



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 2

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

# **ETHICS CLASSES TO CONTINUE IN SCHOOLS**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**30 May 2012**

Ethics classes should continue in NSW government primary schools, according to a report released today by a Parliamentary Committee.

Committee Chair, the Hon Marie Ficarra MLC, said, “We believe that ethics classes should continue and we have recommended that the NSW Government continue to facilitate the delivery of ethics as an option for students who do not attend Special Religious Education (SRE).”

“The Committee has made a number of recommendations that are aimed at improving the implementation and delivery of ethics classes and also SRE. These recommendations relate to increasing the availability of information for parents including factsheets on SRE and ethics, improving access to the SRE and ethics curriculums, ensuring suitable training of volunteer teachers and the collection of statistics on the number of students participating in ethics, SRE and for those students who do not attend either to better help inform policy decisions” Ms Ficarra said.

Ms Ficarra continued: “We have also recommended that the Department of Education and Communities give more guidance to schools on what to do with students who do not attend SRE or ethics classes, including what constitutes adequate supervision for students and what activities these students can be meaningfully engaged in during that timeslot.”

“Significantly, we have recommended that a future independent review of both ethics classes and SRE be conducted by appropriately qualified early childhood educational reviewers in 2014-2015 that includes the issues that have been raised in this report” Ms Ficarra stated.

“It is with the key stakeholders in mind, the students, that the Committee has considered the important issues raised in this inquiry and presented a suite of recommendations that uphold the right of choice for students and their parents/carers and advocates improvements in the area of special religious and ethical education” said Ms Ficarra.

A list of the Committee’s recommendations is attached. The report is on the Committee’s website: [www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/gpsc2](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/gpsc2). Hard copies are available on request.

-ENDS-

*For further information please contact Committee Chair Hon Marie Ficarra MLC, on 9230 2894*

## Summary of recommendations

- Recommendation 1** **23**  
 That the NSW Government:
- Not seek to repeal section 33A of the *Education Act 1990* that allows for Special Education in Ethics classes in NSW government schools; and
  - Continue to facilitate the delivery of Special Education in Ethics in NSW government primary schools as an option for students who do not attend Special Religious Education.
- Recommendation 2** **28**  
 That the NSW Government maintains the current situation where neither providers of Special Education in Ethics or Special Religious Education receive direct financial support from the Government; and that the Department of Education and Communities publish on its website information advising that the provision of Special Education in Ethics and Special Religious Education are not government funded.
- Recommendation 3** **35**  
 That the Department of Education and Communities continue to review the age appropriateness of the Special Education in Ethics curriculum and teaching materials.
- Recommendation 4** **37**  
 That the Department of Education and Communities, in the revised *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and the new Special Education in Ethics procedures, require all providers to post their curriculum outlines and curriculum scope and sequence documents online, and that all relevant curriculum information be presented in the order in which it is taught.
- Recommendation 5** **40**  
 That the Department of Education and Communities establish an open and transparent expression of interest process to allow other organisations to apply to deliver Special Education in Ethics in NSW government primary schools before 2014.
- Recommendation 6** **50**  
 That the Department of Education and Communities collect and publish data annually on the number of students participating in Special Education in Ethics, Special Religious Education and for those students who do not attend either.
- Recommendation 7** **53**  
 That the Department of Education and Communities include in its revised *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* recommendations to schools regarding what constitutes adequate supervision for students and for activities that those students not attending Special Religious Education or Special Education in Ethics can be meaningfully engaged in, during that timeslot.

**Recommendation 8****53**

That the Department of Education and Communities ensure that the revised *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and Special Education in Ethics implementation procedures are effectively communicated to and implemented by principals once they are finalised.

**Recommendation 9****59**

That the Department of Education and Communities require and monitor Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics providers to ensure that they have in place a system of accredited initial and ongoing training for their voluntary teachers that includes training in classroom management and child protection issues and that this information is published on the providers' websites.

**Recommendation 10****64**

That the Minister for Education investigate the inclusion of philosophy in New South Wales secondary schools as part of the development of the Australian Curriculum.

**Recommendation 11****65**

That the Department of Education and Communities ensure that the revised *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and the Special Education in Ethics implementation procedures include the requirement for the provision of departmental approved fact sheets for parents at the time of enrolment that include information on the available options of Special Religious Education, procedures for opting out of Special Religious Education and the option of choosing Special Education in Ethics where available, and how to access curriculum information for these options. These factsheets should be available on the departmental website and individual school websites.

**Recommendation 12****66**

That the Department of Education and Communities ensure that the revised *Religious Education Implementation Procedures* and the Special Education in Ethics (SEE) implementation procedures include templates of letters that can be provided to schools for their use to:

- Advise parents/carers of the various Special Religious Education (SRE) classes available for year groups each year
- Advise parents/carers of any changes in organisation and/or availability of any new SRE classes
- Offer parent/carers of non-SRE students the option to attend SEE classes (advice should be clear to principals that this letter should only be distributed to parents/carers of potential non-SRE students only after an 'opt out' decision by parents/carers has been communicated to the school)
- SRE and SEE letter templates should differ in appearance to avoid confusion for parents/carers.

**Recommendation 13****66**

That the Department of Education and Communities ensure that the Learning Services team of the NSW Curriculum and Learning Innovation Centre be adequately staffed and resourced to enable 'in servicing' of school leadership teams with regard to providing support for the implementation of Special Religious Education and Special Education in Ethics.

**Recommendation 14****69**

That the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) commission an independent review of both Special Religious Education (SRE) and Special Education in Ethics (SEE) in NSW government schools to be conducted by appropriately qualified early childhood educational reviewers in 2014-2015 that includes the following:

- Survey of the nature and extent of SRE and SEE
- DEC Implementation Procedures for SRE and SEE including: parent/carer choice through the enrolment process and opting out; approval of SRE and SEE providers by DEC; authorisation of volunteer teachers and curriculum by providers
- Development of complaints procedures and protocols
- SRE and SEE providers training structures
- Registration of SRE and SEE Boards, Associations and Committees
- New modes of patterns of delivery using technology
- Pedagogy, relevance and age appropriateness of teaching and learning across all primary grades in a variety of demographics
- Need for annual confirmation by parents/carers on SRE choice or opting out
- Review of activities and level of supervision for students who do not attend SRE or SEE.