

To John Carter
Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
Department of the Senate
PO BOX 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

I am writing to express my concern over some of the Sections contained in the Schools' Assistance Bill 2008.

I am the Principal of Mount Carmel Christian School, a small, low-fee Christian School near Wodonga, in Victoria.

Mount Carmel Christian School seeks to offer to parents a curriculum that reflects Biblical beliefs and values and offers students the opportunity to learn in an educational environment that caters for individual needs.

The parents who choose Mount Carmel Christian School to educate their children come from a broad section of the community. Mount Carmel Christian School has low-income and single parent working class families as well as Doctors, Lawyers and Chemical Engineers. While most parents have connection with the Christian Faith, a number of parents do not have any particular religious belief and choose the school for its ethos and educational offering.

The common connection for all of these families is to have their children engaged in a learning program that secures good outcomes for their child.

I have particular concerns regarding section 22 of the Bill which ties the compulsory delivery of the National Curriculum to receiving funding from the Federal Government. If the delivery of the National Curriculum and the funding of the non-government sector of education are tied together in a compulsory manner then there will be serious implications flowing from the Bill for non-government schools and in particular, Mount Carmel Christian School.

I agree that the Australian Government should be setting goals and directions in education to ensure that the citizens of Australia receive a quality education. I also understand that there should be agreed minimum standards of education that schools should be aiming to achieve. However, a high-level of regulation will impinge on parental freedoms and responsibilities that have long been held as an essential part of Australian democracy.

A National Curriculum will have an important role in guiding standards of education throughout Australia but it should not prevent school's developing special curriculums that have particular approaches to learning or reflect the religious and cultural needs of a community.

Given the seriousness of the content of the Schools Assistance Bill I now have many questions that concern me, such as:

Will the children in my school be able to continue the educational program that their parents have chosen for them in their best interest?

What happens if a child's educational, religious and cultural needs are different from other students?

How will each family's educational needs and their religious and cultural values be met if they lose their right to choose what they know is best for them?

Why is it necessary to threaten parents' right to choose what is best for their children?

I hope that the Senate will give consideration to these concerns and work to removing or amending the offending sections of the the Schools Assistance Bill 2008.

Yours Sincerely,

Larry Gunn
Principal

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