

Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws: Consultation Paper (2023)



**Submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission
consultation papers – February 2023**

About Queensland Independent Schools

Community confidence in the independent schooling sector remains strong with more than 141,000 students enrolled in 230 independent schools across Queensland. These schools educate more than 16 percent of the state's total school-age population and about 20 percent of all secondary students.

Independent schools are valued institutions and a pivotal part of Queensland's education system. They are valued schooling choices for families, hubs of human and community connection, places of intellectual, civic and social development, employers and employment generators, education innovators and change-makers.

Independent schools are as unique as the communities they serve and offer parents a choice in the education of their children. Common to all independent schools is their commitment to strong student outcomes, high standards of behaviour, and the welfare and wellbeing of students.

Many independent schools educate international students or specialise in the education of students with disability. There has also been strong growth in the number of Special Assistance Schools for students who have disengaged from mainstream schools, and trade training schools that combine senior year studies with practical vocational education and training.

Some independent schools are governed by schooling systems; however, most of them are independently operated.

Over the past five years, enrolments at Queensland independent schools have increased by more than 11 percent. This growth is a clear indication that parents value an independent education and are prepared to invest their after-tax incomes in their child's schooling.

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) is the peak body representing Queensland's independent schooling sector. Independent Schools Queensland represents the interests of its member schools, fosters choice in education and protects the autonomy of independent schools. ISQ is a not-for-profit organisation and membership to ISQ is voluntary.

Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws – ALRC Report Submission

In light of its commitment to promoting and supporting choice and diversity in the education sector, ISQ welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Australian Law Reform Commission's consultation paper on Religious Education Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws (2023).

Diversity is one of the key strengths of Queensland's independent schooling sector. ISQ represents a wide range of schools, many of which are providing an education in a school environment consistent with their religious beliefs and convictions. Of ISQ's 230 member schools, 65% have a specific religious affiliation. Some of these schools are affiliated with Christian denominations such as Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Presbyterian or Seventh Day Adventist. Others are non-denominational Christian schools, Islamic schools and Jewish schools.

Many other independent schools, whilst not having a direct religious affiliation, base their philosophy and values on religious beliefs.

The provision of an education system that encourages diversity in school choice acknowledges parents as the persons responsible for making educational decisions for their children. Ensuring diversity in the education sector is also embedded in State legislation, with a key object of the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2017 (Qld)* being:

“[...]to foster educational choices in the state.”

Each school’s ethos plays a fundamental role in its appeal to perspective parents as is evidenced by the ongoing, increased enrolment trends in independent schools. A significant portion of ISQ’s member schools, however, have expressed concern around the scope of the proposed reforms and their potential to erode the strength of their educational ethos and therefore, the choice and diversity in schooling offered to parents.

ISQ asks that before any reforms to anti-discrimination laws are carried out, serious and informed consideration is given to the impact these reforms could have on the diversity of schools across the sector and the subsequent reduction in choice of schooling for parents and their children, now and in the future. Deep and ongoing consultation with schools will be necessary in developing any proposed legislative changes to ensure parents can continue to select a school that best suits their child.

**Independent Schools Queensland
February 2023**

