

Children are important and their contentment in every aspect of their life needs to be enhanced. That is why I volunteer as a Special Religious Education teacher at Oakhill Drive Public School. I also volunteer in a Supaclub, a Scripture Union initiative which is held at Oakhill Drive Public School.

SRE teaching volunteers make up the largest volunteer group in Australia and I have seen firsthand the positive effects these lessons have on the wellbeing of the students. I have witnessed how input from SRE and Supaclub teachers has increased the sense of confidence exhibited by the students. I am asking that we as a nation increase the DGR status support for these religious education initiatives in government schools or at least maintain what is currently available.

I personally would like to see volunteers within the faith communities recognised within the DGR system for their tireless work. Without this work the society in our nation would be less cohesive. I have spoken to a number of adults who have had their life effected positively by their Special Religious Education teacher who shared their time, resources, care, concern and priceless truths with the students.

Australia is the most multicultural nation; approximately 60% of Australians identify with a religion. Religion is obviously highly beneficial in our multicultural society. Research shows that one of the best ways to promote social cohesion is through religious education in schools – putting extra pressure on this education system and its teachers is not a quality decision for Australia and will have long-term negative ramifications.

Our communities need hope and this hope is in part supplied by the selfless SRE and Scripture Union volunteers. The community-wide benefits that faith communities bring are immeasurable. The observable positive effects on the lives of our young people substantiate the need for religious instruction. Teachers have commented on how the students who attend SRE lessons or faith lunch time groups display a more cheerful outlook.

The draft report and reforms to the DGR system are a great cause for concern. Australia's children and their wellbeing is crucial for the future success of our country. We need to protect the best interests of the children. There is no other initiative of higher importance. The system should not be expanded to include other groups at the expense of our children. They are our upcoming adults. Please do not remove the DGR status from religious charities like Special Religious Education and Scripture Union NSW, which will significantly impact the health and well-being of current and future students engaged in religious education and lunchtime groups.

As Religious Education teachers in Australia represent our nation's largest weekly group of volunteers, we must encourage them to continue their excellent work. We need to make the

plight of the volunteer as easy as possible as we are a highly effective workforce who believe in what we are doing firmly and work despite the fact we do not receive a pay packet. Please do not remove privileges from faith communities that represent a huge proportion of the people who will help you and are helping you right now. This is not a wise decision.

School building funds should not have their DGR status removed. Faith-based education is Australia's fastest-growing education sector – which tells us that this is what our communities want. So why make it harder for faith-based education to be successful? Faith-based communities save the whole community money, which is a great financial benefit to the government. If faith-based schools have less encouragement for tax deductible giving, then an unsustainable strain would be put on the public school system.

Lastly you are penalising both the fastest-growing sector of education – predominantly privately funded by citizens – and putting undue pressure on the largest weekly group of volunteers in Australia, risking a lower level of social cohesion as a result. We as Australian citizens need to work toward good and sustainable outcomes for our future generations. Our children are relying on us to give our best efforts. We need to think carefully about the consequences of our actions. We must do our utmost to allow support for our children to continue and increase.

We volunteers are sure that our efforts result in immeasurable “community-wide benefit” and would encourage you, even if you do not have a religious belief yourself, to realise that your report if implemented will damage a Multicultural Australia.