ALP intends to amend the Equal Opportunity Act to include systemic discrimination. It should be noted, therefore, that needed as an occupational requirement for each teaching the ‘inherent requirement’ (now called ‘bona fide’ requirement) stated in the ALP Policy Platform. The policy states that the well written and has a conciliatory and understanding tone. The standard response letter the ALP has been sending out is understand the issues that we have...

Letters are one thing – it’s policy that counts
The standard response letter the ALP has been sending out is well written and has a conciliatory and understanding tone. Indeed, the letter is considerably ‘softer’ than what is actually stated in the ALP Policy Platform. The policy states that the ALP intends to amend the Equal Opportunity Act to include the ‘inherent requirement’ (now called ‘bona fide’ requirement) so that Christian schools would have to prove why faith is needed as an occupational requirement for each teaching role. Further it would provide broader powers to “the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to deal with systemic discrimination”. It should be noted, therefore, that the ALP policy statement doesn’t include any of the reassurances found in the campaign response letter.

Selective Consultation
The ALP claims to have consulted widely. It is true that before the 2010 changes the ALP undertook a consultative process with many stakeholders and the compromise (proving ‘inherent requirement’ rather than simple abolition of the exemption) was satisfactory for many. However, church/religious-based schools who do not require a Christian faith of their staff for them to be employed, do not speak for the whole Christian or independent sector. The ALP consultation process did not listen to the Christian school sector voice, which is made up of over 20,000 students in 50 schools across Victoria. These schools are members of Christian Schools Australia (CSA), Christian Education National (CEN), Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS) and the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) groups. As a group of schools we have a very different understanding of what Christian education aims to be and the employment of Christian staff is fundamental to those aims.

Who decides?
The 2014 ALP Policy Platform states that the ALP will return to the legislation they passed when last in government. That legislation required the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to be the adjudicator regarding ‘inherent requirement’. The VEOHRC’s Chair at that time, Helen Szoke, said it was not an ‘inherent requirement’ for a Maths teacher to have to share the “doctrines, beliefs and principles” (as written into the official school documentation) of the Christian school in order to teach Maths. In the Commission’s understanding ‘inherent requirement’ means only those requirements needed to teach Maths! This essentially means that faith would only be needed for ‘expressly religious’ subjects, a viewpoint at stark odds with our ethos. So the Commission’s understanding is notably at odds with the more recent ALP reassurance that includes ‘all teachers’. What view would have precedence? We have grave misgivings about the understandings of the VEOHRC in an area which is absolutely fundamental to Christian schools - and this is the body that would be adjudicating on these matters in respect of our schools.

Even more concerning - the VEOHRC would be given the authority “to deal with systemic discrimination on their own motion.” This means that it could instigate an investigation into any place it deems to be discriminating “on their own accord”. What huge power that allows! Is it any wonder that Christians are not happy that a secular tribunal, with a deeply dualistic (separating secular and sacred) understanding of religion, should decide these matters?

What about the secretary or the gardener?
The ALP’s response letter addresses only the employment of teachers. What about the non-teaching staff? As it stands the ALP would not allow Christian schools to ask these staff members about their faith. Here we note a seeming inconsistency in the ALP response letter. On the one hand they seem to recognise that there are schools like ours who take an ‘all of school’ approach. However, if the ALP were to fully understand our holistic approach they would also recognise that everyone employed within the school community is a role model living out an authentic faith and has a part to play in the shaping of Christian education. Christian schools function as holistic learning communities where each employee plays a valued ‘faith-directed’ part. This includes the gardener and the administration team. We reject the idea that schools can be characterised as a collective of individual competencies where a so-called ‘inherent requirement’ determines position. On the contrary, our schools strive to be rich, inter-dependent, faith-shaped learning communities. Christian education happens in the whole school in every activity, not in a specific classroom with a specific ‘faith-related’ curriculum.

Diminishes long standing freedoms
Christian schools have always been allowed to employ Christian staff – people who share the same values and beliefs as the Christian school. Such freedom is consistent with, and connected to, common understandings of core human rights as captured in human rights covenants that Australia is a signatory to. (Cont next page...)

Enjoy your week!
Jason Riding

ALP Response Still Poses Dangers
Why the standard ALP response should be rejected by Christian School Communities
Many parents have written to Labor candidates about changes the ALP proposes to make to the Equal Opportunity Act. A standard response letter has been received from the ALP but this response doesn’t address the real issues that Christian school parents have.

Here’s why the ALP response doesn’t tackle or even understand the issues that we have...

Letters are one thing – it’s policy that counts
The standard response letter the ALP has been sending out is well written and has a conciliatory and understanding tone. Indeed, the letter is considerably ‘softer’ than what is actually stated in the ALP Policy Platform. The policy states that the ALP intends to amend the Equal Opportunity Act to include the ‘inherent requirement’ (now called ‘bona fide’ requirement) so that Christian schools would have to prove why faith is needed as an occupational requirement for each teaching role. Further it would provide broader powers to “the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to deal with systemic discrimination”. It should be noted, therefore, that the ALP policy statement doesn’t include any of the reassurances found in the campaign response letter.

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As a school community, we are partnering with Open Door Church and the Monbulk Care Network to help provide for those in need this Christmas. Each student is encouraged to bring in a minimum of one food item that could be included in a Christmas ‘Hamper’. Some suggestions include:

- **Packaged ‘Chirstmassy’ treats such as Puddings, Fruit Mince Pies, Canned Ham, Chocolates, Biscuits**

- **Other basic ‘non-perishable’ food items**

- **Children’s Toys**

Each classroom will have a box in which items will be placed, and we hope to present them to a representative from Open Door Church and /or the Monbulk Care Network, at our final assembly on Tuesday, 16th December. **So let’s aim to have those boxes overflowing……and be a blessing to those in our wider community.**

For more information, please contact the MDCS Office.

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**REMINDER**

**Twilight Working Bee**

TOMORROW! Friday, 7th Nov

LAST ONE FOR THE YEAR

BEE organised, BEE part of the fun & BEE here!!

4pm - 8pm Dinner provided

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**KOORONG KIDS**

Parents wishing to order from this month’s Kooring Kids, can pick up a catalogue from the School Office or the library. Orders need to be returned to school by the 14th November.

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Continued from page 1...

These rights specifically cover freedom of religion and the freedom parents have to choose their child’s school.

Even though the explanations that the ALP have provided may not appear that onerous (Christian schools proving that faith is needed to teach), why must Christian Schools be required to do so? Political parties don’t need to do so. They get an exemption to ‘discriminate’. And so they should. Which ALP member would accept a card-carrying Liberal on their staff? It defies reasonableness and logic.

We assert very strongly that being able to employ Christian staff goes to the very heart of why Christian parents established Christian schools in the first place. Any ‘discrimination’ that is taking place is part of a rightful and appropriate choice that parents are making to send their children to a Christian school. It’s the freedom we expect in a democratic, tolerant and pluralistic society.

The balance hasn’t been struck

The ALP says that their amendments strike the right balance between the right to freedom of religion and freedom from discrimination. They do not. They lean heavily to the latter. When the government’s task of assisting society to protect the vulnerable (i.e. discrimination laws) means that particular interest groups, like Christian schools, can no longer have authority over their own employment policy, the balance has swung too far. Christians schools not being allowed to advertise for Christian staff is an inappropriate intrusion into the freedom that faith-based schools should be able to maintain.

The ALP hasn’t established the case

The ALP response does not establish a convincing case for why such a significant and intrusive change is needed. It is inferred that Christian schools are places that get away with systemic discrimination. No doubt the ALP is listening to voices that portray Christian schools as being odd, separatist and discriminatory places with far too much freedom. We know that such misguided stereotypes are simply not the case. Of course Christian schools will look different from their state counterparts as they seek to be learning communities that reflect their stated faith and charter.

Finally...

We are concerned that this notion of needing to prove ‘inherent requirement’ may be part of a much bigger and more dangerous agenda that seeks to restrain the freedoms that Christian schools enjoy. Whilst Christian schools are good social citizens and conduct themselves in responsible and reasonable ways, they do not want to be shaped by secular guidelines that would distort their very character. These proposed changes represent a potentially dangerous directional change. It is crossing a line that we implore the ALP not to cross. We urge all our parents to do the same and make their concerns known to the ALP candidates in their electorates.

*International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - Article 18.1; International Covenant On Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – Article 13.3; UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Article 26.3*

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**NOVEMBER**

- 5th - 7th Yr 11 Study Break
- 6th - Yr 7-11 Interschool Aths Carnival (selected students only)
- 7th - TWILIGHT WORKING BEE
- 10th - Secondary Assembly (Yr 8)
- 10th - 11th Year 11 Exams
- 12th - Yr 3-6 Interschool Athletics carnival
- 14th - Yr 2 Sleepover
- 17th - VCE Unit 3 2015 Begins
- Primary Assembly (Yr 5/6HB)

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