

**SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION
PHILANTHROPY INQUIRY**

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Board Chairman**

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I write as Board Chairman on behalf of the Springwood-Winmalee Interdenominational Scripture in Schools Christian Education Association Inc.

The presence of Special Religious Education in Government Schools honours the significance of 'beliefs' in life and, therefore, in learning.

Beliefs, whether they be religious or not, inform choices, values, motives and, ultimately, our sense of purpose, meaning and satisfaction in life. They even inform the questions we ask – or prefer not to ask!

A strong case can be made that 'faith' (the beliefs we rely on for life's choices) makes sense of life. For many, that collection of beliefs may centre around a God or gods. For others, it may focus on 'god-substitutes' that they come to trust and depend upon to give them confidence to negotiate life's challenges and adventures. Whatever the personal circumstances, beliefs matter!

Therefore, it is vital that students be given the opportunity to explore beliefs, especially those beliefs that have shaped our history and cultural landscape.

Where Special Religious Education (SRE) is available in Government Schools, it is generally provided by Departmentally approved organizations representing the religion/s of the local area.

In our local area, Protestant Christians have joined together to form an Association to deliver SRE in 6 local schools. We employ a trained and experienced teacher who oversees a team of 20 volunteers.

In the Christian faith, an understanding of the world and life is commonly expressed through the lens of beliefs that focus on one God revealed in the Christian scriptures – the Bible.

His existence is perceived in part through the astonishingly fine-tuned design of myriad constants of the physical universe, our solar system and our planet. He is also revealed through history – notably through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The curriculum for SRE is developed by authorized bodies approved by the Department of Education for use in schools. All volunteers are screened for suitability and are periodically supervised and provided with professional advice and support.

So, what is the value of SRE in the development of emerging citizens?

The presence of 'influencers' from all sorts of backgrounds and worldviews combine with the power of social media technologies to exert very strong pressures on children and young people at critical stages in their development. Whether they be from academia, pop-culture, sport, fashion or cultural/religious backgrounds, the impact of these 'influencers' can be substantial – for good or for bad. Their ideas and techniques represent worldviews that

require an informed mind and a discerning judgement that enables young people to ask probing questions that will help guide them towards mature and independent choices that will serve them well in years ahead.

SRE is offered with the intent of sharpening the skills and insights of those who attend classes and of raising their awareness of issues and content that may not emerge through other curriculums that are offered during their school experience. It has been demonstrated over many years that SRE contributes handsomely to well-being benefits and social cohesion.

It is imperative therefore that this curriculum option continue to be available in Government schools and that the costs associated with offering classes be supported by Government by means of maintaining the DGR status for those who contribute by way of tax-deductible donations.

At the moment, our Association has a database of 150 donors who contribute \$70,000 per year towards our costs. The tax benefit to them is, relatively speaking, very small and a small price for Government to forego in terms of taxes not collected for the very significant benefit to society of young people being equipped to be more discerning and stable citizens.

We would urge the Commission to withdraw from any thought of withdrawing DGR status for donations to charities that offer religious education in Government schools.