

Submission  
No 189

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 21/02/2012

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Partially Confidential

## **Submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 inquiring into Ethics Classes**

This submission is in regards to the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011

By:

Date: 21 February 2012

My Son started school this year and every Tuesday morning goes to the library with all the other children who do not attend SRE classes. My wife and I have decided not send our children to SRE classes as it is our opinion that religious belief is a private matter. My wife is Christian (Uniting Church) and I am not religious. Since SRE is about instructing children in the tenets of a particular faith, rather than educating about religion in general, we have decided it would be more appropriate to teach our children about our family's beliefs ourselves.

The situation, whereby children who do not attend SRE classes are sent to the school library or a spare classroom, without being allowed to do anything meaningful, is discriminatory and completely unacceptable. Segregating children in this way is divisive and should not occur in secular public schools in our multicultural society.

Schools don't offer an SRE class for all the different religious faiths. Usually only the main faiths are available. What are the children of parents who belong to minority religions or who aren't religious at all supposed to think? Are their family's beliefs and philosophies not good enough? Sending your children to another religions SRE class may contradict what you want your children to learn and so the only option is to go to the non-scripture class.

The introduction of ethics classes last year, as an alternative to SRE classes, was a very welcome change. Teaching children about ethical inquiry is such a wonderful idea and this is a good use of their time. I look forward to ethics classes being rolled out to all years in primary school (and secondary school) soon so our children do not have to spend valuable school time, during the scripture time slot, doing nothing. The government should provide every assistance possible to ensure these classes are a success.

The benefit to our children and society at large by both, removing the negative impact of discrimination whilst at school, and, teaching ethical inquiry and thinking skills, would be positive.

If the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 were repealed, there would no longer be a legal requirement for schools to offer ethics classes as an option for children not attending SRE classes. This would mean that the unacceptable situation, whereby the non-scripture class children are not allowed to do anything meaningful during the SRE time slot, would continue. The NSW government would be responsible for allowing discrimination to occur against thousands of children in NSW.

The scrutiny of programs in schools should always be welcome in order to ensure that the best programs and outcomes are being achieved for our children. As such I would welcome any investigation into the ethics classes in order to make improvements where possible.

However, I call for a parallel investigation to be conducted into the objectives, intent and curriculum of SRE classes and the respective SRE class providers in order for parents, schools and The Department of Education and Training to properly understand what is taught in SRE classes and be sure that the best use is being made of our children's precious school time.

I am puzzled and saddened by why some of our community's churches and SRE providers are against the introduction of ethics classes as an alternative to SRE. However, I am heartened by the fact that many other religious organisations support the introduction of ethics classes. The promotion and maintenance of a tolerant secular society is a benefit to everyone, whether religious or not. No one should be discriminated against on the basis of their religious beliefs or the religious beliefs of their parents.

Please do not repeal the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010.