

Dear Friends of Concerned Catholics Tasmania

16 December 2023

Consent and Relationships Education is about Safety and Respect

The Executive Director of Catholic Education, Dr Gerard Gaskin, received national media attention on [4 December 2023](#), after posting an article on the [Archdiocese of Hobart website](#) questioning the Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE) measure, a new measure announced by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in the Health and Physical Education learning area. In his article, Dr Gaskin expressed his concerns about aspects of CRRE, some of which he regards as amoral. His main focus is on consent education in so far as it relates to sexual activity. However, consent education is much more than this.

The CRRE measure is intended to support the wellbeing of Australian primary and secondary school students and school communities through investment in high-quality evidence-based, age-appropriate Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE). It is part of a National curriculum approved and adopted by Federal, State and Territory governments. The aim of the measure is to teach children that they have the right to personal space, human dignity and respectful relationships in every encounter. It is to be age appropriate and the curriculum is available on the [ACARA](#) website.

Consent education regarding romantic or sexual relationships occurs in Years 9 and 10, and is focussed very much on boundaries and respectful relationships. Religious schools are encouraged to tailor programs to include religious teachings.

Concerned Catholics Tasmania (CCT) Committee is deeply concerned that Dr Gaskin:

- reduces consent education to “sexual activity,” when it is intended to teach children about bodily autonomy, i.e. the right to have boundaries and for those boundaries to be **accepted**;
- does not seem to appreciate that children from an early age need to learn respectful boundaries as well as to how to protect themselves from unwanted physical attention from other children or adults;
- believes that the sexual and moral formation of the child is the **exclusive** right of parents, when in fact most sexual abuse occurs within families, and therefore, schools have an important educative role;
- does not acknowledge in his article the importance and necessity of consent and respectful relationships education in combatting the scourge of sexual violence in Australian society.

CCT encourages its supporters to read Danielle Wood’s Mercury article of December 8 (below) as a well-reasoned and researched, realistic approach with direct connection to the sequenced curriculum. Further, we encourage you read media responses by CCT members: Catherine Sullivan’s letter to the editor and Dr Trish Hindmarsh’s response (below) to the ABC website’s article For a global perspective, [Katrina Marson](#)’s article is very helpful.

Warm regards



Susan Chen

Chair of Concerned Catholics Tasmania

Opinion OURS & YOURS

Consent class our best hope to keep kids safe

Consent education should not be regarded as a political or religious issue, but a human rights issue

Q uick question for you, dear reader: if you were to be asked to nominate an organisation with such a faultless record on respectful, consensual relationships that this organisation should be given a leave-pass from attending consent class, would that organisation be the Catholic Church? No? No, not for me either.

In recent weeks, in an article published on the Archdiocese of Hobart website, the executive director of Catholic Education Tasmania expressed concern at the addition of mandatory consent education to the Australian curriculum, calling it "anti-family and secular ideology".

In his article, Dr Gerard Gaskin claims that consent education teaches children "that any form of sexual activity is OK provided both persons give consent". He sees this as contrary to Catholic morality, which holds that sexual activity is only right when it is both consensual and "expressed within the loving relationship between husband and wife".

Consent education, he says, includes information that is "highly sensitive, amoral and potentially harmful" to school students. Dr Gaskin's article is concerning, not only because it seems to misunderstand what the new additions to the Australian curriculum actually call for, but also because it seems fundamentally prurient.

Consent education is not only about sex. When we teach children

Danielle Wood



and young people about consent, we are teaching them about their rights to have boundaries and to insist on those boundaries being respected.

Such boundaries apply across a vast range of situations and activities. A person may or may not give consent to be kissed on the cheek, or be hugged, as a social greeting or farewell. A person may or may not give consent to have their photograph taken.

Consent is at issue when someone says they're not ready to have a difficult conversation; it's at issue when you keep someone's information private rather than sharing it.

Even when consent education does explicitly address romantic and sexual activity, it's not just about the kinds of sexual activity. I assume Dr Gaskin considers ought to be quarantined in marriage. Holding hands, kissing – neither of which I imagine you need a wedding ring for, even in the Catholic Church – are activities that bring consent into issue.

The relevant items within the Australian Curriculum V9 are the Health and Physical Education Capabilities AC9HPF04 (foundation year), AC9HP2P04 (year 1 and 2), AC9HP4P07 (year 3 and 4),



Teach Us Consent founder Chanel Contos believes the incidence of sexual assault would decrease if young men were better educated about consent.

AC9HP6P07 (year 5 and 6), AC9HP8P07 (year 7 and 8) and AC9HP10P07 (year 9 and 10); you can look them up yourself and see how they're calibrated across the school years for age-appropriateness.

While year 3 and 4 students "rehearse and refine strategies for seeking, giving and denying permission respectfully and describe situations when permission is required", year 9 and 10 students "examine how strategies, such as communicating choices, seeking, giving and denying consent, and expressing opinions and needs can



support the development of respectful relationships, including sexual relationships" (my emphasis).

The inclusion of sexuality in the year 10 calibration is more than reasonable, especially when mapped against 2022 results of the 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health (SSASH), which reports that 43 per cent of year 10 students had engaged in anal or vaginal sex, rising to 68.9 per cent of year 12 students.

The vital importance of consent education is underscored by the survey's finding that a staggering 40 per cent of sexually active respondents had experienced unwanted sex.

One of the things we tend to forget is that if we know a large number of people who've been sexually assaulted, it's also likely we also know

a large number of people who've perpetrated a sexual assault.

While, as a society, we're fairly clear about how to respond to violent stranger-rape/sexual assault, we're much more confused about how to deal with the far more common phenomenon of rape/sexual assault between people known to each other. The marriage union is certainly no guarantee of consensuality.

Consent education is critical for young people so they learn both how to protect their own boundaries, and how to respect other people's. It needs to start early, and in all schools, regardless of religious affiliation; it should undergird and refigure any other "moral" frameworks.

There are quite a lot of adults who could be usefully sent back to consent school, too, including the male high school educator who told me that a

State's independent voices work with all members of

Our Legislative Council (the "upper house" of Tasmania's parliament) has a rich tradition of strong and effective independent members that must be maintained. It has a crucial role in our democracy: it reviews and accepts, changes or rejects laws; questions the government on its decisions; and holds inquiries into important issues. Therefore, it needs to be independent of the party politics and squabbling of the Greens, Labor and Liberals.

But its independence is under threat – currently eight of the 15 Legislative Councilors are members

Next election, don't let the upper house fall to party politics, writes Charlie Burton

of a political party. That is a key reason why in May 2024 I am seeking to replace the retiring independent Member for Hobart Rob Valentine MLC, who has been a respected, thoughtful and considered voice since 2012.

Strong independents are crucial in the upper house because they make decisions based on their publicly

stated values and the public interest, not according to party ideology or the interests of wealthy donors. It also means they work more collaboratively with all members of the parliament for the public interest – something rarely seen between political parties.

As an independent member for Hobart, I would commit to proposing

and supporting solutions that address the real needs of Tasmanians – such as making sure everyone has a safe and affordable roof over their head, enough food on the table, and access to affordable and timely health care – while also ensuring future generations inherit a Tasmania



Dr Charlie Burton

that boasts a thriving economy, healthy environment, and a rich social and cultural life.

As an independent member for Hobart, I would be guided by the principles of independence, fairness and the best interests of our community. Independence means my decisions would be informed by my publicly stated values and by evidence, not by how a party or donor tells me I should vote. I would always be transparent about how I arrive at my decisions.

Fairness means a focus on making Tasmania a state where everyone can thrive, now and into the future. It

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sexual assault could not have taken place between two students "because they're in a relationship".

Speaking to Hobart's ABC this week, the founder of Teach Us Consent, Chanel Contos, made the excellent point that consent education should not be regarded as a political or religious issue, but a human rights issue. In response to Catholic Education Tasmania's resistance to consent education, she said: "Abstinence is a choice; sexual assault is not."

In 2021, Contos polled her Instagram followers about whether or not they, or someone they knew, had been sexually assaulted when they were at school. An overwhelming response led to her founding Teach Us Consent, the campaigns of which have been instrumental in triggering changes to the Australian curriculum.

Speaking to the National Press Club last month, Contos used the term "entitled opportunists" to refer to a significant category of rapist: well-educated young men who are "confident, powerful and opportunistic in other areas of their lives".

"Their offences are predatory acts that are unplaned or exhibit poor self-control. Little anger is exhibited and there is minimal physical violence, often none. So it's sexual coercion that's the avenue, namely pressuring, tricking, threatening or forcing someone in a non-physical way. Or using drugs and alcohol, so the victim can't consent."

Belief in their own entitlement and a lack of empathy are key to their offending, and because of the private nature of the encounters, and the unwillingness of victims to come

forward into a brutal justice system, these perpetrators rarely face consequences for their actions. Contos says she believes the incidence of this kind of opportunistic sexual assault would decrease if young men were better educated about consent and, consequently, had greater empathy for others.

Dr Gaskin's fantasy of a world without pre- or extramarital sex should not be allowed to get in the way of the swift and thorough implementation of consent education in all schools, including Catholic schools, because such education is our best hope to increase empathy between, and safety for, our young people.

Dr Danielle Wood is an acclaimed author, who has had great success writing under various pen names.

parliament for the public good

means seeking out the views of those whose voices aren't often heard, such as Tasmanians living on low incomes, people with disability, Tasmanian Aboriginals, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Community interest would mean using my 30 years of experience in social policy and advocacy at the state and federal level to engage with our community and ask the right questions to come up with the right solutions our community needs now, and that set us up for the future.

If I am elected, these key questions will inform my decisions:

1. What is the problem we are

trying to solve and are new laws the right solution? If new laws aren't the right solution, I won't support them, or I'll seek amendments based on what the evidence tells us is the best solution.

2. Have we heard from all the people who will be affected? I will consult widely, especially when the people most affected have difficulty having their voices heard.

3. Does it strike the right balance between economic, social and environmental benefits or costs, now and for the future? Attractive proposals now should be weighed against potential longer-term costs to

our economy and environment.

Tasmania needs leaders, not party powerbrokers, in the Legislative Council who are prepared to make decisions and laws in the interests of all Tasmanians. The electorate of Hobart deserves a local member who is independent and prepared to speak up for and help the community. We need to keep the party politics – of all colours – out of the Legislative Council and keep an independent voice for Hobart.

Dr Charlie Burton is an independent candidate for the Legislative Council seat of Hobart in May 2024.

Scoring goals for an active community

Schools partnership is bringing down barriers to participation in sport, writes Nic Street

A healthy and active community is a happy, connected and productive community. The Rockliff Liberal government knows that investing in programs and facilities to encourage grassroots participation in sport is important to not just our young people and children but to the community as a whole.

However, a common barrier to participation is access to facilities. If you want to play, but you can't find somewhere to play, how do you get involved?

That's why our Liberal government has been working hard to make it easier to get active. We want to ensure that grassroots clubs can partner with schools so Tasmanians can get the most out of the facilities in our communities.

Pleasingly, many sports, particularly indoor sports, have seen participation rates growing as more Tasmanians have continued to hit the courts, pitches and fields around the state.

And we have the high-quality school sports facilities to support this growth, in spades.

Late last month I had the pleasure of attending Lauderdale Primary School to see the improvements made to their school gym funded by our government's Improving the Playing Field Grant Program.

This investment has allowed for the installation of new height-adjustable hoops in the school gym. As a result of these improvements, more new, accessible and low-cost basketball programs are now available on Hobart's Eastern Shore

for a growing number of young participants, as well as improved facilities for youth in the community.

I heard first-hand how, through co-operation, this community is getting the most out of their facilities.

Turning away prospective players is something that no sporting club wants to do. These local clubs are defined by their inclusivity and mission of getting Tasmanians moving.

With the Grenadiers Basketball Club having more than doubled its number of teams – it needed room to grow.

Lauderdale Primary School, Basketball Tasmania and the Grenadiers are now working together to ensure that the incredible growth being experienced by the club is able to be accommodated.

The Rockliff Liberal government wants to see more of these beneficial arrangements in place that allow our local clubs and communities to grow, move and be healthy.

We have recently appointed three community liaison officers to support and facilitate the use of government school facilities outside of school hours.

The arrangement between Lauderdale Primary and the Grenadiers is a shining example of the partnerships that I am keen to see grow.

By doing more with what we already have, we can support and encourage greater participation in sport.

Our government will continue to deliver on our long-term plan to do what matters for all Tasmanians by making Tasmania the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Nic Street is the Minister for Sport and Recreation



Nic Street



Grenadiers Basketball Club has proven so popular it has more than doubled its number of teams.

Opinion OURS & YOURS

THE VOICE OF TASMANIA
MERCURY

PARLIAMENT CHAOS

Cluster fiasco is flattering

Being decisive is one thing but making the right decision is a different kettle of fish.

As yesterday's recall of parliament with the sole purpose of suspending Supreme Court Justice Gregory Geason unfolded, it quickly became evident the snap call for the proceedings was just a bad decision from the get-go.

But despite being advised over the weekend that there was a constitutional risk in suspending a judge, the recall went ahead and it wasn't until the luncheon adjournment when Attorney-General Guy Barnett said the motion to suspend would not proceed.

Justice Geason has undertaken not to sit as a judge while charges of assault and emotional abuse are considered.

"It is the position of the government that there is a constitutionally valid power to suspend a judge of the Supreme Court," Mr Barnett told parliament.

"However, this matter involves complex and untested legal and constitutional issues and will take

some time to work through to minimise the risk of constitutional challenge."

Professional media political observers are meant to watch and question proceedings in the House of Assembly arena. But as the communication chaos played out yesterday, Legislative Council members were relying on the Mercury blog for updates on what – or wasn't – happening on the Justice Geason consideration in the House.

Greens MP Dr Rosalie Woodruff flatteringly described events as a "cluster fiasco".

While Labor's Dean Winter said the proceedings had been "the most incompetent exhibition from a Minister of the Crown in living memory" and called for the Attorney-General to resign or be sacked.

Mr Barnett asserts the highly irregular case of Justice Geason's charges are complex, but that shouldn't constitute a domino effect of knee-jerk reactions that have so far wasted a lot of time and thousands of dollars in recalling MPs to parliament for its most embarrassing sitting in memory.

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Letters

Relationship respect is not just about sex

Congratulations to Danielle Wood for her comprehensive coverage of curriculum initiatives concerning respectful relationships. While employed as a school psychologist, I used resources promoting protective behaviours with students from prep upwards. I am pleased and relieved that teaching consent is now part of the normal curriculum.

I am mystified that the executive director of Catholic Education Tasmania, Dr Gerard Gaskin, appears to believe that the curriculum initiatives concerning respectful relationships refer only to sexual intercourse. Surely all our relationships require the respect of boundaries, whether within marriages and partnerships, families and friendships or concerning our interactions with colleagues in the workplace.

As Danielle Wood so clearly indicated, consent refers to boundaries and to bodily autonomy. In previous generations small children were taught to obey adult authority and to tolerate unwanted hugs from distant relatives and family friends. It is now apparent that the denial of the right of children to accept or reject physical contact has facilitated sexual abusers both in institutions and sadly also within families. This was truly harmful to so many survivors of sexual abuse.

As an active Catholic and a grandmother, I hope and trust that Tasmanian Catholic schools will embrace the Australian curriculum initiatives concerning respectful relationships.

Catherine Sullivan
Lenah Valley



Teaching consent is an important lesson for young people.

Going down

Has anyone else noticed how filthy and litter-strewn the floors are of the lifts in the Liverpool St section of the Argyle St carpark and Woolworths complex lately? Not a great look for any cruise ship tourists who might have wandered a few blocks from the docks. Can't the city council afford cleaning staff, or is that section a private situation? Either way, it's pretty poor form. Centrepoint doesn't have the same problem. Hopefully a responsible manager reads this and takes corrective action.

Steve Bailey
Glenorchy

Bit steep

We recently stayed at Waldheim Cabins at Cradle Mountain during the bus fee introduction.

We totally understand the fee and think that the 72-hour pass, at \$15 per adult with children free, is reasonable

and affordable for families visiting. However, we think the daily fee does not make sense and will stop families being able to afford to just come for the day.

Families that already have annual parks passes are forced to buy the Icon daily pass which, per adult, is more than the 72-hour bus pass – i.e. \$27.95 for an adult and \$11.20 per child, with family costing \$67.10 for the day, even with annual parks pass already paid for.

In fact, it is cheaper for families to buy the 72-hour bus passes.

Why is there not a choice of a daily bus pass fee for families and people who already have a parks pass which mirrors the 72-hour fee – i.e. \$5 for the day.

Amber Etheridge
Howden

Progress pains

As 2023 slowly fades into history, a year where man's inhumanity to man

Dr Trish Hindmarsh: ABC Website Comments section:

As a Tasmanian Catholic educator I write in support of 'Consent' education in Catholic schools. More than fifty years of experience and senior leadership in delivering an Australian curriculum in Catholic schools and systems has taught me the importance of holistic human development for students. A partnership between authentic Catholic faith, its values and ethics, and the secular curriculum can be achieved by competent, switched on teachers attentive to the needs of students.

These are times of alarming domestic violence, sexual assault of young people, online pornography and the continuing legacy of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse in families, churches and other organisations. Carefully planned and appropriately delivered 'Consent' education is critical from the time small children take their place in society and will be needed throughout their adult lives.

Teachers in Catholic schools have always been tasked to interpret and open up the mandated curriculum in a way that is both conducive to the total human development of students and informed by the Gospel in a Catholic faith context. That can and must be done now regarding 'Consent' education if Catholic schools are to remain relevant and true to their mandate.