



## **SENATOR THE HON SIMON BIRMINGHAM**

Minister for Education and Training  
Senator for South Australia

18 March 2016

### **STATEMENT ON SAFE SCHOOLS COALITION**

Every student has a right to feel safe at school. Tolerance should be taught in our schools and homophobia should be no more accepted than racism.

Students grappling with personal issues, including questions of sexual identity, deserve to be supported and deserve to be able to access the best information, advice and support.

Students should not be confronted with, nor be at greater risk of, accessing information or material that is inappropriate for their age or cultural background.

Parents should have confidence in what is taught in a school and receive clear information, especially about potentially contentious issues. Parents should have a right to withdraw their child from classes dealing with such matters.

The Safe Schools Coalition Australia programme was established with worthy objectives to reduce homophobic and transphobic behaviour, increase support for individual students and increase their positive inclusion to maximise the learning potential of all in a safe environment.

The review by Professor Bill Loudon, Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Western Australia, into the appropriateness and efficacy of the resources generated by this programme has identified shortcomings that need to be addressed. Further, public concern has been expressed about the actions, including the political advocacy, of some of the participant organisations.

The government will seek to address these findings and reasonable concerns via a number of immediate actions.

1. Fix the content of the programme resources by:
  - a. Having the lesson plans for Lessons 2, 6 and 7 of the *All of Us* resource amended to remove those activities identified by the review as potentially unsuitable for some students.
  - b. Having the content of Lesson 5 of the *All of Us* resource redesigned to ensure that the content aligns with the curriculum content for biology appropriate for the target age group.
  - c. Requiring that the amended resources and any further resources be peer reviewed and approved by a panel of qualified educators appointed by the Department of Education and Training.
2. Address concerns about third party links, advocacy and materials in resources by:
  - a. Having all third party organisation branding removed from all official resources.
  - b. Having reference to any third parties limited to organisations funded by state, territory or Commonwealth governments for the provision of mental health or counselling services.
  - c. Requiring that national and local programme managers not bring the programme into disrepute, or engage in political advocacy in a way that represents their views as being endorsed by the programme.
  - d. Requiring that the resources for the programme not be used for political advocacy.
3. Limit the distribution of certain materials by:
  - a. Requiring local programme managers to ensure the distribution and promotion of Safe Schools Coalition Australia programme materials is restricted to secondary school settings only.
  - b. Restricting the use and distribution of the *OMG I'm Queer*, *OMG My Friend's Queer* and *Stand Out* resources, which were not developed as classroom resources, to one-on-one discussions between students and key qualified staff.

4. Align the location of resources with other inclusion, support, tolerance and anti-bullying measures by housing official resources only on the official Australian Government Safe Schools Hub website, which contains other inclusion and anti-bullying resources for schools, teachers, parents and students in areas such as racism, domestic violence and disabilities. The Safe Schools Coalition Australia website will not have any resources, advice or links and will limit operations to programme coordination and direct users to the Safe Schools Hub for access to official programme resources only.
5. Ensure parents are appropriately empowered and engaged by:
  - a. Requiring agreement of relevant parent bodies for schools to participate in the Safe Schools Coalition Australia programme, including the extent of participation and any associated changes to school policies.
  - b. Requiring parental consent for student participation in programme lessons or activities, while maintaining the rights of all students to seek counselling services.
  - c. Having an official fact sheet for the Safe Schools Coalition Australia programme for parents about the programme developed so they have access to full and consistent information of its content and the resources that may be used in schools.
  - d. Having an official resource for parents of students dealing with questions of sexual identity developed, and distributed only by key qualified staff.

Professor Loudon's Review is available at [www.education.gov.au](http://www.education.gov.au)

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