

Submission  
No 157

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

**Name:** Ms Maria Naidoo

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Partially Confidential

**The Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000**

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To whom it may concern

I have had the privilege of fulfilling the role of Ethics Coordinator for since January 2011. It was my strong objection of the inherent unfairness of the system which prompted me to become involved in the introduction of ethics classes at the school my daughter has attended since starting kindergarten in 2007. It was then the unfairness of the situation hit home for me, when we were faced with the restricted choice of enrolling her in an SRE class or a non-scripture class. As a family with a diverse religious background (Catholic, Hindu) we had always assumed that our children would be given the opportunity in a multicultural society to choose from a range of options with regards to their formal instruction of values. To discover the limited choices we had was disappointing and frustrating. As parents we felt it was our right to raise our children in whatever religious tradition we chose for them and expected the public school system would echo and support this, and although there is a range of SRE choices available, each of these offers instruction in one particular religious tradition, either Christian, Bahai or Buddhism, for example, depending on the representation in the parent body at any given time.

It was with great enthusiasm, therefore, that we received the news of the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 and embraced the idea of ethics classes becoming a reality. As someone who had always felt strongly about this issue, I felt obliged to volunteer my services in order to make the dream a reality. It is distressing to think that a repeal of the Act would return us to the previous fundamentally biased and unjust position of choosing between SRE and non-scripture, robbing our children once again of an opportunity to learn valuable critical thinking skills and to engage in meaningful debate around current and enduring ethical issues, in a structured, well-developed curriculum framework, to raise children who are able to examine their position on issue, and question whether their actions are beneficial or harmful to themselves or to society in general. What a wasted opportunity that would be, not to mention the enormous waste of time and effort the successes so far would be. I would very much like to share with you the enormous success we have had at our school.

When we first introduced ethics classes at our school in 2011, 22 Year 5 and 6 students signed up for the combined class, with one parent who had volunteered to undertake the training and who gracefully gives up some of his time in the week to prepare for the lesson and take the class. He has his own successful financial consultancy and is a highly effective individual with children of his own at the school. He is a dedicated, exceptional individual with much to offer our children. With his background in philosophy and his life experiences, he has been a source of inspiration in the classroom, with some parents reporting that it is their child's favourite lesson of the week. By word of mouth, this year the numbers of students enrolling in ethics classes has doubled and we are very fortunate to be able to offer two classes starting next week, a Year 5 and a Year 6 class of approximately 21 students each. Again, through word of mouth, I have been able to recruit another remarkable individual to teach one of the classes. He is an inspiring young university student who has excelled in his field of study and has a keen interest in philosophy and in engaging young people in the philosophical debate of issues that shape our society. I have no doubt that he will make a significant contribution to the education of the children in his class.

With ethics classes set to be offered to Year 3 and 4 students in Term 3, I am in the process of recruiting more volunteer teachers and have been approached by several interested parents. It is immensely rewarding to see parents giving of their time and contributing to the school and their community. It is an invaluable opportunity to volunteer and to extend skills to students. I have even had a grandparent expressing interest in becoming an ethics teacher. She is a retired teacher with two grandchildren at the school and feels this is a wonderful opportunity to contribute and to remain vital and meaningfully engaged. From young university students, to grandparents, to parents – all wanting to make a difference and offer our children a program with immense possibility to enrich their minds. In its short time in existence, already this program has had a

significant impact on our school. And I know my story is reflected in the hundreds of other schools offering the program. Just today I have had several emails where the demand for classes far exceeds the number of parent volunteers and where coordinators are desperately trying to meet demand. This is a program that many, many people have been waiting for and it is here to stay, even if it relies solely on the passionate, dedicated individuals who believe so strongly this is a program that finally gives all non-scripture students an equal opportunity to explore the things that make us all better people.

I welcome close scrutiny of the program if these are the stories it uncovers.

Yours sincerely  
Maria Naidoo  
Ethics Coordinator