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## MEDIA RELEASE

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14 April 2024 – for immediate release

### **Christian Schools Welcome Prime Minister's Commitment To Protecting Religious Freedom**

Christian schools have welcomed the commitment from the Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, that religious freedom protections for faith groups *"Will not go backwards while I'm Prime Minister of Australia"*.

The commitment, made in a meeting of key faith leaders and representatives of Christian schools on Friday, provides some welcome relief to Christian schools and their communities in the light of the release of the recent controversial final report from the Australian Law Reform Commission.

Australian Association of Christian Schools Executive Officer Vanessa Cheng said schools and their communities have been extremely concerned since the release of the Commission's report.

"Our schools are growing, as parents are choosing an education for their children that reflects their values and beliefs. There are more than a third of students in Australia being educated by non-government schools, the vast majority of them religious," she said.

"We made it clear to the Prime Minister and the Attorney-General that the legislative package the government is considering would remove the clarity and confidence the existing protections provide for religious schools and their communities".

"It's all about protecting freedom of choice for parents when selecting a school for their children," she said pointing out that teachers have this choice too.

"Teachers who don't agree with our values and beliefs have many other employment options within the context of Australia's diverse educational sector," she said, "which we see as a strength to be celebrated and protected, not undermined by the removal of fundamental existing protections."

Christian Schools Australia Director of Public Policy Mark Spencer said that the Prime Minister's commitment was welcomed.

"It was encouraging to hear the Prime Minister recognise that religious bodies, including schools, employing staff based on their faith was not discrimination. His commitment that protections for religious bodies and people of faith would not go backwards provides a measure of relief to concerned schools and their parents."

“We now need the Prime Minister to take action on this commitment and release draft legislation that will provide clear protections based on international law and providing certainty that Christian and other religious schools can teach their beliefs, employ staff who share their beliefs, and operate the school in accordance with those beliefs.”

“We welcome the Prime Minister’s promise,” he said, “but it needs to be backed up by action.”

Christian schools continue to call for a bipartisan approach to religious freedom laws and protections to allow faith-based schools to continue providing quality education to hundreds of thousands of Australian parents who make this choice for their children.

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### About the Associations:

**Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS)** represents over a hundred independent Christian schools in every state and territory across Australia, ranging from very small to large; urban to regional, rural and remote. The majority of member schools are non-denominational with a protestant heritage and are governed by parent associations with over 44,000 students enrolled from a wide variety of socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

**Christian Schools Australia (CSA)** is the largest association of Christian schools in the country and has member schools educating over 86,000 students and employing more than 13,500 staff at more than 200 locations across Australia. CSA member schools provide caring and compassionate education within an authentic Christian learning community.