

1 November 2018

Attn: Judith Nealy
The Illawarra Grammar School
10-12 Western Ave,
Mangerton, NSW 2500

OPEN LETTER TO JUDITH NEALY, HEAD OF THE ILLAWARRA GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Dear Judith Nealy,

I write to you as a former pupil regarding an open letter you signed dated 25 October. It was addressed to government indicating support of a right for schools to dismiss staff on the grounds that they do not align with one's institution's faith. This has been widely and, I believe, correctly interpreted as a right to discriminate against LGBTQI+ teachers. I put it to you that such legislation would not be used against atheist teachers; after all, if things haven't changed that much, that would be a not insignificant portion of the staff. Given the context in which this legislation came about (that is, the aftermath of the postal vote on marriage equality), I think people are right to be concerned that it is aimed at discriminating against LGBTQI+ teachers.

The fact is, the legislation you propose would have the consequence, intended or not, of allowing schools to bar LGBTQI+ individuals from becoming teachers if their sexual and/or gender identity itself is seen as at odds with the values of the school. **To grant this power would be to grant the explicit power to discriminate.** Imagine a religious school whose faith had them believe that the colour of people's skin made them at odds with the school's value system. **Would you think in such a situation it would be acceptable for such a school to ban black staff members on religious grounds? Do you think anyone should have this right?**

After I came out as gay, I had a consultation with a senior member of staff. I talked about my experience, about how I felt that I didn't receive a great deal of institutional support. I was promised at the time that an effort would be made to make things better for students like me. It would be naïve to think that the current pupils of your school are not negatively affected by the signing of this letter. Regardless of how it may be spun, **I have heard from some of them, and it has been seen as a targeted attack.** To them, I would say stand strong, and that this too shall pass. **Ms Nealy, will you honour the promise made to me?**

The argument is clear. We live in a pluralist society where we should be exposed to a variety of value systems. I'm personally very grateful for the Christian values I was taught at school. I still find myself appealing to the ethics taught to me in many of my high school classes. I was taught within this framework without the school having a right to discriminate against my teachers. I had Gay teachers. I wouldn't change the schooling I was so blessed to receive for all the money in the world.

Finally, I want to say thank you to this school. It taught me many things in my time. I learnt the values of compassion, of kindness, of loving thy neighbour. It taught me when it is right to turn the other cheek and when it is right to stand up for what you believe. It taught me the nuances of gender; that we ought not be restricted by the sex we are born with or the labels we are given. It taught me that it's okay to be gay and supported me when I came out. It taught me all of these things within a Christian framework. It taught them because they were right.

Perhaps most importantly, it taught me how to write a letter. I trust this one finds you well.

Henry Hulme
Graduate of the year 2014
Former Captain of Aranda House