

**Submission
No 135**

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

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

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission regarding the proposal to have an Inquiry into Ethics classes in NSW.

I am the parent of a nine year old child in a NSW public school, a volunteer ethics teacher, and I have a Masters of Bioethics (hons) from the University of Sydney.

Teaching the Primary Ethics curriculum last year was challenging and rewarding, and I believe that it was valuable for those students who attended. Indeed, I will never forget the rapt silence that fell upon my group when I described the Nelson Mandela's imprisonment and subsequent rise to lead to his country, in the context of reflection upon what constitutes 'a good life'. Subsequently, a student shared her perspective on novel she was reading on mid-century race relations in America's south to further discussions about discrimination, race and institutional inequality. This showed me that the students cared about the issues we were discussing in ethics.

Primary school children want and need to explore their own values and those of the world around them. They enjoy the opportunity to ask 'what should I do?' and 'how should we live?' In my view, this program enables students to develop the critical thinking skills that they need to grow into secure, ethical adults.

Senator Nile's call for an inquiry on ethics classes seems premature – my understanding is that there has never been a similar inquiry into the teaching of SRE. If this inquiry goes ahead, it should apply equally to SRE classes.

The NSW legislation, prior to the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010, systematically discriminated against students whose parents did not want them to be inducted into a particular faith. The 2010 Act has restored equity by enabling those students who are absented from SRE to participate in an alternative educational program. To repeal this Act would be state-sanctioned discrimination against students on religious grounds in secular schools. It simply would not make sense.

Sincerely,

Bridget Haire