

**Submission
No 186**

INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES REPEAL) BILL 2011

Organisation: Randwick School P & C

Date received: 23/02/2012

Randwick School P&C

OUR CHILDREN – OUR SCHOOL



21 February 2012

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

The Hon Maria Ficarra

Re: Inquiry to Investigate Ethics Classes

In 2010 Randwick School was pleased to be one of the ten participants in the pilot program of ethics classes as an option for children not attending special religious education (SRE) classes. Our participation in the pilot was supported by a large number of parents who had looked forward for some time to such an option being made available. In that year, about half of the children in years 5 and 6 at our school opted to attend the pilot ethics classes instead of SRE or non-scripture classes. As you are aware, the trial and evaluation of ethics classes was successful and in December 2010 they were introduced as part of the NSW school curriculum by Act of Parliament.

Since term one last year, the school has been pleased to be able to offer ethics classes to year 5/6 children on a continuing basis. About 50% of the children in those years choose to attend ethics classes. We are looking forward to offering the classes to younger children when the ethics course provider, Primary Ethics, finalises development of the age-appropriate curriculum for those years.

Consistent with Primary Ethics policy, our ethics class coordinator ensures that our ethics teachers undergo appropriate screening and training prior to recruitment. We have four ethics teachers, all of whom have excellent experience and skills relevant to teaching and ethics. They all have a strong link with the school and its community. The ethics classes were well attended last year with each class comprising 18 children, close to the maximum class size set by Primary Ethics.

In November 2011, Randwick School parents who supported the ethics program were disappointed to hear the news that ethics classes were to be investigated by a parliamentary inquiry into the "stated objectives, curriculum, implementation, effectiveness and other related matters pertaining to the current operation of 'special education in ethics' being conducted in State schools, and whether the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 should be repealed."

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Whilst we welcome this scrutiny of the school curriculum, a number of our parents are concerned that this inquiry may lead to a recommendation that ethics classes should be cancelled.

Given the popularity of these classes at Randwick School, we feel that this result would be a disappointing outcome for our school community. By way of example one of our ethics class students has expressed his own disappointment in a letter that was published in the Sydney Morning Herald on 1 August 2011.¹

Randwick School P&C supports ethics classes as an alternative to SRE classes. We submit that the Committee of Inquiry should recommend that ethics classes are maintained as an option for children not attending SRE classes.

Should the Committee require any further information from Randwick Public School about the ethics program, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Ben Ashton
President, Randwick School P&C

¹ <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/keep-your-politics-out-of-our-classrooms-nr-nile-20110801-1j77c.html>