

Submission
No 317

INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES REPEAL) BILL 2011

Organisation: Newcastle East Public School Council (NEPS)]

Date received: 23/02/2012

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

I write on behalf of Newcastle East Public School Council to provide a submission to the committee inquiring into Special Education in Ethics.

Newcastle East Public School has run an ethics class since the initial roll-out of the program in February, 2011. This program was preceded, and met, with overwhelming support across the school community and student body.

The formal enquiry into the objectives, curriculum and implementation of the ethics classes is welcome, as it is a well run program with clear and transparent objectives. We note that there has never been a similar investigation of Special Religious Education. We would thus like to see a parallel inquiry of SRE in schools, with the same scope and objectives as the enquiry into primary ethics. The existence of ethics classes does not diminish the role of SRE at our school. We recognize that SRE has a place, but emphasize that children who opt out of SRE deserve a meaningful alternative.

Our School Council and P & C welcomed the long awaited introduction of ethics classes, and to that end, a lot of time and resources have gone into getting the course successfully operational. The overwhelming support for ethics classes has also been demonstrated by the fact that these positions have been filled by unpaid volunteers, at no cost to parents or the state of NSW. Indeed, whilst federal funding is provided for the School Chaplaincy Program, there is no funding for paid positions for primary ethics teacher training, recruitment, or coordination.

In our annual survey of parents we received positive feedback on the introduction of ethics classes, and a desire for the course to be offered to more students. Past surveys have identified a wish for children who opt out of SRE to have some meaningful instruction or education. This year a further survey reinforced that, and as a result we have had to recruit another ethics teacher to provide for a second class. There are now 40 students taking part in primary ethics for the first term in 2012. This represents approximately 20% of the student population of Newcastle East Public School.

If the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 was repealed there would be a return to a situation where children opting out of SRE have nothing of value to do. This would essentially discriminate against these children and be a great disappointment to our children, teachers and parents, as well as our wider school community. Furthermore, the School Council is of the view that this would erode parent's ability to make decisions affecting their children, a basic right in a liberal democracy.

Yours Sincerely

John Mowatt
President, School Council
Newcastle East Public School