

SA senator slammed over comments on school's Do It In A Dress fundraiser

Abbott bashed as campaign gets ugly

JACK HOUGHTON

FORMER Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott was headbutted by a same-sex marriage campaigner while walking across Hobart's Salamanca Place last night.

Mr Abbott, who sustained minor injuries, said he had just left the offices of *The Hobart Mercury* when a man yelled out to him that he wanted to shake the prominent "No" campaigner's hand.

But Mr Abbott said he was given the "Liverpool kiss" by a large tattooed man wearing a "Yes" badge.

After the attack, Mr Abbott called *Advertiser* columnist and Sky News presenter Andrew Bolt, who broke the story on air.

Mr Abbott had said that he brushed off the assault, saying his attacker "wasn't very good at it".

"A fellow sung out to me, 'Hey, Tony', I turned around, there was a chap wearing a 'vote Yes' badge," he says. "I wanna shake your hand," he said.

"I went over to shake his hand and he headbutted me.

"He wasn't very good at it, but he did make contact, but the only damage was a very slightly swollen lip.

"It was very disconcerting to find ... someone, who under the guise of wanting to shake your hand, gives you a so-called Liverpool kiss."

He said that his staff member grappled briefly with the man but he ran off swearing at Mr Abbott, yelling that he deserved it because of his campaign against a Yes vote in the postal ballot on same-sex marriage.

Mr Abbott said the assault was evidence of the "ugliness" coming from same-sex marriage activists and urged people to vote no if they were tired of "political correctness".

"It was just a reminder of how ugly this debate is getting," he said.

"The ugliness is not coming from the defenders of marriage as it's always been understood," he said.

120,000 reasons to thank Cory



OVERWHELMING SUPPORT: Craighorn Primary senior leader Rob Warncken, teacher Rebecca Hepworth and principal Paul Luke.

Picture: DYLAN COKER

TIM WILLIAMS EDUCATION REPORTER

SENATOR Cory Bernardi has been widely condemned for failing to do his homework before attacking a Craighorn Primary School fundraiser where students can choose to wear a dress.

And his intervention continues to provide an incredible boost for the event, planned for the end of term, with donations skyrocketing past the \$120,000 mark last night, from an initial target of just \$900.

The Australian Conservatives leader caused a storm by accusing the school of politicising gender issues and "absurd gender morphing" in the midst of the same-sex marriage and Safe Schools debates. But crit-

ics hit back at Senator Bernardi for making a political issue out of a student-led fundraiser for the One Girl charity's long-established Do It In A Dress campaign, where donations help poor African girls go to school. Last night's running total was enough to pay for the education of 400 girls.

Asked about Senator Bernardi's stance, principal Paul Luke said "everyone is entitled to their opinion", but he added: "There had been no intention (by the school) to initiate or ignite any debate. We encourage our kids, before they form an opinion, to research widely and validate facts."

Mr Luke said the fundraiser arose from a Year 5 class's research into education around the world, and students' con-



SA Senator Cory Bernardi.

cern that some children missed out. He said parents had been "overwhelmingly supportive" and "we've not had one person from our school community who has voiced any opposition". Governing council chair Kerrin Burrow said the core of the event was "not about wearing a dress at all"

but supporting a worthwhile cause. "As a parent of a daughter, I want girls in other countries to have access to education and a better life," she said. "There will be some children in dresses and some in casual clothes, they will not be pushed in any way."

Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham said Senator Bernardi and other anti-gay marriage advocates would "say and do anything" in "creating a scare campaign".

"The reason politicians sometimes get a bad name is because people don't check their facts before they open their mouths," he said.

SA Education Department chief executive Rick Perse yesterday tweeted a photo of himself in a dress raising

money for charity when he led the Attorney-General's Department. He said he'd be "happy to do it again".

Parent group SA Association of State School Organisations director David Knuckey, who also made a donation, said: "Around the world, far too many girls do not have the same opportunities and access to education as boys. It's a credit to these children that they are doing something to help." The SA Association of School Parent Communities agreed.

Senator Bernardi stuck to his guns, saying Craighorn "went a step too far by encouraging six-year-old boys and male teachers to observe what could be the first official cross-dressing day to be held in a South Australian school."

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