedom and exemptions for schools under the *Sex Discrimination Act* and *Fair Work Act*, it is pleasing that, while recommending against exemptions for schools, the Inquiry Committee recognises the need for protection of religious freedom in Australia.

With the support of the Chair of the College Board, Overnewton was a signatory, along with 45 other schools, to a letter written to the Prime Minister seeking for the exemptions to be removed immediately.

Recently, I sat with another Independent School Principal on the Senate Inquiry panel and I was also invited to be interviewed by Fran Kelly on Radio National.

I make available for you below the text I provided to the Senate Inquiry in Melbourne.

*Overnewton Anglican Community College is a dual campus independent Anglican school of some 2100 students located in the north west of Melbourne. I have been Principal of Overnewton for the last 18 years.*

*Our mission statement opens by stating that Overnewton strives to be an inclusive learning community with a strong Christian foundation.*

*As a community we celebrate the diversity of our families, however they are formed and whatever they look like. We believe that this welcome is an expression of our Christian values and ethos.*

*We acknowledge that all members of our community, whether of faith or no faith, are going to be at different places on different social and ethical issues. And as an educational community we welcome and engage with a great diversity of viewpoints and experiences expressed in a spirit of learning, humility, respect and mutual care.*

*To the best of my knowledge, the religious exemptions in question have never been used at Overnewton. Indeed, they are absolutely out of step with our deep commitment to be a safe and supportive place for all students, families and staff, regardless of their sexuality, faith position, race and ethnicity, or ability. There is no place for these exemptions in our school.*



*It is not the business of any adult working in a school to know what the sexuality of a student attending that school is. The vast majority of students enter Overnewton at Prep and are there for the 13 years of their schooling. It is possible that in those 13 years, students will question both their sexuality and their gender identification. It is the role of my Christian school to ensure that students have a safe and supporting place in which to work through those questions. The thought of any school excluding a student from their community because they come to an understanding of their own sexuality or gender identification is abhorrent to me.*

*Given the size of Overnewton, it is not surprising that we have a handful of students who identify as transgender. One such student fully and successfully transitioned to her identified gender when she was in Year Ten. She was a popular and involved member of the College community and received a major prize at our Presentation Night. The announcement of her award was popularly received.*

*All employees join Overnewton knowing that they are required to support the Christian ethos of the College. This year, we have celebrated the marriages of both heterosexual and same sex couples. Also, we celebrate the birth of children in all types of staff families.*

*Our shared Christian ethos and values define the nature of our community. Our school is deeply enriched by the diversity of its community. At Overnewton, we cherish being a faith-based school and proudly talk about what that means within the community. This includes the participation of students and staff in the whole life of our schools; in worship, in learning, in community service, and in our care for each other.*

*We urge the Government to remove the religious exemptions under the SDA immediately.*

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