

## Education advocacy policy

That the Synod

### A Preamble:

1. Notes the principles of the Uniting Church's Education Charter, namely, the Uniting Church in Australia –
  - 1.1 values all people as created in the image of God
  - 1.2 believes that all people have rights and responsibilities for the well being of society
  - 1.3 understands that education is 'a lifelong journey by which all people develop the ability to participate in society and lead lives that are life creating and life sharing'
  - 1.4 calls for quality education that is accessible and equitable for all
  - 1.5 encourages excellence in education by which the God given gifts and talents of people are fully developed
  - 1.6 commits itself to promoting education for its members as part of their faith, ministry and community responsibility
  - 1.7 promotes the value of diversity in educational provision, expression and access
  - 1.8 affirms the contribution to Australian society of the teaching profession and those engaged in educational research
  - 1.9 acknowledges the primary importance of families in the context of education (the importance of families in education)
  - 1.10 commits itself to pastoral care and chaplaincy within educational institutions
2. Notes the human rights to education set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, ratified by 191 of 193 countries), namely -

ARTICLE 28: states Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity; and

ARTICLE 29 Aims of Education: states Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

  - The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.
  - The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations
  - The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own.
  - The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.
  - The development of respect for the natural environment.
3. Notes the importance of education in advancing both academic excellence and social cohesion, and the potential of education for reducing social disadvantage;

4. Notes that there are a number of issues of serious concern to the church about access, equity and other matters with regard to public education, as articulated by the Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Provision of Public Education in NSW (the Vinson Report); the Vinson report *Community adversity and resilience: the distribution of social disadvantage...* Richmond Victoria: Uniya, 2004; and the advocacy of UnitingCare Burnside and other organisations who work with children and young people;
5. Notes specifically that socioeconomic background is currently the best predictor of educational achievement, and that Indigenous educational outcomes are particularly concerning;
6. Recognises the important ministry of the church that is embodied in the life of its church schools;
7. Affirms the excellent work of Uniting Church schools in providing education of the highest quality and the efforts of many of them to provide mechanisms for ensuring access to a diverse range of children, to provide a curriculum emphasising a commitment and contribution to the wider community, and to provide encouragement for fundraising and other acts of service to important community concerns; and therefore -

**B** Adopts the following policy directions in response to the Uniting Church National Education Charter's "guidelines for practice" (the headings are taken from the charter and are explained there), with regard to public education and our own church schools.

1. A theology of education –

1.1 The church will advocate that both public and non-government education systems provide for the education of the whole person, that is, with physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, social and cultural aspects to their lives, enabling students:

- to develop as healthy persons, with attributes such as resilience, compassion and hope, who know they have human value and dignity
- to acquire the knowledge and skills that they need to function in daily life at work, in the family, in the community and as citizens in a democracy
- to acquire functional literacy and numeracy and the knowledge and skills required to embark on vocational or professional training
- to develop a sense of responsibility as part of the diverse human community, committed to human rights, social justice and respect for the environment
- to develop their capacity to think critically, creatively and ethically
- to express their ideas and feeling effectively, verbally and non-verbally, and to listen to and learn from others;
- to work with other people, and to work independently
- to understand and participate in their own culture and religious tradition,
- to appreciate Australia's cultural diversity, including Indigenous cultures and various religious beliefs
- to work towards effective reconciliation with Australia's Indigenous peoples

- to resolve conflicts by non-violent means
  - to experience and reflect on a variety of life experiences
  - to develop wisdom
- 1.2 The church will advocate for the recognition of the importance of religious influences on Australian life in the teaching of Australian history
  - 1.3 The church will uphold the importance of access to special religious education in public schools to encourage children to reflect on the spiritual aspects of their lives and teach them in their religious tradition
2. A commitment to lifelong learning -
    - 2.1 Recognising that early childhood years are critical in laying the foundation for lifelong learning, the church will advocate that the government prioritise providing all children with access to quality early childhood education in the public or community sector, with particular emphasis on those with special needs and on redressing social or economic disadvantage.
3. A recognition of our rights and responsibilities –
    - 3.1 The church will advocate in support of education (both public and non-government) that develops in people the skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable people to participate in society as responsible citizens respecting one another's human rights and living in a socially and ecologically responsible manner.
    - 3.2 The church expects all its schools to have programs of social justice education based on church statements on issues of justice and consistent with internationally recognised human rights, and environmental education that recognizes the rights of nature and rights of future generations.
4. Access to equitable and quality education –
    - 4.1 The church will uphold the right of parents to freely choose the appropriate school for their children, including the options of public or private education
    - 4.2 The church will advocate for adequate government funding for excellence in public education at all levels, ensuring this education is free at least in primary and secondary schools, and that the cost of higher education is minimised to the point of ensuring accessibility for all Australians.
    - 4.3 The church will advocate that the first priority of government be a well funded public education system that caters for children in all their diversity, including children with special needs, children with behavioural problems, children in areas of economic, social or locational disadvantage and asylum seeker children
    - 4.4 The church will resist any attempts by governments to reduce public education to being only a safety net for the poor
    - 4.5 The church will advocate for enhanced programs and funding for Indigenous Education that aim to equalise educational outcomes with those of non-Indigenous students while valuing Indigenous cultures and history
    - 4.6 The church will advocate that government provide the funding to ensure equitable access to lifelong learning through diverse modes such as informal, continuing, further and postgraduate education
    - 4.7 The church will advocate to government that the level and mode of public funding for higher and further education reflect the value that society derives from an educated workforce and an educated citizenry

- 4.8 The church expects all schools to make appropriate provision to be accessible to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, through mechanisms such as financial assistance, specific mentoring, and other programs that encourage a diverse community of students
  - 5. Valuing diversity of educational expression –
    - 5.1 The church will advocate that the public education system and its own schools make use of the diversity of educational practices that children need to learn effectively; this includes the provision of special programs and if necessary special schools for those children who do not prosper in schools based on standard curriculum and teaching arrangements
  - 6. Valuing teaching and research –
    - 6.1 The church will advocate that teachers in the public and non-government education systems (including early childhood education) be paid at a level that reflects the value of the work that they do, and that they have adequately funded opportunities for in-service training and post-graduate education.
    - 6.2 The church will advocate for publicly funded educational research and services that will enhance the quality of teaching and thus improve educational outcomes.
  - 7. The importance of families in education –
    - 7.1 The church will advocate that all schools have adequate resources to enable effective consultation and participation of parents in activities and decisions
    - 7.2 The church will advocate for more support and recognition of families in the education of their children, especially in early childhood education.
  - 8. Provision of pastoral care and chaplaincy -
    - 8.1 The church will advocate for a public education system that provides effective pastoral care resources and programs for all students so that they can develop body, mind and spirit.
    - 8.2 The church will encourage Presbyteries and Congregations to find ways of providing appropriate chaplaincy and Christian religious education for the public educational institutions (from early childhood through to tertiary education) in their area, and commits itself to providing training, resources and support for these activities.
  - 9. Priorities -
    - 9.1 In its advocacy, the church will emphasise the importance of Indigenous education, early childhood education and efforts to improve the educational outcomes of the most disadvantaged.
- C** Encourages the Board of Education and UnitingCare NSW.ACT to work together in practical partnerships to further redress educational disadvantage.