



# Should Christian schools be free to employ Christian staff?

This sounds like a stupid question. And it is. We ask those ALP and Green politicians proposing to take away ‘exemptions’ that allow Christian schools to employ Christian staff, whether they should be allowed the freedom to choose their own staff exempt from ‘political belief’. Can you imagine a Greens politician not being allowed to ask a prospective employee about climate change? Politicians, quite rightly, have an exemption.

**Frequently their argument portrays Christian schools as exclusive bastions of separatist, bigoted, and discriminatory practice.**

We use the same ‘most reasonable’ argument for Christian schools. Limiting or taking away this present exemption from Christian schools is political correctness within the anti-discrimination debate gone mad.

The very reason that Christian schools were set up in the first place was to provide Christian parents with the

choice of sending their children to a school where key understandings about life and core values were in keeping with that of the home. Such a Christian education obviously needs to be led by Christian staff.

Until recent times, within our secular society, Christian schools have been free to employ Christian staff because Equal Opportunity (EO) legislation (also called Anti-Discrimination law) has included exemptions for religious bodies to employ staff on the basis of their faith and the out-workings of that faith.

In recent years these exemptions have been challenged by aggressive secular interest groups who have argued that Christians shouldn’t be permitted to retain such freedoms. Frequently their argument portrays Christian schools as exclusive bastions of separatist, bigoted, and discriminatory practice. Whilst Christian schools are quite happy to comply with the most reasonable ‘protections’ found within equal opportunity laws (race, impairment, age, physical features, political belief, pregnancy, breastfeeding, etc.) we do not agree that the exemption around religious belief should be taken away.

This issue has cropped up in various forms around different states depending on the political forces at play. The past ALP/Greens government in Tasmania pushed this agenda. In the present Victorian election campaign the ALP proposes to change the EO Act such that Christian schools would need to prove why faith was needed for any employee to hold a position.

Within our holistic (the whole child, the whole school community, the whole of learning for all of life) approach we don’t think it would be that hard to show why faith is vital. However that would not be so easy when the definition of religion sees faith as irrelevant for the school secretary or the maths teacher.

It’s no wonder that Victorian Christian school parents are making brisk contact with their ALP candidates and saying “let us retain our present and most reasonable freedoms to be authentic Christian schools”.

*Martin Hanscamp  
Executive Officer  
Australian  
Association of  
Christian Schools*

