

**Submission  
No 275**

## **INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES REPEAL) BILL 2011**

**Name:** Ms Jessica Barr

**Date received:** 24/02/2012

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## **I am wholly in support of the Primary Ethics Program for children who opt out of religious instruction in NSW state schools.**

It is horrifying that in this day and age there is even a question that children be denied access to a professionally developed, highly structured curriculum when their alternative is doing nothing.

This program benefits kids from not only from non-religious families, but also from families who observe a minority religion that is not represented at their school, and even just families who believe that religious proselytising has no place in a secular school system. That these families should be denied a fair alternative in the school system is abhorrent.

Teachers are constantly telling us that there isn't enough time in the school day for all their curriculum requirements, yet Mr Nile would have our children spend up to an hour each week being explicitly prohibited from learning anything of value solely due to their family's beliefs.

There is no question of removing the scripture alternative for those who choose it, many other religions are accommodated during SRE so it seems petty and punitive to prevent a non-religious alternative alongside all the other faith teachings.

My child's ethical instruction is of no business to Mr Nile or anyone else. As many flaws as there may be in the Christian SRE instruction – with the lack of a professionally developed, standardised curriculum, the absence of reporting requirements and the minimal training required, along with the abhorrent teachings that can be discussed due to aforementioned absence of reporting (my 6 year old non-SRE daughter came home in tears one week after being informed by her best friend that the Scripture teacher had told her that anyone who didn't believe in God would be going to hell) at no point have I lobbied for the abolition of Scripture in schools, nor have I demanded that my State MP launch an inquiry into the lack of standards in the Christian SRE program. How then, is it any business of Mr Nile to start questioning the content of a course that is completely optional?

Practically every religious group in NSW now supports Primary Ethics. Even the Catholic and Anglican churches, who were initially its strongest opponents have conceded that to discriminate against a significant proportion of the school population by denying them a fair option during school hours is unconscionable. The minority religious groups have been extremely supportive from the start, recognising, quite rightly, that in order to have freedom OF religion, they must support freedom FROM religion. As our Constitution protects freedom of religious belief, it is astounding that Mr Nile thinks it is appropriate to force our children into a “non-choice” where their alternatives are to either pick a religious instruction class, or waste up to an hour of school time every week.

A more cynical person might suggest that Mr Nile and his evangelical Christian cronies would prefer that the alternative to Christian SRE be so unpalatable that families who do not otherwise practice religion would be tempted to send their children to Christian SRE simply to offer them some stimulation in their school day. An equally cynical person might suggest that this is the Church's way to “get ‘em while they're young” and begin preaching to a group who they may not otherwise have an opportunity to access through church.

Ultimately, this is not about religion or religious freedom or even about the standard of the ethical instruction (after all, it has been pretty clearly demonstrated that the Ethics Course has far more monitoring, reporting and curriculum standards than the ad hoc mishmash that comprises Christian SRE) It's about fairness and equality for ALL kids in NSW state schools, regardless of faith.