



Albany Free Reformed Church Education Association (Inc.)

operating the

JOHN CALVIN SCHOOL ALBANY

9 Beaufort Road, Albany WA 6330

Phone: (08) 9841 3840

15 December 2021

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
Via My Parliament online submission system

Dear Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee,

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed *Religious Discrimination Bill 2021*. We support the Bill as a whole as a step in the right direction for preventing religious discrimination and promoting religious freedom. In particular, as a faith based school association operating a Christian school with strong links to our local churches, we value how the Bill allows religious bodies to generally act in accordance with their faith (Section 7).

Our history

In 1958, members of the Free Reformed Church in Albany established the Albany Free Reformed Church Education Association (Inc.). Four years later, in May of 1962, they opened the John Calvin School, Albany. For nearly sixty years, the members of the Free Reformed Churches in Albany have continued to send their children to this school. All staff and students at the school are members of one of our local Free Reformed Churches. The school currently has about 210 students from kindergarten to year 10. Instruction at the John Calvin School follows the WA Curriculum and the school was recently re-registered for a maximum five-year period till 31 December 2025. The school has consistently performed well in NAPLAN, although our focus is much broader than academics, including the spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing of each child.

Our school aims to provide Christian education based on the Bible to help optimally equip students for their service to God and their neighbour. Our school is unashamedly Christian in all aspects. This is well known to all parents, students and staff. It is clearly articulated in our school documentation. All staff, including non-teaching staff, are expected to live consistent with the Christian ethos of the school. Each school day starts and ends with prayer. The Bible is read every day and applied to all subjects and every aspect of school life. Outside the front entrance of the school is a sign "A SCHOOL WITH THE BIBLE".

The school community feels like a close-knit family, where support is given to anyone experiencing hardships.

Section 7

We support that “religious bodies may generally act in accordance with their faith etc.” For example, we consider it necessary for our school to be able to make staffing and enrolment decisions that are consistent with maintaining its Christian ethos. If an individual staff member or student undermines the Christian ethos of the school, then it is reasonable and desirable that there be an amicable parting of ways. Removing this ability will do harm to our parents who strongly desire the thoroughly Christian education that our school offers.

This is consistent with Article 18.4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:

Article 18.4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

If our school is no longer able to operate in a fully Christian manner, our parents do not have a similar alternative school to send their children. The essential purpose of our school and its future would be at risk. In contrast, an individual staff member or student who no longer shares the ethos of our school, would typically have much greater opportunity to find another school to be involved with.

It is our prayer that you receive wisdom and strength to complete your inquiry and provide the Parliament with a good report.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Russell ‘t Hart (Chairman)

Mr Andrew van Burgel (Secretary)