

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 495#

## 'DISCRIMINATION' IS IN THE DNA OF PRIVATE RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS

25 November 2012

**Private Religious Schools have Discrimination in their DNA in both enrolment and employment policies. Even the mainstream media have recently revealed blatant discrimination on the basis of**

1. Ability to pay
2. Religious Belief and Lifestyle
3. Sexual Preference

### 1. Ability to Pay:

On November 9, *The Age* revealed the cost of educating a year 12 student at Melbourne's top private schools is close to the Australian minimum wage, annual fees approximating \$30,000. In spite of ever increasing grants of public money, allegedly given to make such schools 'affordable' Victorian independent schools are generally lifting fees by between 4 and 6.5 per cent next year, with some warning of a tough economic climate and pressure on enrolments. <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/private-school-fees-edge-closer-to-minimum-wage-20121109-293jt.html#ixzz2CF8mDILm>

Wesley College increased tuition fees and charges by about 6.25 per cent.

The parents are restless.

Parent Simon Smith has launched the website [makewesleyaccountable.com](http://makewesleyaccountable.com) as part of his nine-year campaign to get Wesley to incorporate, publish annual audited reports and hold an open annual meeting, criticised the lack of accountability over how fees were spent.

*"For our last child entering year 12 it will be over \$30,000 for the year after further hidden fees like music camps, uniforms, music events in Murdoch recital hall etc are factored in," he said. In the decade 2001 to 2011 fees increased by nearly 100 per cent, he said. "I estimate that for a child entering year 7 now, by the time they reach year 12 the annual fees will rise to \$50,000 per annum based on historical patterns."*

In the business of education, if you charge like a wounded bull and promise an outcome, what happens if you don't get it?

Perhaps Simon Smith should do his sums and realise that a public education offers, not only value for money, but social value beyond compare.

## 2. Religious Belief

Although the Federal Government is overhauling and allegedly strengthening the Discrimination Act and employers not employees will have the burden of proving their case, religious organisations in general and religious schools in particular are granted exemptions. In other words, they can discriminate on the basis of religion – and by implication – lifestyle as much as they please. This is the reverse side of the ‘values’ preference aspirational parents give for preferring private schools for their children.

In an article entitled ‘Few Know of Religious Exemption’, the *Canberra Times* reported that a study found that an overwhelming majority of Australians –78% in fact were not aware that religious schools were able to discriminate on the ground of marital status or sexuality. 89% support laws that would force schools that discriminate to publish their employment policies online and alert parents to them.

Advertising agencies sometimes refuse to allow Christian Schools to print, in job ads, that they preferred certain candidates.

Read more in <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/few-know-of-religious-exemption-20121118-29kns.html>

## 3. Sexual Preference

Not every victim takes discrimination lying down. A former principal of a Jewish school, Bialik Collee in Melbourne is suing the school for millions. Jewel Topsfield of the *Age* has revealed his story.



Former Bialik College principal Joseph Gerassi.

PHOTO: PETER HASKIN/AUSTRALIAN JEWISH NEWS

Joseph Gerassi - believed to be the first openly gay principal of a Jewish school in Australia - was called into a meeting on August 24 last year and told the school council had "lost confidence" in him.

However, in a case which has similarities to the termination of Methodist Ladies' College principal Rosa Storelli, the council of Bialik College acknowledged the "positive changes" Mr Gerassi had made to the school.

Documents filed in the Federal Court reveal Mr Gerassi alleges his dismissal contravened the Fair Work Act and was a breach of his contract.

He is seeking compensation for loss of income, shock, distress, humiliation and damage to his reputation and professional standing.

Mr Gerassi, who is believed to have earned more than \$300,000 a year as principal, is unlikely to find an equivalent job at another Jewish school given homosexuality is not condoned by sections of the Jewish community. The mystery that surrounded his termination also meant rumours were rife within the Jewish community that were damaging to his reputation.

The court documents claim the school council's ultimatum that Mr Gerassi resign or he would be fired prevented him from exercising his workplace right to make a complaint in relation to his employment. They say he was not able to obtain advice or respond to the conclusion the school council had lost confidence in him.

Mr Gerassi said: "The only thing I would like to say at this point is that I took the decision to take this matter to the Federal Court at great personal cost in an attempt to clear my name and to restore my reputation."

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/former-principal-sues-jewish-school-for-millions-20121112-298g4.html#ixzz2CtwUxIj7>

#### **SUMMARY:**

Schools which divide children and discriminate on the basis of ability to pay, religious belief and lifestyle are institutions which divide a community.

If Australia is to be a vibrant democracy we need to educate our children together, in harmony, without any form of discrimination. We can only do this in a free, secular and universal public system. And we need to employ teachers who are well qualified to teach what they are required to teach, not teachers who possess peculiar or particular religious beliefs and lifestyle.

Discrimination legislation should not discriminate on the basis of religion or ability to pay or lifestyle choice. If it does, it is a nonsense.

***THE DOGS RADIO PROGRAM***

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**12.00 NOON SATURDAYS**