

Submission  
No 363

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 24/02/2012

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Partially Confidential

## To the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

### Need for a further inquiry

I believe there is no need to complete a further inquiry into the objectives, curriculum, implementation, effectiveness and other related matters pertaining to the current operation of 'special education in ethics'.

The Ethics Evaluation Final Report published in November 2010 was very comprehensive, with its objectives stated as follows.

"The evaluation of the ethics course was designed to:

1. Provide an overview of the trial ethics course.
2. Critically analyse the quality of the course content, activities and resources.
3. Evaluate the efficacy of the course in relation to improving students' understanding of and skills in ethical decision making.
4. Determine whether the organization used by the St James Ethic Centre for the ethics trial for Stage 3 students is a viable option for wider implementation in NSW government schools.
5. Make recommendations for improvement to the quality of the course and support materials and/or the arrangements for the delivery of the course."<sup>1</sup>

The report concluded that:

"The findings of the evaluation demonstrate the effectiveness of the course in relation to improving students' understanding and skills in ethical decision making, and the overall appropriateness of the course content, activities and resources and of the associated training. The evaluation also points to the success of the organisational model employed by the St James Ethics Centre, and considers the viability of this model for wider implementation of the course in NSW government schools."<sup>2</sup>

I think that unfortunately the proposed inquiry is motivated by politics rather than concern for the community and I don't believe the need for it to proceed is a reflection of the views of a significant part of the community. If the inquiry is to proceed, I would ask as to why it is that only ethics is being inquired into; surely a similar thing should be done with other extra-curricular activities, including SRE?

### Repeal of the Ethics Act

I do not believe that the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 should be repealed.

I was pleased when the NSW ethics course trial was approved. The situation in NSW public schools was that if parents didn't feel it was appropriate for their children to attend SRE classes, those children were left to do fundamentally meaningless tasks rather than receiving some sort of useful learning. This in itself was unacceptable.

Since I believed in a relevant alternative to SRE, I volunteered as an ethics co-ordinator. It is my role to recruit ethics teachers for the local school. I was pleased to see the calibre of, and the enthusiasm from, the applicants.

For the first classes, which started half-way through 2011, we had only eight students. However in 2012 we have had an increase to 30 students. Virtually all the students that attended last year have selected to attend again. It shows that the parents and/or the children find the classes useful and think that it is a better alternative than to sitting around "doing nothing".

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[https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/detresources/Ethics\\_Evaluation\\_Final\\_Report\\_11112010\\_HQssrhmwK.pdf](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/detresources/Ethics_Evaluation_Final_Report_11112010_HQssrhmwK.pdf), accessed 23/2/12

<sup>2</sup> ibid

I think that the ability for Primary Ethics (<http://www.primaryethics.com.au/>) to find volunteers both as ethics co-ordinators and ethics teachers across NSW shows that there is a real interest in the wider community to have a quality alternative to SRE. There is a significant part of the NSW population<sup>3</sup> that have declared themselves as having no religious affiliation (14.2%) as well as a residual of persons who have not declared or inadequately described their views (10.1%).

Based on the diversity in the Australian society, I believe that as long as SRE classes continue to be held in NSW public schools, there needs to be a secular alternative and I think the current ethics classes suit the purpose well.

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<sup>3</sup> 6,549,165 as per <http://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au/publications/benchbks/equality/section04.pdf>, accessed 23/2/12