

Personal submission to the Productivity Commission on Philanthropy

I appreciate the Productivity Commission's aim to help increase charitable giving, both in time voluntarily given and money gifted, in order to benefit our communities.

Alongside countless others, I have voluntarily served the homeless on our city streets through religious charities and as a volunteer scripture teacher in public schools wherein students have been able to ask their big questions about the purpose of life and making good choices to help themselves and others.

I trust that you will understand why I am concerned with our Productivity Commission's assumption about those who practice a religion and the benefit to the communities they help.

If you find yourselves homeless, the Sisters of Charity are there amongst the homeless to offer you food, as are the thousands of Saint Vincent De Paul volunteers across our country and world with so many others of goodwill. Religious Sisters also gave us Saint Vincent's Hospital, for instance, among many other religious hospitals, and then there are religious schools and universities that were the first in many countries, including our own, founded with the express aim of aiding people out of poverty via healthcare and education in following Jesus' lived example of healing and teaching others to 'Love one another as I have loved you'.

Governments can't legislate for the love that inspires such charity but you can support this strongest of motivations for good.

And at a time when we have documented evidence that shines a bright light on the wellbeing needs of students, I recommend to you the evidence that Special Religious Education supports parental choice and actions our Education Ministers' signing of the [2019 Mparntwe-Alice Springs Federal Education Declaration](#), because it is this Federal Declaration that commits to the importance of students' wellbeing, including **spiritual** wellbeing, to become informed, confident and creative members of our multicultural, multifaith society:

Australian Governments commit to working in collaboration with the education community to support all young Australians to become:

Confident and creative individuals who...

- have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, cultural, **spiritual** and physical wellbeing

... Australian Governments will work with the education community to:

- ensure that education promotes and contributes to a socially cohesive society that values, respects and appreciates different points of view and cultural, social, linguistic and **religious diversity**
- support all young Australians to become confident and creative individuals who a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, cultural, **spiritual** and physical wellbeing

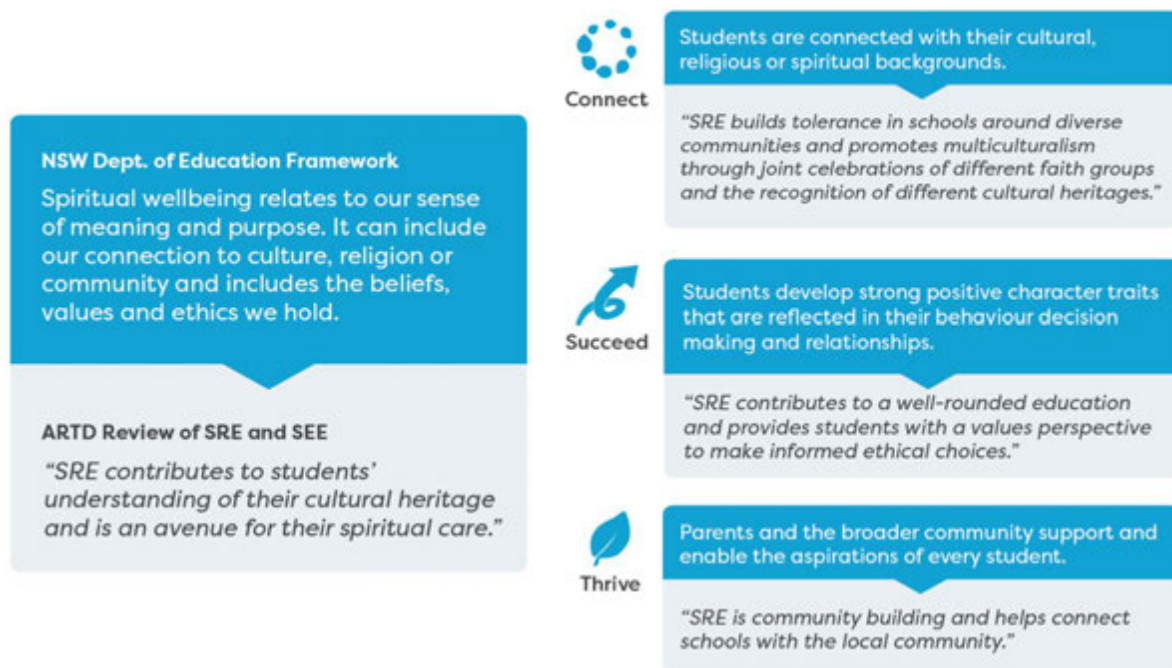
I urge you to honour our standing Federal Education Declaration commitment to our students.

As Commission members for our Australian Governments, I recommend that you do not undermine the goals of our Federal Education Declaration through your current recommendations that, if accepted by our government, affect the charitable funding of SRE.

Your recommendations ought to support SRE precisely because it (a) actions the Federal Education Declaration, (b) supports tens of thousands of families who freely choose SRE and give to SRE and (c) supports over 11,000 SRE volunteers from our communities who also give to SRE and are trained at no cost to deliver significant benefits to our communities, as outlined below.

We have an independent government review that resulted in the ARTD reviewers' evidencing how SRE directly supports the NSW Student Wellbeing Framework:

Benefits of Providing SRE



Furthermore, in their *Study of SRE and its Value to Contemporary Society*, Professor Zehavit Gross and Professor Emerita Suzanne D. Rutland OAM identify four key benefits of Special Religious Education to students, families and society; namely, SRE:

- provides a safe place for students to explore deeper questions of identity;
- provides important psychological benefits to students' mental health and wellbeing;
- strengthens the multicultural fabric of Australian schools;
- provides an effective values education that empowers student decision-making, fosters student action and assigns real student responsibility.

I recommend that our government appreciates the fact that there are well over 11,000 volunteer SRE teachers from our communities of many different faiths who serve together to make up the largest weekly volunteer labour force in Australia that enables SRE to happen.

SRE is a charitably provided community service that, importantly, upholds parental choice in our public schools to support their children to live lives of faith, hope, love and service.

Parental choice of SRE ought to be valued and recognised within the deductible gift recipient (DGR) system along with the community-wide benefits that faith communities bring.

Given both the Federal Education Declaration and the NSW Education Student Wellbeing Framework recognises the importance of students' spiritual well-being and sense of belonging within our multicultural, multifaith communities; and given SRE directly supports both the Federal Education Declaration and NSW Education Student Wellbeing Framework, deductible gift recipient status should be maintained for SRE in government schools in view of the community-wide benefits.

With thanks for your consideration of these points,

Douglas Mawhinney