

Ballina Christian Education Committee

Submission to the Productivity Commission's draft report "Future foundations for giving", released on 30 November 2023

Lodgement: Electronic, this day 1 February 2024

- My name is Antje Moore. As Treasurer and Executive Board Member, I represent the Ballina Christian Education Committee in Ballina, Northern NSW. This Committee was formed by the combined local churches, operates as a Sub-Committee of SU Australia and is responsible for the delivery of Special Religious Education to the students at Ballina Coast High School, Ballina, NSW.
- I am responding to the recommendation by the Productivity Commission to remove DGR Status for SRE providers to Public Schools (Draft report "Future foundations for giving", released 30/11/2023)
- Under the Education Act 1990, S 32, Ballina Coast High School allows time for such Special Religious Education. However, the cost of this is not covered by the Department of Education. Rather, it is solely funded by the Ballina Christian Education Committee via funds raised from the local community.
- Given the high standards necessary to provide a quality service, meeting annual budgets is difficult and requires generous donations. The annual budget for the Ballina Christian Education Committee is \$60,000. This provides for one SRE teacher to service the school for six half days per week. Tax deductions provide the necessary incentives for some of our private donors. We estimate that approximately one quarter of donations are from donors seeking a tax deduction, the remainder is raised from local churches and fundraising.
- For the Ballina Christian Education Committee, there exists the additional burden of living in Regional NSW with limited resources and a lower socio-economic status. We have not experienced an increase in donations over the past few years as it appears from the data submitted by the Productivity Commission. The recommendation by the Productivity Commission is causing us concern about the continued viability of this important service to our local School Community.
- The effect of Christian Ethos on a school society cannot be overestimated. In the current social climate teachers are increasingly struggling with behavioural issues. We have record levels of assaults at school. Assaults in schools across New South Wales have jumped by 50 per cent over the past decade, rising to a level where police are notified of violence 10 times per school day on average (Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research). We believe that Education in the Christian Ethos is more important than ever and every effort should be made by governments to encourage the work of SRE providers.
- Parents and students often express their gratitude to us for the high standard of SRE teaching. A reduction in donations due to a loss of tax deductibility may push Religious Education in Public High Schools into a more volunteer-based service with a resulting lack of quality and to the detriment of students.
- We conclude with some feedback from one of the current SRE students at Ballina Coast High School:

SRE has been an important part of my education. In a school with many different cultures, beliefs and moral standards, it has been very important for me to have an SRE teacher employed at the school. My teacher has a bible college degree and so is able to teach and to answer questions from an academic base of knowledge rather than from his own opinions. This has given me a better understanding of the whole bible. My teacher is available most days which is important for building relationships with students. It seems to me that a paid teacher has more resources available with better activities. My SRE teacher has a website students can access. Teaching several classes a week helps with classroom management, engagement of students and more thorough preparation. A paid teacher, particularly at high school level, is more likely to be younger, have children of high school age and be easier to relate to. My SRE teacher has become a friend and role model for me. He has done many activities to expand my knowledge - going through bible passages with me, showing strategies for how to read bible passages myself, how to talk to people about Christianity and how to answer any questions people may have about the bible. Also, SRE has been a fun activity for me while at school because it includes fun activities and games in amongst the lesson. I believe that for high school students to have sound teaching in SRE is important for their well-being and gives them a solid base of belief for the future.

We sincerely thank you for your time in considering our concerns.

Antje Moore
On behalf of the Ballina Christian Education Committee
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