

8th February, 2024

I write to express concern about the proposed changes to the DGR status currently available for school building funds and SRE in government schools. Such changes would have a massive impact on the capacity of Christian organisations to provide SRE in schools.

I write as a former government school teacher myself and as one who was educated within that system. So I'm a big fan of public education. I love the fact that it's free and secular, and especially that it can provide a pathway to success in life, even if you come from a disadvantaged background, as we did. It's the great equaliser.

There are some things I know and one is that the Christian faith is central to Western civilization and its values, and the single most transformative development in Western history. This is beyond dispute according to (secular) historians like Dr Tom Holland who states that even as many abandon the Christian faith of their forebears, "they remain recognisably its heirs ... its enduring influence being seen everywhere in the West, in science, secularism, gay rights and even in atheism." Indeed even Richard Dawkins, the world's most famous atheist notes that a person uneducated in the basic teachings of Jesus is seriously uneducated. They will struggle to understand so much, including common concepts and expressions used in the English language. Like being a Good Samaritan, loving your neighbour and turning the other cheek.

A second thing I know comes from working for many years in the area of Child and Adolescent Mental Health with the NSW Ministry of Health. I know that an individual's wellbeing is closely connected to having pro-social friends and family, spiritual meaning and practising altruism. This is broadly acknowledged. For example, Dr Martin Seligman, the world's leading expert on positive psychology, says that "faith in something bigger than oneself is the one necessary condition for a meaningful life." And in his book "Well and Good", the Australian researcher Richard Eckersley concludes that, "despite the cultural propaganda of our times it is clear that filling up an empty self is a poor substitute for the web of meaning created by enduring personal, social and spiritual attachments." Hugh MacKay makes similar comments.

Indeed the NSW Board of Studies syllabus documents recognise the vital role of Spiritual Wellbeing, which begs the obvious question: how does this proposal fit with any of that?

What I'm arguing is that any move which diminishes the availability of scripture in government schools will be detrimental to the wellbeing of students and the breadth of their education, as well as a contradiction of their own syllabus documents.

I'm arguing that our slow drift away from the teachings of Jesus, whilst fashionable, hasn't done us any good as individuals or as a society. So I'm trusting that our granddaughter, who started Kindy this week at her local public school, will be able to hear about the most significant and other-centred person, the kindest and most decent person who ever stepped on to the pages of human history in the Scripture classes there. That can only do our kiddies, and our world, a power of good.

Regards,

Bruce Winter

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