

THE AUSTRALIAN

Safe Schools activist Roz Ward raises 'red flag'

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Safe Schools Coalition architect Roz Ward with Victorian Education Minister James Merlino at the Pride march.

The architect behind a contentious sexual diversity program set to become mandatory across all Victorian schools is an outspoken hard-left warrior who has publicly denounced Immigration Minister Peter Dutton as a “sexist prick”.

Safe Schools Coalition Victoria co-founder Roz Ward has also conceded the Safe Schools Coalition program is part of a broader Marxist strategy to change society.

Ms Ward is a La Trobe University academic who moonlights as a writer for *Red Flag*, the publication of the Socialist Alternative, a Trotskyite self-described Marxist organisation that has become a dominant force among university radicals and the broad-left activist movement.

Ms Ward’s recent contributions include an article published in January, titled “Sexist text messages are the least of Peter Dutton’s crimes”, in which she accuses the minister of being responsible for instances of sexual abuse being experienced by refugees at the Nauru processing centre.

“Dutton is responsible for these horrors,” she writes. “Sure, call out casual sexism, but we should rage longer and harder against his ongoing crimes against refugees.”

In another article, Ms Ward accused the former Victorian Liberal government of turning train stations into prisons after the introduction of a safety policy in 2012 of manning platforms with armed guards. She denounced the guards, known as “protective services officers”, as “uniformed thugs”.

The program has recently been linked with an improved public perception of safety.

A prominent campaigner on gay, lesbian and transgender issues, including marriage equality, Ms Ward has repeatedly claimed that the Safe Schools Coalition was derived out of a bid to stamp out homophobia within schools.

Victorian Education Minister James Merlino, who posed for photographs with Ms Ward at the recent Pride March, declined a request for an interview yesterday.

However in a statement, his spokesman said that the “scare campaign” being run by opponents of Safe Schools Coalition has been “nothing short of disgraceful”.

“The comments from federal MPs like Cory Bernardi and George Christensen are perfect examples of the kind of attitudes that we need to change,” he said.

The Victorian government was the first to provide public funds to the cause. Former Labor education minister Bronwyn Pike, who has an openly gay son, announced \$80,000 in seed funding in October 2010. A year later, the newly elected Coalition government announced further funding of \$416,000 and the federal Labor government then lent its support in 2013 when Senator Penny Wong, who is gay, unveiled \$8 million over four years to “help stop homophobia and create more inclusive school communities”.

The Safe Schools Coalition program has since been rolled out to more than 500 schools and has the backing of the Australian Secondary Principals Association and the Australian Education Union.

Despite the program’s stated aims, its politically correct approach to sex education — under which teachers are counselled that it is “heterosexist” to refer to students as “girls and boys” and children are instructed to role-play gay teenagers — has outraged religious groups and conservative politicians.

Many have questioned whether it is appropriate for schools to be teaching children as young as 11 the meaning of terms such as “queer”, “pansexual”, “sister girl” and “trans guy”.

The Coalition’s website also lists more than 40 primary schools or P-12 colleges that have registered.

One of those, St Kilda Primary School in Melbourne, took part in the Midsumma Festival’s

annual Pride March in January alongside the Safe Schools Coalition.

Ms Ward, who manages the program in Victoria, wrote about the landmark occasion on the coalition's website: "For the first time ever we marched with a primary school as well as more than a dozen secondary schools, which just really shows the progress that has been made."

St Kilda Primary School principal Sue Higgins confirmed that the school had taken part, but did not respond to further questions via email, including whether students had taken part.

West Australian Education Minister Peter Collier has raised concerns, describing aspects of it as "almost offensive".

A former high school teacher, he said it could hurt the children it aimed to protect, although it had the hallmarks of an effective bullying strategy.

"I cannot see or fathom any situation where drawing attention to a particular set of students is going to necessarily assist that child," Mr Collier said.

"I feel as soon as you start to identify or isolate very discrete elements of student cohorts, inevitably you're going to draw attention to those students and if anything it could work in reverse."

He said only 16 of the state's 800 public schools had registered for the program.

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