

**Submission
No 22**

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

Name: Mr John Kolotas

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
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RE: Inquiry into special education in ethics.

I would like to make a formal submission to the inquiry into ethics classes in NSW.

I am dismayed that despite bipartisan support for the introduction of ethics classes, the voice of a small minority are jeopardising the rights of children to attend ethics classes.

I am confused as to why the investigation applies only to ethics classes. Special Religious Education classes have never been formally investigated since their introduction in the 19th Century. Research by Cathy Byrne indicates that there is a need to investigate SRE classes as well.

If the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 were repealed, there would no longer be a legal requirement to offer ethics classes as an option for children not attending SRE classes. This move would return us to a situation in which children opting out of SRE are given nothing meaningful to do. This situation would lead to directly discriminate against those children and would be entirely unacceptable to both myself and much of NSW.

I am from a Greek Orthodox background and was educated at an Anglican primary and secondary school in Sydney. I was forced to study religious education despite my atheistic views and was judged accordingly. SRE teachers would subtly remark that I was going to hell and that was a terrible thing to experience. Growing up in this environment of religious education made my struggle with my homosexuality even more difficult to deal with. SRE classes often taught that homosexuality was a sin and having no option but to sit and endure these experiences should never be let to happen again.

There is a clear separation of church and state in Australia. I will always respect the right of parents who want their children to attend SRE classes, however the same rights must be afforded to those who want their children to learn ethics in a non-religious setting – especially in our secular state public schools. The idea that if you do not want to attend SRE means that you sit in a classroom and learn nothing is absolutely intolerable.

Ethics classes must not be sacrificed because a vocal minority see it as a threat to their own existence. With all major religions backing ethics classes, the Australian Christian Lobby and Fred Nile and supporters are not reflective of the broader religious community.

I implore NSW to keep ethics classes as an option for students as an alternative to SRE.

Regards,

John Kolotas