



Supplementary Data and Academic Research

RE: Productivity Commission draft report into Philanthropy, with a focus on DGR status recommendations.

In response to our previous submission, as well as our presentation at the Public Hearing at the Productivity Commission on February 12, 2023 (together with the questions and discussion with the Commissioners and panel on that day), we would like to present the following additional data and academic research, as well as international research from the Churchill Fellowship investigation into world's best practice for Religious Education.

Additional recommendation:

We would also like to add a further recommendation, in light of increased focus on student wellbeing, that School Chaplaincy, Pastoral Care and Welfare Officers be considered for the granting of DGR status. The government currently only funds a small portion of the salaries of these workers, and the remainder is funded by faith groups and community organisations. In the interest of student wellbeing, and highlighting those initiatives that represent 'greater community-wide benefit', we consider that these vital roles in both government and non-government schools – for both chaplains and non-religious welfare officers – should be eligible for DGR status for funding of the remainder of the worker's salaries and resourcing student wellbeing initiatives. This recommendation was also supported in the National Catholic Education Commission's submission.

Thank you for your consideration.

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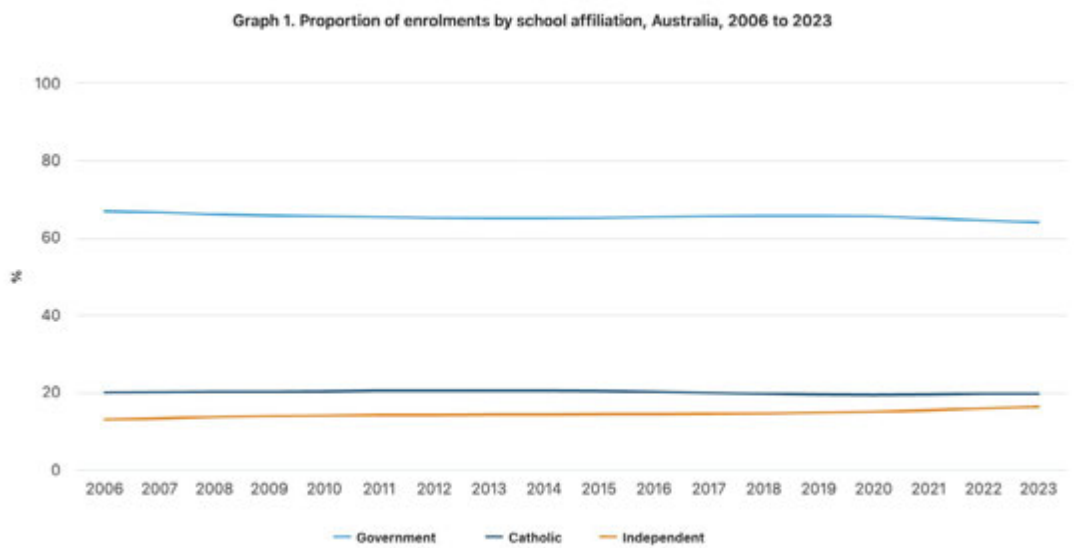
OVERVIEW – AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

ATTENDANCE BY SCHOOL TYPE NATIONALLY

In 2006: Government: 67%, Independent / Catholic: 33%
 In 2023: Government: 64%, Independent / Catholic: 36%

Graph 1. Percentage proportion of enrolments by school affiliation, Australia, 2006 to 2023

	Government	Catholic	Independent
2006	66.9	20	13
2007	66.6	20.1	13.3
2008	66.1	20.2	13.7
2009	65.8	20.2	13.9
2010	65.6	20.3	14
2011	65.4	20.5	14.2
2012	65.2	20.5	14.2
2013	65.1	20.5	14.3
2014	65.1	20.5	14.3
2015	65.2	20.4	14.4
2016	65.4	20.2	14.4
2017	65.6	19.9	14.5
2018	65.7	19.7	14.6
2019	65.7	19.5	14.8
2020	65.6	19.4	15
2021	65.1	19.5	15.4
2022	64.5	19.7	15.9
2023	64	19.7	16.3



(SOURCE: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools 2023)

INDEPENDENT AND FAITH-BASED EDUCATION – A CONSISTENTLY GROWING CHOICE FOR AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES FOR ALMOST TWO DECADES

As a trend for almost two decades now, Australian parents are increasingly choosing non-government schools as the source of education for their children – the vast majority of which (over 96%) is faith-based education.

(SOURCE: ABS, 2023; Independent Schools Australia, 2023)



STRONG COMMUNITY-WIDE BENEFITS OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

(SOURCES: Research conducted by McCrindle, 2022; Christian Schools Australia, 2022; Cardus Education Survey, 2020.)

BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION

- 74% of Independent school parents believe that their child's school is highly intentional in promoting acceptance, respect and inclusivity.
- More than 80% of Independent school parents believe their child's school is extremely/very intentional in developing positive characteristics and values, such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, respect, kindness and compassion.
- 84% of parents from Independent schools value the cultural diversity of their child's school.
- 74% of Independent school parents credit their schools as being extremely or very intentional in developing acceptance, respect and inclusivity among their students.

POSITIVE COMMUNITY IMPACT, INCLUDING REGIONAL, REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

- 85% of Independent schools surveyed provide scholarships or bursaries to students in need, many of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and families facing financial hardship.
- 91% of parents agree their independent school has a positive impact on their community.
- 93% of parents agree that their Independent school has had a positive impact on their family.
- 34% of Independent schools serve communities in regional and remote areas.

The Independent sector has over 40 Independent schools that educate a majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student body. Western Australia has the highest proportion of majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students schools at 37%, followed by the Northern Territory (24%) and Queensland (20%). 63% of these schools are based in remote areas across Australia.



STRONG COMMUNITY-WIDE BENEFITS OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

(SOURCES: Research conducted by McCrindle, 2022; Christian Schools Australia, 2022; Cardus Education Survey, 2020.)

BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PHILANTHROPIC GIVERS AND VOLUNTEERS

- 42% of graduates from Independent schools have volunteered in the last twelve months, compared with 28% from Government Schools.
- 70% of Independent school graduates have donated money or goods to a non-profit, charitable organisation in the past 12 months.

Independent schools actively support important local, national and international causes.

Many organisations receive philanthropic benefit and value from Independent schools directing their volunteering and fundraising efforts to various causes.

The five most supported causes by Independent schools are:

- Community service charities (73%)
- Faith-based programs (66%)
- Overseas charities (60%)
- International aid organisations (60%)
- Local community organisations (56%).

Independent schools (and faith communities) are proven to provide a strong underpinning of the Government's goal to see giving and volunteering double by 2030.

"Volunteering was most common among Christian and Independent school graduates. About half of Christian school graduates and two in five Independent school graduates reported volunteering."

(REPORT: *Australian Schools and the Common Good*, Cardus Education Survey Australia)

"A person who becomes religious is 1.7 times more likely, on average, to be a volunteer than someone who has never been religious, all else being equal"

(*The Study of the Economic Impact of Religion on Society (SEIROS)*, 2017, p. 14: Economic value of donating and volunteering behaviour associated with religiosity).



STRONG COMMUNITY-WIDE BENEFITS OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

(SOURCES: Research conducted by McCrindle, 2022; Christian Schools Australia, 2022; Cardus Education Survey, 2020.)

STRONG FOCUS ON STUDENT WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

- 77% of parents find the mental health and wellbeing resources and sessions offered by Independent schools to be extremely or very valuable.
- 77% of parents stated that that the Mental health and wellbeing resources/sessions provided by their Independent school have been extremely/very valuable in supporting them as a parent.
- 64% of Independent school graduates feel somewhat or very prepared by their school to find purpose, meaning and direction in life.
- 95% of parents are extremely/very/somewhat satisfied with the pastoral care and support programs at their Independent Christian school (*Why Parents Choose Christian Schools, CSA Publication, 2023*).

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

- 37% of Independent schools are 'small schools' with 199 or less students.
- 27% of these schools are either a special assistance school or a special school.
- Special assistance schools provide an alternative option to mainstream schooling to re-engage young people in education.
- Special schools cater for students with disability, mostly students requiring significant levels of support and adjustments to access their education program.



STRONG COMMUNITY-WIDE BENEFITS OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

(SOURCES: Research conducted by McCrindle, 2022; Christian Schools Australia, 2022; Cardus Education Survey, 2020.)

Independent school communities are contributing \$8 billion of funding support for children's education in Australia.

Overall, Independent school parents and communities contribute 52% of the sector's recurrent and capital income. Nationally, this equates to an estimated \$8 billion to the cost of educating young Australians.

QUOTATION FROM THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION'S SUBMISSION:

"School building (or capital works) funds and Scholarship funds enabled and endorsed under the DGR framework are significant sources of philanthropic contributions by parents, families, and others to Catholic school communities. Catholic school parents and communities must raise the costs of capital projects privately, although disadvantaged schools can apply for assistance through government grants. In contrast, government school capital costs are mainly funded by state and territory governments with a small contribution from parents. For example, in making the choice of a Catholic education, families take on almost 90% of the funding required to support school buildings and capital works in Catholic schools. In 2021 alone, this investment was about \$2.0 billion in capital projects, with federal and state governments contributing 4.4% and 6.9% respectively. This is in addition to the nearly \$3.9 billion of after-tax dollars in recurrent funding which parents and families contribute towards their children's education noted above. Through these generous donations, facilitated by the current DGR framework, Catholic school communities contribute to Australia's capital infrastructure through the construction and maintenance of school and community assets."



DEFENCE FOR RETAINING DGR STATUS FOR NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOL BUILDING FUNDS

In light of all of this data, and the long-term and increasing trend for Australian families to move towards Independent schools - and that there is already an estimated total \$8billion of funding of education that occurs through Australian families for the education of the next generation - it seems that out of all the entities that currently hold DGR status, these Independent school building fund entities represent as amongst those with ***the very highest level of 'community-wide benefit'***.

The current Productivity Commission report, however, appears to consider them at the lowest, as evidenced by their draft recommendation to have their DGR status revoked.

Independent school building funds are also an example of Australians currently engaging strongly in philanthropic giving – with community-wide benefit – and are also proven, together with the faith communities, to be leaders in this area, and also leaders in encouraging these behaviours within the next generation. This should continue to be encouraged, especially in light of the government's goal to see this increase to double its current level by 2030.

It is therefore our position that the government should continue to encourage this large-scale generosity of Australians, who are funding more than a third (and growing) of the education of our young people, and that school building funds should retain their DGR status.



MULTIFAITH AND MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA: A SNAPSHOT

(SOURCES: ABS Census, 2016-2022; McCrindle 2020-2022.)

GROWTH IN MIGRANT POPULATIONS

Since 2016, Australia has seen the largest migration population growth in communities from East, South and Southeast Asia: India 217,963; Nepal 67,752; Philippines 61,506; China 40,063; Vietnam 38,642.

MULTICULTURAL DATA – CAPITAL CITIES

- In 2021, 28% of Australians were born overseas (grown from 22% in 2006).
- This is much higher in many of our capital cities: 39% in Sydney, and 36% in both Melbourne and Perth.
- 50% of NSW residents have at least one parents born overseas (Aus: 48%).
- 22.3% of Australians use a non-English language at home, however in the Sydney CBD, this figure is much higher, at 61%.

GROWTH IN AUSTRALIA'S RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

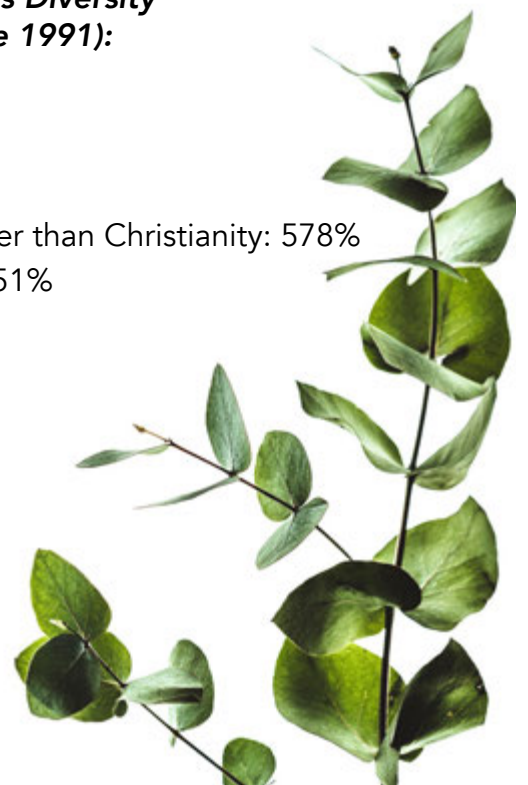
The proportion of Australians affiliated with religions other than Christianity is growing: 1991: 3%, 2011: 7%, 2021: 10%

Australia's Religious affiliation in 2021:

Christianity 44%
Islam 3.2%
Hinduism 2.7%
Buddhism 2.4%
Sikhism 1%
Judaism 0.4%
Other religious groups 0.5%
No religion 39%
Not stated 7%

Growing Religious Diversity (increases since 1991):

Hinduism: 1592%
Islam: 555%
Buddhism: 450%
Total religions other than Christianity: 578%
Total population: 51%



As the most multicultural and multifaith nation on earth – and increasingly so – Australia therefore has an enormous need for social cohesion. This needs to be both built and maintained within our education system.

Religious Education is well-researched and promoted globally as a key part of building social cohesion.

*Some summarised data is presented herein, but a more extensive study is available in the Churchill Fellowship report: **An Investigation into Global Best Practice for Religious Education.***



LINK:

<https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/project/to-explore-best-practice-in-religious-education-worldwide-to-enhance-re-in-a-multicultural-australia/>

THICK vs THIN MULTICULTURALISM

Thin Multiculturalism:

Generalised moral discourse which ignores unique aspects of culture and religion (Walzer, 1994).

Thick Multiculturalism:

Acknowledges the moral, ethical and religious values which are unique to each human group (Greenberg, 2004).

Religious Education: A strong basis for thick multiculturalism

“In simultaneously providing students with a safe place to explore their own religious identity, and a multicultural environment in which to understand others, Cooperative Religious Education in government schools provides a strong basis for thick multiculturalism.” (Schweitzer, 2007)



Religious Education in Government Schools

DATA: STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SRE) IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- 71% of Primary School Students attend SRE
- 30% of Secondary School Students attend SRE
- SRE Classes were held in 87% of all government schools (92% of Primary Schools and 81% of Secondary Schools)

(SOURCE: NSW Government Education Department and ARTD Consultants, 2016)

Key Benefits of Religious Education

In their ongoing research into Religious Education, spanning more than a decade, Professors Gross and Rutland have found the following community-wide benefits associated strongly with the provision of Religious Education in Government schools:

- Educating for multiculturalism
- Values education
- Spirituality and wellbeing
- Identity development
- Countering religious bullying
- Builds social cohesion
- Facilitates open dialogue
- Creates respect for others
- Dismantles stereotypes
- Reduces religious bullying and vilification
- Builds strong multiculturalism
- Better future trade for Australia

(Gross & Rutland, 2021)



KEY LEARNINGS FROM FINLAND: Global Leaders in Religious Education

(SOURCE: Churchill Fellowship Research Project)

A comparison between Australia and Finland (arguably, the world leaders in Religious Education).

In Australia (reflecting the increasing secularisation of society) some academics, some parents and some non-religious groups are critical of religious education in schools. This is in stark contrast to the approach in Finland, a recognised secular state, that relies heavily on Religious Education to promote social cohesion.

The following are Key Learnings from research into Religious Education in Finland.

COMPULSORY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STUDY

Enormous value and recognition placed upon Religious Education in Finland, as it promotes social cohesion and student wellbeing.

STUDENTS ENGAGE WITH CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

In Finland, students are encouraged in their Religious Education classes to openly discuss controversial issues with respect and tolerance. This was illustrated markedly, by students civilly and openly discussing the Ukraine conflict within class, with both Russian and Ukrainian students present, and being only 250km from the Russian border.

UNIVERSITY LEVEL TRAINING & CURRICULUMS

Religious Education teachers and curriculum are well-supported by both government and university level academia. Religious Education is a matriculation subject, and the teachers are considered and regarded just as any other subject (for example Mathematics).

INDIGENOUS BELIEFS STUDIED IN RE CLASSES

As well as within other subjects, the Indigenous Sami culture and beliefs are studied within the school's Religious Education classes.

POSSIBLE HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

The academics I met were very open to partnership with us in Australia, to help develop curriculum and resources to improve our Religious Education in Australia.

SYMPOSIUM FOR APPLIED RESEARCH INSTITUTE

A plan for a symposium to be held in Australia on Religious Education has been drafted by the academics at Helsinki University, with a lens towards establishing an Applied Research Institute, called The Centre of Excellence for Religious Education in Australia.



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- PROMOTING STUDENT WELLBEING via a strong alignment with the NSW Department of Education's 'Wellbeing Framework for Schools'.

The goals of Religious Education in schools align and overlap strongly with the articulated Wellbeing Framework for Schools, published by the NSW Department of Education.

The nine key values articulated by the NSW Department of Education are:

Integrity, Excellence, Respect, Responsibility, Cooperation, Participation, Care, Fairness, and Democracy.

When it comes to Religious Education, Gross & Rutland's research found that interviewees from the six faith groups agree values such as loving kindness, care and compassion, righteousness, and responsibility are foundational to Religious Education teachings. Interviewees also stressed that being a good citizen and understanding that they are part of a broader humanity and community was very important. (Gross & Rutland, 2021)

In 2015, the NSW Department of Education, together with ARTD Consultants, conducted a sector-wide review of Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics in Government schools:

NSW Dept. of Education Framework: ***"Spiritual wellbeing relates to our sense of meaning and purpose. It can include our connection to culture, religion or community and includes the beliefs, values and ethics we hold."***

ARTD Review of SRE and SEE: ***"SRE contributes to students' understanding of the cultural heritage and is an avenue for their spiritual care."***

Students are connected with their cultural, religious or spiritual backgrounds: ***"SRE builds tolerance in schools around diverse communities and promotes multiculturalism through joint celebrations of different faith groups and the recognition of different cultural heritages."***

Students develop strong positive character traits that are reflected in their behaviour, decision-making and relationships: ***"SRE contributes to a well-rounded education and provides students with a values perspective to make informed ethical choices."***

Parents and the broader community support and enable the aspirations of every student: ***"SRE is community building and helps connect schools with the local community."***

(ARTD, 2016)

In their research and review of the community benefits of Religious Education, Gross & Rutland (2021) found five major positive outcomes:

1. VALUES EDUCATION

Children develop their understanding of the world based on the cultural, moral and intellectual foundations of their community. Exploring and questioning these foundations are crucial in developing their own identities and understanding of the formation of others' identities.

2. IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Growing an awareness and understanding of one's own beliefs are critical in forming identity. Religious education plays a critical role in helping students form their own identity.

3. SPIRITUALITY AND WELLBEING

The holistic needs of children extend beyond the physical and intellectual components of traditional schooling. An opportunity to explore one's own spirituality alongside others contributes to the overall wellbeing of students.

4. EDUCATING FOR MULTICULTURALISM

Through students developing a deep understanding of their own background and religious traditions, they can gain a better understanding of other religions which strengthens multiculturalism in schools.

5. COUNTERING RELIGIOUS BULLYING

Religious Education provides a safe place for children to learn about and explore their own religious identity, which legitimises their voice and choice in religion and faith, while fostering a sense of belonging within their school environment. This is all while observing other students do the same, therefore reinforcing social cohesion of the school and Australian society.



RESEARCH SURVEY: Australians' value of religious education

Australians continue to see value in well-rounded religious education in schools. McCrindle (2022) found that 74% of Australians see this value, agreeing that children should be allowed to learn about a range of religions/beliefs while at school.

Australians who have attended religious education at school believe this education has helped them to understand others' beliefs more, showing religious education is still relevant and important to Australians.

Responses from participants include:

- Helped me to accept others' beliefs if they are different to my own (31%)
- Informed the faith/religion I have today (30%)
- Helped me understand others' beliefs more (29%)
- Equipped me to have discussions about faith with others (28%)
- Helped me understand my own identity (23%)

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: Countering Religious Fundamentalism and Extremism

If Religious Education is not provided through a regulated approach in schools, the potential risk arises for increased religious fundamentalism or extremism, as religion becomes increasingly something that is excluded from the public eye. Religious Education is provided in the main by the largest planned group of weekly volunteers – with support, monitoring, curriculum, and resources from the DGR-funded Religious Education providers. Removing the DGR status will severely reduce the ability to provide this monitoring and resource for this community of volunteers, and the young people they serve as educators. This is a move in the wrong direction, for building an increased level of social cohesion in multicultural Australia.



RELIGIOUS BULLYING & VILIFICATION

Gross & Rutland (2021) found that young people report having felt teased or made fun of at school because of their religion or how they practice their faith.

McCrinkle, 2022 found the following:

- 75% of Australians consider prejudice against others to be negatively impacting Australian society today.
- 74% of Australians believe racism is negatively impacting Australian society today.
- 24% of Australians have experienced discrimination because of their religion or religious views.

McCrinkle, 2022 also found that the problem is becoming worse, and is a much larger threat to our younger generations:

Younger residents are more likely to face religious discrimination (Gen Z 50%, Gen Y 47%, compared to Baby Boomers 34% and Builders 38%), whilst minority religions are also almost twice as likely to experience discrimination.

RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS INTO GENOCIDE – LEARNINGS FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION IN AUSTRALIA

In discussions with Dr Navras Aafreedi in India, and other colleagues internationally, it was intriguing to hear their perspective on how best to promote social cohesion in extreme situations. Education was viewed as of paramount importance – and when it comes to promoting social cohesion, these experts recommend building curriculum around an understanding of other's religion, culture, customs, and festivals, as well as a strong understanding of someone's own beliefs and worldviews. When students gain a greater understanding of others', together with an opportunity to engage with their own beliefs and worldviews, they are less likely to engage with discriminatory thoughts and behaviours. Instead, the school – and the wider community – will enjoy the benefits of a more cohesive society.



INCREASED FOCUS ON SPIRITUALITY AND MEANING OF LIFE FROM YOUNG PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY POST COVID-19:

McCrindle (2022) revealed the following through their research into NSW residents:

Which of the following inform your morals and values which determine how you live your life?

- How I was raised (65%)
- My education (42%)
- Australian laws (41%)
- My own faith, spirituality, or religion (40%)
- My culture (36%)

Which of the following have you spent MORE time on, over the last two years?

- Thought about the meaning of life (51%)
- Thought about my own mortality (52%)
- Thought about God or higher beings (35%)
- Had spiritual conversations (29%)
- Prayer (27%)
- Reading religious texts (19%)

Interestingly, an increase in these activities is much more pronounced in younger generations:

	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X	Baby Boomers	Builders
Prayer	32%	29%	27%	22%	31%
Reading Religious Texts	27%	24%	17%	12%	12%
Thought about God or higher beings	44%	35%	36%	28%	33%



Faith and spirituality creates meaning for two in three NSW residents

Answers such as:

“It gives me hope, it gives me a moral compass to live by, it provides a sense of purpose, it helps inform my decisions, it informs my identity, it provides a community.”

- 83% of people agree that faith groups provide a place for people to turn to during times of crisis.
- 80% of people agree that faith groups provide a sense of community.
- 82% of people agree that faith groups provide social support.
- 81% of people agree that faith groups provide wellbeing support.

At a time when youth mental health is a major issue and focus, it is important that young people continue to learn about, and have easy access to, all avenues of support during times of difficulty:

- Younger generations are most open to turning to a faith community during times of crisis (Gen Z 50%, Gen Y 47%, compared to Baby Boomers 34%, Builders 38%).
- Younger NSW residents are more likely to face religious discrimination (Gen Z 50%, Gen Y 47%, Baby Boomers 34% and Builders 38%).
- Minority religions are also almost twice as likely to experience religious discrimination.



SUMMARY

Religious Education in Government Schools provides the following community-wide benefits:

1. Educating for, and building strong, thick multiculturalism
2. Values education
3. Spirituality and wellbeing
4. Identity development
5. Countering religious bullying
6. Builds social cohesion
7. Facilitates open dialogue
8. Creates respect for others
9. Dismantles stereotypes
10. Reduces religious bullying and vilification
11. Better future trade for Australia

Religious education provides our largest group of volunteers:

- Religious Education in Government Schools represents the largest planned weekly group of volunteers in Australia: 11,500 volunteers.
- These volunteers rely on the generosity of community donations into DGR funds, for the provision of coordination, curriculum, monitoring and accreditation – all focussed on resourcing these volunteers to deliver the strong community-wide benefits from Religious Education in government schools, outlined above.

Effects of DGR status removal for Religious Education

- By removing DGR status, and thereby reducing their support, not only will we see a reduction in the community-wide benefits supplied, but we will also be heading in the wrong direction when it comes to achieving the Government's goal of doubling giving (financial and volunteering) by 2030.
- Instead, it is our position and advice that we seek how the government can further support this leading group of volunteers, and also how the government can further support the strong cultivation of social cohesion and student wellbeing that religious education provides.
- We also recommend continuing to look at global best practice when it comes to Religious Education and pursue partnerships for research and curriculum development with institutions such as Helsinki University in Finland. Academics there have expressed a desire to work with us in Australia, moving forward.

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