

MEDIA RELEASE

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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS PARTNERS IN ELIMINATING BULLYING

National Catholic Education Commission executive director Ross Fox says Catholic schools are committed to creating safe environments that are free from bullying for all students, but a review of the Safe Schools Coalition is appropriate.

Two respected academics were last week chosen to lead the Government-initiated review of the program, which was intended to address bullying of same-sex attracted, bisexual, transgender and intersex students, teachers and staff.

“Everyone agrees that schools should be safe places free from bullying,” Mr Fox said.

“The question here is whether government-funded material goes beyond the original purpose of the program, which was to support teachers and school communities to address bullying.

“It is important that the concerns of parents, as the first educators of children, education leaders and the broader community are addressed so that the community can have confidence in the approach being taken in schools throughout Australia to address bullying.”

Mr Fox said suggestions that the material goes far beyond an anti-bullying agenda, and concerns that the material is not age-appropriate, should be considered.

“Catholic schools are committed to eliminating bullying where it is occurring for whatever reason and in whatever form,” Mr Fox said. “Bullying is not tolerated in Catholic schools.

“Longstanding national, state, territory and diocesan programs are available to schools and systems to combat bullying including through the National Safe Schools Framework and Safe Schools Hub.”

Catholic education is also a partner of the “Bullying. No Way!” initiative established by the Australian and state and territory governments.

A number of Catholic school authorities have examined the Safe Schools Coalition’s material. The material viewed to date has not been deemed appropriate for use in Catholic schools.

“The National Catholic Education Commission does not determine the material and programs used in Catholic schools. This is a matter for the relevant local Catholic school authorities,” Mr Fox said.

“Catholic education is focused on the care and development of the whole person. Catholic schools believe no one should be characterised by a single attribute or characteristic. Every student and every person should be recognised for their innate human dignity.”

It has been reported that two Catholic schools out of 1,730 across Australia are using some materials from the Safe Schools Coalition. Mr Fox noted media reports that the principal of one of those schools has raised questions about whether the program material goes beyond its stated purpose of combatting bullying and should therefore be changed.

“I believe the reservations expressed about the program material are widely shared by parents, teachers and school leaders,” Mr Fox said.

“It is appropriate to examine this issue, but most importantly all students should feel safe and supported at school and schools should be free from bullying.”