

**Submission  
No 378**

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

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## SUBMISSION TO THE GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO 2 ON THE REVIEW OF THE EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS) ACT 2010

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I am the Ethics Co-ordinator for Annandale Public School (APS) and for the reasons outlined below, I submit that the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2012 should NOT be repealed.

### Introduction and uptake of Ethics classes at APS

Ethics classes for students in Years 5 and 6 were introduced at APS in Term 3 of 2011. Only students who had already opted out of Special Religious Education (SRE or 'Scripture') were invited to opt in to Ethics classes. As shown in **Table 1** below, the majority of students in non-scripture (79% across both years combined) opted to join Ethics classes in 2011. The same pattern has been observed in February 2012, with 73% of non-scripture students in Years 5 and 6 opting to join Ethics for the current year. All of the returning students who took ethics classes in year 5 in 2011 are taking ethics classes again in year 6 in 2012. What is also evident in the table is that not a single student has switched from Scripture to Ethics in 2011 or 2012.

**Table 1 Numbers of students attending Ethics classes at APS in 2011 and 2012**

Year	Prior to introduction of Ethics				After introduction of Ethics			
	Scripture	Non-scripture	Ethics in prior year	Total	Scripture	Non-scripture	Ethics in current year	Total
<b>2011</b> <sup>a</sup>								
Year 5	9	14	n/a	23	9	4	10	23
Year 6	12	14	n/a	26	12	2	12	26
<b>2012</b> <sup>b</sup>								
Year 5	7	28	n/a	35	7	8	20	35
Year 6	9	3	9	21	9	3	9	21

<sup>a</sup> based on class rolls at start of term 3 2011; there were minor fluctuations during terms 3 and 4 due to students leaving and joining the school

<sup>b</sup> classes for 2012 are still being finalised, these figures are based on written expressions of interest from parents, confirmed places, and the known school roll as at 22 February 2012.

### Feedback from Students

On 7th December 2011 our two ethics teachers undertook an evaluation survey of the students' experience of ethics through 2011. Eighteen (18) students completed this written evaluation of ethics classes. A summary of the responses is provided below.

**Table 2 Evaluation survey of students in Ethics at APS at the end of 2011**

Statement	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
I enjoy going to Ethics classes	18	0	0
My Ethics Teacher is a good teacher	18	0	0
I like the ethical topics that we discuss	16	0	2
The children in my Ethics class are generally well-behaved	0	4	14
I think more deeply about ethical issues now than I used to	16	0	2
I would like to continue doing Ethics classes next year	17	0	1

**Open questions: What did you enjoy about ethics?**

Summary: 6 students liked discussing the topics, 4 students liked it all, 4 students liked learning, 4 students liked talking, 4 students liked being with their friends, 2 students liked talking to the students rather than the teacher, 1 student liked being with their classmates, 1 student liked that the topics were realistic, 1 student liked having fun, 1 student liked the teachers

Verbatim responses:

- I liked everything
- I liked it all!!!
- I liked talking to other kids not the teacher
- I liked discussing the topics
- I liked it all
- I liked it all!
- I like talking with the classmates and discussing the topics
- I enjoyed discussing the topics
- All the people in my class and how realistic all the topics were so you can relate to them
- Talking to the students rather than the teachers
- I enjoyed being with my friends and talking
- Talking to people
- Being with friends and talking about subjects
- Discussing all the different topics each week, and learning with my friends
- I enjoyed the interesting topics
- I enjoyed being with my peers and learning things that I didn't know and at the same time having fun, and contributing to the conversation
- Learning about ethical topics and understanding the topics
- Learning about the different ethics topics with some of your friends is very enjoyable. Also the teachers are very calm and fun to be with and makes it better to learn

**What is something you would change about ethics?**

Summary: 14 students said they wouldn't change anything, 3 students said they'd change the behaviour of the class, 1 student suggested the classes be outside

- Verbatim responses:
- I would change nothing
- I wouldn't change a thing!!
- I wouldn't change anything
- And I wouldn't change anything
- nothing at all

- nothing change :)
- I would change nothing!!!!!!
- nothing!!
- I would change nothing
- I would change nothing
- Nothing
- Nothing
- nothing
- The behaviour of the other people in our ethics class
- I would like to change the places we did ethics, I would prefer it to be outside
- Nothing
- I would change the behaviour of our peers like talking over each other and so on
- The noisiness of the classroom and how everyone should listen a bit more

### **Summary and conclusions**

The conclusions that can be drawn from the data above are that:

- (i) the majority of students participating in non-scripture have chosen to join Ethics classes,
- (ii) the students enjoy participating in Ethics classes with a very high retention rate,
- (iii) the parents of children participating in Ethics are supportive of the Ethics programme,
- (iv) our school Principal and teachers are supportive of the Ethics programme,
- (v) the introduction of Ethics classes at our school has had no impact on the number of children attending scripture classes.

In summary, I believe that Ethics classes provide a stimulating and enriching alternative to 'non-scripture' when students are otherwise involved in compulsory periods of non-curricular/non-educational activities. Consequently, Ethics classes should be allowed to continue in NSW in accordance with the 2010 legislation, and the proposed Amendment to repeal the legislation should be rejected.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Sarah Norris**  
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