

**Submission
No 92**

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

Name: Ms Greta Werner

Date received: 3/02/2012

The Hon. Marie FICARRA

Chair

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2.

3 February 2012

Dear Ms Ficarra MP,

Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011 (Inquiry)

According to the St James Ethics Centre website: "The central question of ethics is: **"What ought one to do?"**" Thus ethics is about values and about distinguishing between right and wrong actions.

Children in special religious education are being taught values that are based on their religion. These values form a framework which helps the children answer the question: "What ought I to do?". This forms an important part of their moral compass and their ability to contribute positively to the broader community.

It is not intended, nor possible for ethics classes to replace Special Religious Education (SRE).

Both Jude Hennessy, the spokesman for the Catholic Conference of Religious Education in State Schools, and Dr Bryan Cowling from the Anglican Education Commission were quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) in 2011 as being comfortable that SRE classes were not being affected, and that they therefore were happy for ethics classes to continue.

Dr Cowling is quoted in the article as saying about the ethics curriculum that "It's good educational stuff." and that: "I'm comfortable with the current arrangements and so is the Anglican Church."

The article goes on to point out: "... Dr Cowling said removing the classes would be "undemocratic" and Mr Nile's proposal risked throwing the whole area into turmoil, so "ultimately [that] could mean SRE could disappear altogether," he said. "I don't think his position can be defended on the basis of

fairness." (SMH accessed on 3 February 2012, <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/nile-isolated-as-anglicans-back-ethics-classes-20110720-1hp05.html#ixzz1lBXfMRfB>)

There are significant numbers of children in non scripture, who are not being taught any values at all during the time that SRE classes are held. Children don't necessarily develop the ability to make reasoned judgements on their own. Formal training in this area is highly beneficial, even for children who already possess these skills. It allows children to enhance their ethical reasoning, which is a skill they will take into adulthood.

It is for the benefit of the whole community that children who do not participate in SRE, be taught how to make decisions based on well reasoned and responsible arguments. Children are given more freedoms and responsibilities as they grow up. Eventually, they become young adults with the ability to have a significant impact on those around them, and the broader community. Even commonplace decisions, such as whether to drive a car after drinking alcohol, benefit from ethical inquiry. Such ethical inquiry, often quite simple, and made in a split second, can avoid personal catastrophes and potential horrific impacts on random strangers.

Ethics education reduces the likelihood of actions that are based on thoughtlessness, vagueness, or insufficient ethical enquiry. Offering this to children on a large scale, who have no other values based framework for decision-making in their lives, will make a huge positive difference to the whole NSW community. It even has the potential to reduce crime rates, reduce traffic accidents and reduce domestic violence in the future.

Based on the above arguments, I recommend that 'special education in ethics' be supported by the government and that the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 be left in place.

Yours sincerely,
Greta Werner