

SUBMISSION TO THE RUDDOCK REVIEW ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

BY

QUEENSLAND PARENTS FOR SECULAR STATE SCHOOLS

Permission is willingly granted for this submission to be made public

Queensland Parents for Secular State Schools (QPSSS) is a parent-run movement which would like to see State schools become truly secular as befits a multi-cultural, multi-faith country such as Australia. We submit that a secular education is one in which education about multiple religions and non-religious world views may be provided, but public schools are not used as a platform for doctrinal faith instruction in any religion and the religious formation of children is left to parents in their private capacity. This approach in no way prevents or prohibits individual expression of religion in this space, within appropriate school rules in relation to safety and hygiene, but creates an environment in which the state takes a position that neither advantages nor disadvantages religion or non-religion. We suggest this is the optimal way to ensure freedom of religion and freedom from religion, the latter being equally as important to those who adhere to a particular faith as those who adhere to none, a principle which has added importance in public schools in a country as religiously and culturally diverse as Australia.

Religious Instruction in Queensland State Schools

Queensland Parents for Secular State Schools is recognised by the Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) as a stakeholder in the issue of religious instruction (RI) in school hours.

We contest that the provision of doctrinal faith instruction, necessitating the religious segregation of students, in a public school populated by children of a multitude of faith backgrounds and a high number of those with no faith background is antithetical to inclusive education and constitutes privileging of religion.

Churches and other religious organisations already enjoy, in the following ways, generous public subsidisation of their desire to propagate their particular teachings.

- 1) Tax exemptions under the “advancing religion” charity status, which effectively grant subsidies to religious bodies to purchase land, construct and maintain purpose-built facilities and hire “experts” with the aim of disseminating their doctrine in various houses of worship.
- 2) Publicly funded faith-based schools in which to disseminate doctrinal teachings.

It is worth noting that religious organisations also enjoy exemptions from anti-discrimination laws when hiring staff for these faith-based schools, a puzzling dispensation given that there is no religious requirement to engage in the provision of education based on the Australian curriculum; it is an activity in which religious groups engage at their own free will and, as such, is not a manifestation of a required tenet of their faith, meaning requiring compliance with civil anti-discrimination laws would not constitute a breach of religious freedom.

Despite this, religious organisations already enjoy ‘two bites at the public purse cherry’, in the forms stated above, in order to promote their favoured ideology, at a cost of billions of dollars to society each year.

Despite such state largesse in footing a large portion of the bill to disseminate religious belief, religious organisations, particularly of the conservative Christian variety, assert that it is a “right” and an element of their “religious freedom” to be granted access to a *third* state-sponsored platform from which to evangelise their faith – public schools.

QPSS recently undertook an exercise to estimate the annual cost to Queensland tax-payers of this third form of state sponsorship of religion based on the following assumptions. Please bear in mind this is the 108th year RI has been in Queensland state schools.

1. Queensland primary schools - 1008 (incl primary cohort of P-10 and P-12 schools)
2. RI provided in 80% of primary schools
3. Band 3 teacher supervising RI lessons (jnr teacher range) @ \$42.34/hr
4. Two (2) RI classes provided per yr level per participating primary school
5. RI lessons are 30 minutes
6. RI conducted for 38 wks/yr
7. One RI option per school

The figure we arrived at was \$7,780,737.12.

Furthermore, we consider this number extremely conservative given that the following could have been incorporated into calculations:

1. The cost of teachers supervising non-RI children, teachers who are prevented from teaching curriculum content (that is, not doing what they are paid to do because RI is on)
2. 1 hr/wk of RI lessons as permitted by legislation, instead of 30 minutes
3. The cost of considerable hours in administrative work by principals, etc. in timetabling, checking parents’ intentions, inducting RI volunteers, recording permissions online, etc.
4. Lessons for multiple religions being on offer in at least some schools
5. Superannuation of 9.5% on top of the hourly rate
6. A higher hourly rate for teacher’s salary
7. The cost of facility use, equipment use and electricity.
8. High school RI lessons

It remains unclear what scripture could be cited to support the self-perceived “right” to public funds – not once, not twice, but thrice – to further religious doctrine. In fact, in the case of Christianity, at least, it would seem that the very opposite is taught:

“Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”
(Mark 12:17).

Even if some justification can be found for subsidising from the public purse the spread of any and all religious ideologies, there is surely none for that to be virtually limitless in form and amount, particularly when to do so comes at a cost to others, an aspect on which we elaborate further below.

In addition to the financial burden borne by an unsuspecting public, the cost to all children in state schools where RI is provided in terms of lost learning time is incalculable, considering that up to 8 days/year may be co-opted, along with staff and facilities, to deliver what is already freely available in churches and other various houses of worship and, should parents choose and have the financial capacity, at varying cost in one of the many faith-based schools also funded by the taxes of all.

In another assertion of “religious freedom”, religious organisations have resisted any plea put to them to, at the very least, not block the efforts of QPSSS to have removed the policy prohibition on new curriculum learning by students not participating in RI during RI time. That is, it would appear religious groups do not consider it unreasonable, or an infringement of rights, that students who do not participate in RI be made to suspend their learning while they exercise their own purported “religious freedom”.

Religious instruction is an optional, non-curricular offering in state schools that takes place during regular class hours, yet it is afforded special treatment via a policy which prevents children who do not participate in RI lessons from learning any new work during that time.

Contrast this with instrumental music, which, like RI, is an optional, non-curricular offering in state schools that also takes place during regular class hours; in this case, however, non-participating children continue with their curriculum learning while participating children receive instruction for an instrument of their choice.

The privilege to religion is clear, and inexplicable given religious expression through instruction does not require non-participants to ‘kill time’ while it happens. The fair and reasonable course of action here is for anyone involved in any optional, non-curricular activity that occurs during class hours to be expected to catch up on what they missed while non-participants continue undisturbed with their learning, having made the valid choice not to participate in a non-compulsory activity. Instead, we see the compulsory cessation of learning for the optional activity, but only in the case of religious faith instruction. To rephrase, although receiving an education is compulsory under the law and faith instruction in state schools is optional, the optional activity of RI is privileged over the compulsory activity of receiving an education.

Teachers frequently cite overcrowding of the curriculum as an issue, and it has been flagged as a matter to be addressed in the 2014 review of the Australian Curriculum. (https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/review_of_the_national_curriculum_final_report.pdf) To be forced to lose time to an optional, non-curricular activity exacerbates this, as does the time lost to regaining control of children who may be less manageable due to the inexperience in class management of RI volunteers. All this adds up, yet religious groups and doctrinal faith instruction continue to receive preferential treatment to the detriment of others, and the groups that provide RI continue to consider doing so a “right” and part of their “religious freedom”.

We reiterate: manifestation of religious freedom is not dependent of financial support, facilitation and/or patronage by government at any level, particularly in the instances we have illustrated in

which the financial and educational cost to all is extremely high, and could be considered to constitute discrimination against non-participants, who are comprised not only of those of no faith but also those of a variety of faiths for which RI is not provided.

As such, we would argue that allowing religious groups to access public schools and use state facilities, staff and time to provide faith instruction is not only *not* a religious freedom, it actually constitutes a privileging of religion, particularly given the availability of two other avenues of proselytising doctrine.

However, this does not represent the full extent of the desire for privilege under the guise of religious freedom by some religious groups.

Conservative Christian groups consider it a right and part of their religious freedom to *not only* access state schools as a platform for preaching, but *also* to have volunteer instructors not be prohibited from encouraging students in their lessons to evangelise, or otherwise share the lesson content, with the students whose parents have declined the offer of having their child instructed in faith lessons at their state school.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

It goes without saying that QPSSS is in full agreement with this, as it is applicable to all people regardless of faith or lack thereof.

However, Article 29 (2) provides an important caveat, as follows:

“ In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, *everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others* and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.”

As such, the above claim by some religious groups that the children of parents who have declined the offer of RI in the state school setting may still be seen as potential recipients of lesson content by indirect means is not only highly disrespectful, it is a breach of the human rights of those children and parents to be free of proselytising and evangelising of a religion other than their own, and nowhere more so than in the highly diverse state school environment.

Please note, we refer to the actions of adult volunteers who, by urging students in their RI lessons to share lesson content with their non-participating peers, seek to use children as a conduit to relay religious doctrine to those students otherwise placed out of their reach, thereby attempting to circumvent the authority of the parents of non-participating students; we do *not* suggest restrictions should be placed students who, *of their own accord and without prompting from an RI volunteer or other adult in the school setting*, choose to discuss that content with their peers.

There are already some restrictions and cautions directed towards RI providers and their volunteers. RI policy stipulates that RI lesson materials are either removed from the school grounds or otherwise stored in a locked cupboard, etc.; that non-participating students are supervised in a separate location (out of earshot), and; that RI co-ordinators must ensure that they do not provide RI lessons to children who do not have parental permission to participate. It is evident this policy is designed to respect and maintain the right of the children whose parents have declined the offer of RI. It flies in the face of this for Christian groups to assert as a breach of the “freedom of religion” of adult volunteers, who have, ostensibly, accepted the other limitations about who they must and must not share RI lesson with and how materials are to be managed, any attempt to have them refrain from actively encourage RI students to evangelise no-RI students as a ‘work-around’. Nevertheless, this is exactly what was claimed, and to good effect: RI volunteers have been given a green light by the Queensland Department of Education to encourage RI students to share lesson content with their non-participating peers. (Please refer to Appendix 1 for further details of this).

Whether encouraging children to share what they have learned about a particular faith with others is a genuine religious freedom or not, curiously, we can refer to the Queensland Weapons Act (1990) for another example of legal restraint placed on religious expression in the case of schools.

<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/inforce/current/act-1990-071>

51 Possession of a knife in a public place or a school

(1) A person must not physically possess a knife in a public place or a school, unless the person has a reasonable excuse.

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(4) Also, it is a reasonable excuse for subsection (1), to the extent the subsection relates to a public place, to physically possess a knife for genuine religious purposes.

A Sikh may possess, in a public place, a knife known as a *kirpan* to comply with the person’s religious faith.

(5) However, it is not a reasonable excuse to physically possess a knife in a school for genuine religious purposes. [our emphasis]

There was an incident surrounding this issue in a Queensland school last year.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/ceremonial-sword-should-not-have-been-allowed-on-school-grounds/news-story/ad6f630db7294a4a60b3f3622bc71a5b>

Schools are already placed in a category separate from “a public place” and warranting special consideration, including restraint from manifestations of religious faith that may be accepted, or at least given dispensation, in public places.

Given that being granted access to public school children during school hours is not an essential manifestation of religious freedom in the first place, and given that other manifestations of religious belief are legally curtailed, as in the abovementioned case of the *kirpan*, and that there are already policy settings in place that prevent unrestricted proselytisation of doctrine, claims of “religious freedom” that extend to attempts to indirectly access children who do not participate in RI lessons through the priming of students who receive such faith instruction to share content are manifest nonsense.

We recently raised this issue with Ms Megan Mitchell, Children’s Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. Her response to us is below:

“I have discussed this issue with the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission. As you may be aware, freedom of religion is currently under review with the appointment by the Prime Minister of an Expert Panel, of which the President is a member. As part of its Terms of Reference, the Expert Panel will “consider the intersections between the enjoyment of the freedom of religion and other human rights” and “consult as widely as it considers necessary”.

“The President and I agree that the issue you have raised is germane to the Religious Freedom Review [our emphasis]. The Expert Panel is accepting initial submissions on matters raised in its Terms of Reference until 14 February 2018. Given this, I encourage you to submit the issue raised in your letter for the consideration on the panel of inquiry. Further information on the Religious Freedom Review, including the full Terms of Reference and submission details, is available at: <https://pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/religious-freedom-review>.

As such, we anticipate this matter will be given the due attention and consideration it warrants as acknowledged by the Children’s Commissioner and the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission.

RI exists in the public schools of Queensland and other states only because of legislation passed in state government assemblies over a century ago. Notably, the word “secular” was specifically removed from the Queensland Education Act to accommodate its provision, a stark acknowledgement that its presence in the public education system contravenes the secular concept of not advantaging religion over non-religion (and vice-versa).

In 2006, the then Beattie government, with an eye to the potential application of Queensland anti-discrimination laws, sought to amend the Education Act to allow for non-religious world views to also be presented during the time allocated to religious instruction.

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religionreport/religion-in-schools/3334156>

This move was met with fierce, and at times hysterical, resistance predominantly from Christian groups and politicians intent upon preserving their unique privilege, with a resultant abandoning of the attempt to treat all beliefs, religious or otherwise, equally. Apparently it is one thing for religion to assert “freedom of belief” and access to public schools to preach, but unacceptable for non-religious groups to assert the same “freedom of belief”; human rights are only for some, but not for others, it seems.

Never was there a clearer illustration of the privilege that religion claims for itself and itself alone than RI in public schools.

National School Chaplaincy Program

The federally funded National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) is a program which purports to provide welfare support for all students in public schools. Despite constant reassurances that the purpose of the program has nothing to do with the furthering of religious belief, or with religion per se at all, it is a stipulated condition of public funding that only people who profess a faith are eligible for the role; experience and qualifications are subordinate to this non-negotiable requirement. In addition to the unequivocally discriminatory employment practices imposed by this program, it is difficult to accept that the welfare of state school students is its first priority given that a better qualified and experience non-religious applicant would automatically be passed over for a practising theist of less experience and poorer qualifications.

Over the years that the program has been in Queensland state schools, it has become obvious that that any programs/events/speakers of a religious nature that are brought into state schools by school chaplains tend to be those with a background and/or connection to their own particular faith leanings, almost invariably Christianity given the over 95% of chaplains in that state are placed in schools by Scripture Union Queensland. Scripture Union Australia states on its home page, "Scripture Union is a movement of Christians which works with churches to make God's Good News known to children, young people and families, and to encourage people of all ages to meet God daily through bible reading and prayer. We do this so people will come to faith, grow in Christian maturity and become committed church members and servants to a world in need."

<http://scriptureunion.org.au/>

Although those involved in chaplaincy in Queensland have learned to be more circumspect in the public comments as to the goal of the program in recent years, the mission statement of the national body was echoed clearly by then CEO of Scripture Union Queensland, and now Queensland Opposition Leader, Tim Mander, in an article in *Christian Today*:

"Chaplains are making sensational inroads in bringing young people, their families, and entire communities, into a closer relationship with God," he [Tim Mander] said."

<http://christiantoday.com.au/news/cows-chaplains-children-launch-australias-most-ambitious-charity-drove.html>

The first thing to note is that religious program/events/speakers are brought into public schools under a program that is supposedly nothing to do with religion. The second thing to note is that such programs tend to be only of one specific religion, which strongly calls into question the much-recited assertion that chaplains cater to the needs of all in the school community, regardless of a student's religious affiliation. While they claim is made that all students are welcome at such events, which is undoubtedly true, it is also evident that, for some students, the religious nature of these events/programs will prevent them from taking part and availing themselves of a service ostensibly catering to all students.

Christian chaplains have also been known to say Christian prayers on all school assemblies and at special school functions, such as graduation dinners. Given that Department of Education data

shows that only a little over 30% of all students in Queensland state schools have been identified as affiliated in some way with a Christian denomination, this would seem to constitute a breach of the religious freedom of those students who are not Christian.

<https://det.qld.gov.au/aboutus/rti/DisclosureLogs/340-5-4251.pdf>

No argument can be made that the religious freedom of people of faith cannot be established without government funding to provide religious-only chaplains in schools, but there are indications that doing so can impinge on the religious freedoms of others.

If the federal government is actually interested in supporting *all* students and the religious freedom of all students in state schools, it will amend the program to be a secular one by opening up eligibility to anyone suitably qualified, whether religious or not, and by handing the employment and management of such staff to non-religious organisations who will not discriminate in employment on the basis of faith and will not be tempted to see the program as an opportunity to bring students to their faith or otherwise impose their faith practice on them.

This is not to say that QPSSS insists on only non-religious staff in the role of providing welfare support for students in state schools; that is not a secular approach. Rather, qualifications and experience should hold sway, regardless of whether an applicant is a person of faith or not. If the majority of support workers in state schools under a federally funded secular welfare program end up being people of faith hired on the basis of their abilities, so be it.

What we do say is that efforts to privilege religion should not come at the cost of students and the public purse.

As such, we would urge the committee, in the interests of balancing the religious freedom of students in the state school environment, to recommend that, should federal funding continue to be made available for student welfare workers in state schools, the religious requirement be removed, not only in the interests of removing an unnecessary discriminatory employment process, but also to ensure the best people for the job is hired for the sake of students.

If the welfare of state school students is the main priority of the NSCP, and if the federal government is genuinely interested in investigating religious freedom, this program is one that should be rethought.

Conclusion

Significant overreach in the form of religious privilege, often under the guise of erroneous claims to “religious freedom” has particularly evident in the state education environment, and it is clear that action must be taken to remove the religious privileges we have outlined in this submission, an objective and balanced assessment of rights and freedoms be made, and steps taken to ensure that *all* people, regardless of their personal beliefs or lack thereof, are afforded equal rights and freedoms in relation to religion and belief under the civil law of Australia and its states. This may not be an easy balance to strike, but it is certainly one worth striving for.

Appendix 1

On July 27, 2017, an article appeared in the national broadsheet, The Australian, claiming that “Queensland education officials had moved to ban references to Jesus in the primary school yard, with an unofficial policy that takes aim at junior evangelists.”

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/education/junior-evangelists-targeted-in-schoolyard-crackdown/news-story/e719eabc9778e812fd390bd2736a6373>

This was the first in a series of coordinated written media and radio attacks, each one more hysterical than the previous, against the then Queensland Minister for Education, Kate Jones, and her department, all claiming that a draconian education department had instructed principals and staff in state schools to police playground conversations between children and clamp down on any talk about Jesus.

The following passage from the original report of the review into the Godspace Christian religious instruction (RI) program is cited as the primary cause of the concern and was characterised by Rev Peter Kurti as “a massive assault on freedom of speech and freedom of religion”.

“While not explicitly prohibited by the (legislation), nor referenced in the Religious Instruction (RI) policy, the department expects schools to take appropriate action if aware that students participating in RI are evangelising to students who do not.”

At first blush, and taken completely out of context as this is presented, one could perhaps be forgiven for thinking that schools were being directed to take action against *students*.

Except that is not what it says and not what it means. We demonstrate below the context in which this injunction to schools was given to show that the conservative Christian groups behind this campaign used it in a highly disingenuous manner to extract amendments of the RI program review reports from the education department which effectively *removed* a reasonable measure aimed at *balancing* the rights of all in the state school environment. Ironically, this was done under the banner of “religious freedom”.

The Background

In June 2016, the Queensland Education Department was instructed by education minister Kate Jones to review all religious instruction programs used in Queensland state schools following the suspension of RI by the principal of Windsor State School who considered the Connect Christian religious instruction program used at that school proselytised in contravention of education department policy.

To date, three Christian programs have been reviewed – Connect, Godspace and Access Ministries; we have been advised the education department has no plans to review any more programs at this stage.

1) Connect RI program (Sydney Anglican publication via CEP)

The original review report for the Connect program was released in August 2016, and included the following (p12):

“Although proselytising was not common throughout the manuals, evangelising was frequently identified in all teacher manuals – both in terms of teachers evangelising to students, **and students being encouraged to evangelise to others** [our emphasis].

“Examples of activities that may encourage students to evangelise:

- *Students could compose a poem, song, drama to communicate the gospel to others* (Upper Primary, B2, Lesson 18, p. 190).
- *Students could make beaded bracelets or necklaces and give them to their friends as a way of sharing the good news about Jesus* (Lower Primary, C2, Lesson 17, p. 153).

Also (p13):

“Creation of artefacts

“Some lessons propose making artefacts such as art works that could be used for classroom displays, or greetings cards and messages to give to family and friends. To be consistent with the Department’s RI policy which requires that faith group publications are not accessible to other students, all displays would require removal from the classroom at the end of the RI lesson. It would be of benefit to instructors for this information to be included in the manual. ***It would also strengthen the materials’ compliance with legislation for instructors to be advised to tell all RI students not to give any materials used or created in RI lessons (including greeting cards) to students who do not attend RI classes.***” [our emphasis]

2) Godspace Christian RI program (Baptist publication)

The initial report of the review was released in March 2017, and included the following (p7-8):

“Evangelising

“While not explicitly prohibited by the EGPA or EGPR, nor referenced in the RI policy statement, the Department expects schools to take appropriate action if aware that students participating in RI are evangelising to students who do not participate in their RI class, given this could adversely affect the school’s ability to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for all students.

“Some examples were found of students being encouraged to evangelise to others: [our emphasis]

·*“Say: We can share these things with people who don’t know about Jesus”. “Prayer: Dear God, please help us to share what we know about Jesus with other people, and to use what we know to help others. Amen.”* (Purple 2, p. 33)

·*“Say: Knowing about Jesus is a very important thing to know. We can tell others about Jesus too!”.*

“Prayer: Dear God, please help us to use our knowledge to help others. Especially help us to let others know about Jesus. Amen.” (Purple 2, p. 34)

·“Encourage the group to think about things we could do for God, even if it takes a lot of courage, like: Making a speech at assembly about something that matters to God.” (Green 1, p. 118)

·“Say: Yes! God wants us to use our words and actions to help others to follow Jesus.” (Purple 2, p. 15)

“RI instructors should be reminded in the Teacher’s Notes for these lessons that students should not be encouraged to evangelise to other students at the school.” [our emphasis]

3) Access Ministries RI program (Council for Christian Education)

The initial report of the review was released in February, 2017, and included the following (p8-9):

“Creation of artefacts

“Some lessons propose making artefacts such as art and craft for classroom displays, greeting cards or gifts to give to family and friends. It is noted that some lessons indicate checking with the classroom teacher prior to displaying the work.

“To be consistent with the Department’s RI policy which requires that faith group publications are not accessible to other students, all displays would require removal from the classroom at the end of the RI lesson. It would be of benefit to instructors for this information to be included in the teacher books. ***It would also strengthen the materials’ compliance with Queensland RI policy for instructors to be advised to tell RI students not to give any materials used or created in RI classes to students who do not attend RI classes.***” [our emphasis]

“Examples of artefacts and activities where the display or provision of materials to other students is encouraged include: [our emphasis]

“Make a Christmas tree decoration to give away (for example, to a pre-school, a hospital or an aged care home)” (Quest 2, Yellow Series, p. 91)

“An ‘optional project’ involves the creation of baubles from circles cut out of the students’ learnings from the unit or a picture or slogan to care for the natural world and indicates that these could be hung in the classroom “if you have arranged to do this” (Search 2, Yellow Series, p. 40 and 49)

“A ‘science experiment’ over a number of weeks in which seeds are sown in different types of soil with the intention of showing that “‘good soil’ (good listening) produces the best harvest” after referencing ‘He (Jesus) warns them that only people who are ‘good soil’ (those who hear and obey His message) will gain the benefit of His teaching’. The seed boxes would need to be removed from the classroom after each RI session (Search 2, Yellow Series, p. 8).

“While these artefacts seen in isolation do not necessarily have religious connotations or affiliations, there is the potential to cause concern and become non-compliant with RI policy if students who participate in RI explain the intended message to students who did not participate in the RI class.

“While not explicitly prohibited by the EGPA or EGPR, nor referenced in the RI policy statement, the Department would expect schools to take appropriate action if aware that students participating in RI were evangelising to students who do not participate in their RI class, given this could adversely affect the school’s ability to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for all students.”

It is clear from all these examples that *RI volunteers* who provide the lessons are being reminded to follow policy put in place to respect the choices and wishes of the parents of children who do not participate in RI; *they* are asked to *not encourage* the students in their RI lessons to go out and share lesson content, verbally or in the form of artefacts created during the lessons.

When properly read in context, the injunction by the department to schools to take action if students participating in RI were evangelising to students who do not participate in their RI class, would indicate action in respect of the *adult RI volunteers* be taken to ensure they are not actively encouraging such behaviour by the students.

The statements in the reviews by the education department simply request cooperation from RI volunteers so that the rights of all students in the school may be balanced, hardly an unreasonable request given the diversity of belief in our state schools.

Regardless of the clear intent of these comments in the review report, the Christian groups that saw fit to turn the issue into a media frenzy, instead, framed it as one of *children’s rights*, “religious freedom” of *students*, and *students* being told by schools what they can and cannot speak of in the school playground, when, in fact, it is *the Christian RI materials themselves* that sought to manipulate such playground conversations by directing RI volunteers to encourage students to share RI lesson content with other students, among them those who do not participate in RI, and even providing the props to do so.

However, under intense media pressure, in August 2017 the Queensland Department of Education retrospectively amended all three reports.

In doing so, all references to evangelising by the RI volunteers or by RI students of non-participating students were removed, along with the request that RI volunteers not encourage such behaviour. The references to artefacts and the advice to not encourage sharing of the artefacts remain.

In place of requests to RI volunteers not to encourage RI students to evangelise their non-participating peers, the following was inserted with the agreement of RI providers.

“Some examples were found of students being encouraged to recruit others. RI instructors should be reminded in the notes that students should not be encouraged to recruit other students at the school.”

QPSSS wrote to the education department to enquire what was meant by “recruit” in this context. We were advised that it meant “to recruit another child to join RI lessons”.

That is to say, as a result of a disingenuous campaign based on a false premise under the banner of “religious freedom”, Christian groups have succeeded in cowing a state government department into repealing the sensible attempt to balance the rights of all students in Queensland state schools, and gaining permission to have religious volunteers use children in their RI classes to indirectly evangelise to students who don’t participate in those classes, students who may also be Christian, who may be of another faith, or who may be of no faith. What of their religious freedom?