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South Australian Association Of State School Organisations Inc.

Monday October 21, 2013

The Hon Jennifer Rankine
Minister for Education and Child Development
31 Flinders Street
Adelaide SA 5000

Dear Minister,

Re: SAASSO 2014 Election Submission: Proposal 1 - Parents Rights

Please find enclosed is SAASSO's first submission for the 2014 State Election.

This submission relates to 'Parents' Rights' - made necessary by the ongoing revelations of an education department that has 'lost its moral compass'.

It was one year ago this week, that news of the OSHC sex abuse cover-up broke.

A year later, as you read this, the State Government and DECD are embroiled in yet another sex scandal - this time involving a wrongfully accused child and a guilty teacher.

Once again, it was covered-up.

Once again, until the disgrace was revealed in the media, the government did nothing ... this time for nearly a decade.

It is a mistake to view the Debelle Report in isolation. It reveals a systemic cultural failing in DECD. The failures went across multiple departments, at the school, district and head office levels.

None of these disgusting episodes were caused by the lack of a framework, or whatever buzzword is in fashion. The State Ombudsman confirmed that DECD has processes ... it just chose not to follow them.

DECD already has a Complaints Assessment Panel, which convenes fortnightly to address critical incidents. This panel knew about the OSHC rape. This panel knew parents could and should be told. It did nothing.

DECD followed all the rules as an employer. But when it came to its responsibility to parents and their children, the bureaucracy came first.

SAASSO has warned the government of a moribund culture in DECD for years. We have been ignored and even criticised for being 'negative' as we dared to raise problems the government did not want to face.

The DeBelle Report focussed much criticism on the obstinate refusal of DECD to correct its mistakes.

John F. Kennedy is credited with saying: "An error doesn't become a mistake until you refuse to correct it".

We need the State Government to now, correct its error. As each education crisis cascades, the government scrambles to keep a lid on the problem and fix it internally.

At this point the error becomes a mistake.

This flawed culture cannot be fixed internally. Time and again, it has been proven that only external scrutiny compels DECD to do the right thing.

The solution, clearly, is to place DECD under constant and unyielding community scrutiny.

The first step is SAASSO's Education Proposal 1 - putting real power in the hands of parents and the school community to hold the department to account ... because our children really are at the heart of everything we do.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Amato', written in a cursive style.

Gino Amato
President