

5 February 2024

Dear Commissioners,

Continually since 2009 I have personally volunteered, and been involved with supporting scores of volunteers and low paid workers in delivering services to young people in public schools, in two specific ways, each of which will be negatively impacted by the proposed changes as indicated by the draft report. Please consider these impacts in each of these two areas:

Firstly, Voluntary Student Activities of a Religious Nature in Schools (VSA) in NSW, often known as ISCF groups or SUPA clubs. These groups are attended voluntarily, with parental permission, and are often partly and sometimes fully led by students. It appears that Scripture Union NSW (SU NSW) – a volunteer movement which currently has DGR status to support this work - would lose that status under the proposed changes. SU NSW supports this important work through organising, training, assisting with compliance, and providing resourcing, and I urge that this be reconsidered. Some of the community benefits as I see them, are listed below.

Secondly, Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW Public Schools is another area that appears set to be placed under further pressure through these proposed changes. SRE is attended by students of any or no faith, whenever chosen by their parents or carers.

The benefits of these activities for children and young people in Public schools include:

- Social and mental health improvement through being included in caring communities, and making friends across school year groups, and increased kindness and care resulting in the school and wider community (VSA)
- Educational and social cohesion benefits in learning to discuss complex topics in respectful ways (VSA & SRE)
- Personal development via attainment of leadership skills (especially VSA)
- Education about an important and influential factor in society, and history. (VSA & SRE).

Thank you for considering my submission, may you be wise in your deliberations.

Sincerely,

David Tankard