

17 June 2025

Union condemns decision to restore discrimination exemptions for religious schools

The union representing teachers and support staff in Northern Territory non-government schools has condemned the NT government's plans to restore the right of faith-based schools to discriminate against staff and students.

Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEU-QNT) Branch Secretary Terry Burke said the current NT CLP government's decision to reinstate the religious discrimination exemptions was deeply disappointing.

"The reinstatement of religious discrimination exemptions is unnecessary, divisive and harmful," Mr Burke said.

"Faith-based schools were more than capable of functioning in the absence of these exemptions.

"We know faith-based schools have the capacity and resilience to continue to operate in the absence of discrimination exemptions - the vast majority of them already do so.

"Indeed, they have done so quite adequately under the legislation which has been in place."

Changes to the NT *Anti-Discrimination Act* made three years ago by the previous NT Labor government removed the religious discrimination exemptions that historically permitted non-government school employers to discriminate against staff and students.

"The reinstatement of religious discrimination exemptions in the NT does not reflect modern community values and expectations, especially given many faith-based organisations receive public funds," he said.

Mr Burke said employers still had the opportunity at the point of engagement to determine if an employee was suitable for the position advertised.

"That has always been the case," he said.

Mr Burke said the CLP government's plan to also alter the existing wording of the current vilification provision would weaken it.

"We implore the NT government to reconsider its decision and abandon the proposed changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act*, which should remain as it currently is," Mr Burke said.

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Contact: Emily Campbell, IEU-QNT Communications Officer: ecampbell@ieuqnt.org.au / 0400746175

The Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEU-QNT) represents more than 17,000 teachers, school support staff, principals, early childhood education and VET and RTO employees across Queensland and the Northern Territory.
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