

Media Statement 27/2/2023

Rev David Baker and Venerable Tseten, Co-chairs, Multi Faiths RI Network.

- 1. RI is all about parent and caregiver freedom of choice;** empowering parents and caregivers to make an informed choice about the faith education of their children. RI is an opt in program in State Schools.
- 2. RI is popular.** Parents of an estimated 200 000 students across over 600 state schools opt their children into RI. In the primary schools where RI is on offer the majority of students do RI. Low opt in rates quoted in the media are not accurate because their numbers are taken from only one of several places where schools collect and maintain their RI data and because the average opt in rate quoted is calculated including the numbers of schools where RI is NOT offered eg most High Schools.
- 3. RI curricula support the learning outcomes of the National Curriculum.** The National Declaration on Education, "The Alice Springs "Mparntwe" Education Declaration", 2019, states: *"Education plays a vital role it must also prepare young people to thrive in a time of rapid social and technological change, and complex environmental, social and economic challenges. Education plays a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion."* Typically RI is mostly 30 mins each week, or less. Students in non-RI are doing valuable curriculum-based learning as required by the Dept of Education. No learning or curriculum time is lost during Ri. In RI curricula, students are also learning about geography, history, and literature.
- 4. A multicultural Queensland is a multi-faiths Queensland.** RI reflects our growing cultural diversity and strengthens the inclusion of multicultural communities in our state schools. RI supports the Multicultural Queensland Charter (2017). Some of the current available options for RI include Baha'i RI, Buddhist RI, Christian RI, Greek Orthodox RI, Hindu RI, Islamic RI, Jewish RI, Sikh RI, Yarning Circle RI and Yazidi RI.
- 5. RI plays an important role in supporting values education and is inclusive of respectful relationships.** The key values of care and compassion, respect and responsibility, as outlined in the National Framework for Values Education, are fundamental to the faiths represented by the Multi-Faiths RI Qld Network, and are embedded in the network's RI curricula currently in use in Queensland state schools.
- 6. RI provides important psychological benefits to students' mental health and wellbeing.** International research from Harvard University (2018) has shown that children and adolescents who participate in faith-based activities on a weekly basis were more likely to have better health and wellbeing outcomes.
- 7. Faith education is best taught by people who practice the faith tradition being taught,** just like it is best to learn how to play the piano from someone who plays the piano. This is supported by highly regarded joint international research by Prof. Zehavit Gross, Dean of Faculty of Education Bar-Ilan University, Israel, and Prof. Emerita Suzanne Rutland, Biblical and Jewish Studies, University of Sydney. (2018, 2019, 2021). Professors Gross and Rutland's recent research, published in the book 'Special Religious Education in Australia and its value to

contemporary society' (2021) explores the advantages of and challenges to RI in a multicultural Australia. RI is different to General Religious Education (GRE), which is a general information overview of world religions. Both RI and GRE are essential for a holistic education system, and both are currently available in Queensland state schools.

8. **RI in Queensland is progressive.** We reject the straw man argument that RI is indoctrination and educationally unsound. RI is continually being academically reviewed and modernised and made relevant to the modern state school classroom through revisions in RI policy, curricula and high- quality teacher training. Programs encourage children to question, explore, discover the faith their parents and caregivers choose for them to engage with as part of a wholistic education.

9. Quote from Gross and Rutland: (Special Religious Education in Australia and its Value to Contemporary Society: 2021 Springer.)

“While our study focuses on the value of SRE/RI,we strongly agree with the arguments of Byrne, Maddox, Bouma and Halafoff on the importance of GRE, or Secular Religion and Ethics (Byrne 2014) or Worldview education (Halafoff and Bouma 2019).

In Part II, we shall discuss the importance of SRE/RI in terms of developing religious values, identity and spirituality, which contribute to students’ health and wellbeing (Lovat 2010). However, in terms of reinforcing multiculturalism, opposing violent extremism, and countering religious prejudice, we argue for a combination of SRE/RI and GRE, in what has been termed a system of “cooperative education” (Schweitzer 2007). In the conclusion of her book, Byrne (2014) argues that “Secular R&E... teaches children to be open to, respectful and appreciative of, different perspective, while developing and maintaining their own ideas”. While we fully agree with this statement, we shall argue that without a strong basis for their own religious identity, which SRE/RI assists with, it is difficult to achieve this aim.”

Ends.

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Queensland Legislative Assembly	
Number: <u>5723T504</u>	
 18 APR 2023	Tabled <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
MP: <u>DR ROBINSON</u>	By Leave <input type="checkbox"/>
Clerk's Signature: <u>M. Baker</u>	