

Submission
No 28

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 4/12/2011

Partially Confidential

5 December 2011

The Chairperson

Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

Parliament House

SYDNEY 2000

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

SUBMISSION: ETHICS CLASSES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

I understand that the Parliament is conducting a formal inquiry to examine “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in ethics’ being conducted in State schools, and whether the *Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010* should be repealed.”

I make this submission with respect to the ‘and other related matters’ part of the terms of reference for this inquiry.

Normally I would support any enquiry into a new initiative, but the inclusion of the clause ‘and whether the *Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010* should be repealed’ suggests to me that the future of ethics classes in NSW public schools is already threatened.

Why would we be looking at repealing the legislation when ethics classes have only operated for less than two years? Why are we not **evaluating** what has been done to date, without a political sting in the tail which suggests that there is a pre-ordained outcome, that is, repealing the legislation which makes those classes possible?

I support ethics classes in public schools. As a teacher in NSW public schools and a parent of children who attended public schools, I found it quite discriminatory that my children and other children who did not go to Special Religious Education (SRE) classes were left to their own devices during the times those classes were held. Not only that, we were prohibited from giving those children anything meaningful to do during that time. No doubt many of the children enjoyed ‘time out’ from classes, but this is a waste of their time and of public education resources when teachers have to supervise children who are not engaged in structured education.

Now we have vested interests in our society telling us that they should have a say in what our children should do, that is, nothing, while their children attend SRE classes. That is, they want to force on us their will that our children may not be offered a meaningful alternative while their children attend SRE classes.

This is outrageous. I believe that children who do not attend SRE should be offered a meaningful alternative and ethics classes would seem to fill the need in providing an opportunity

for children to discuss the bigger questions and values underpinning life as a good citizen in today's society – which, I would argue, is also the point of most religions.

If the argument is that the children who attend SRE classes miss out on ethics classes, then the supporters of SRE classes are free to organise other opportunities for those children to gain ethics education, rather than deny the opportunity to the children of their non-supporters. Although one has to wonder, then, why the SRE classes don't involve ethics education within the framework of whichever religion is being taught.

This suggests that there might be a need for what is being taught in SRE classes to be formally examined. I note that there has never been a formal inquiry to examine “the stated objectives, curriculum, implementation, effectiveness and other related matters pertaining to the current operation of Special Religious Education classes conducted in State schools, and whether the legislation allowing those classes should be repealed.”

I support ethics classes remaining a permanent feature of NSW public schools and the retention of the *Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010*.

Yours sincerely