



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

### Archbishops call for deeper reflection on religious freedom

**Joint Statement**

**October 19, 2018**

Religious schools must be able to employ staff who uphold their beliefs and values in order to fulfil their promise to parents and students to provide an authentic education based on their faith, two senior Catholic archbishops have stated.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge, president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP, chairman of the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education, said Australians highly value the existing network of faith-based schools.

“It is not unreasonable for religious schools and the families who choose them to continue to expect that staff will support their school’s mission,” Archbishop Coleridge said.

Archbishop Coleridge said staff in Catholic schools have a professional obligation to be supportive of the teachings of the Catholic Church, to act as role models to students and to do nothing publicly that would undermine the transmission of those teachings.

“Those who seek employment or enrolment in a Catholic school will be asked if they understand and accept the values of that school. If employed or enrolled, they will be expected to uphold those values,” he said.

“Catholic schools take seriously the duty that parents entrust to them in the handing on of the Catholic faith. It is therefore critical that Catholic schools are free to employ staff who are attuned to their mission in order to provide and promote the intellectual and spiritual formation of their students.”

Archbishop Fisher said Catholic organisations, including Catholic schools, employ Catholics and non-Catholics alike who are enthusiastic about the Church’s work in education and evangelisation and align with its mission and values.

“We believe in the inherent dignity of all people as beings created in the image of God,” he said.

“Much of the current discourse is about rhetoric rather than reality. What this debate should be about is whether faith schools will continue to be allowed to make their distinctive contribution to our society and our children. Catholic schools should be permitted to be Catholic.

“We want to enjoy the rights that others – including political parties – have to employ people who support the organisation’s values and beliefs.”

Archbishop Coleridge said the Church and Catholic educators are keen to engage with parliamentarians to create policies and legislation that respect the rights of students, families and teachers, as well as those who operate religious schools.

Archbishop Fisher said politicians ought to wait for the religious freedom review to be published and considered in its proper context before rushing to propose changes.