

**Submission  
No 38**

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

**Name:** Ms Rachel Griffiths

**Date received:** 4/12/2011

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Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2011

F.T.A.O Ms Beverly Duffy,

I am writing to express my grave concern in regards to the continuing threat to ethics classes in NSW. There are a number of issues that raise considerable concern that need to be addressed in regards to this matter.

Firstly, Rev. Fred Niles does not clearly act in the name-sake of his party, namely: 'democratic' in the least, but rather is ruled by his own personal religious beliefs. His attacks on ethics classes are a direct attack to the value of our democratic nation itself. Democracy starts with the public opinion and ethics classes have only occurred due to years, many years of 'parents' continued fighting for them to happen. Ethics classes are not a result of 'a' persons beliefs or even Primary Ethics themselves, but rather of seriously concerned parents who wish to enact their democratic rights over such an important issue as religious beliefs. The move by Rev. Fred Niles to impose his own beliefs through his political power is nothing short of disgusting and disturbing that such acts can be allowed to happen in our modern era. Should there be some sound reasoning by Rev. Fred Niles to move to abandon ethics classes then this would provide strength to his weak argument, which personally I find insulting as his truer intention is quite apparent. To date I have not read any 'reasonable' argument put forward by Rev. Fred Niles objections to ethics classes, yet clearly all that has been put forward is 'smoke and mirrors' to try to blind a nation to Fred Niles own personal agenda that Christian studies be endorsed in schools.

Personally, I have grown up in a strong Christadelphian family and attended Sunday school for many years. I see both the benefits and beauty of religious belief when it has been reached through faith and is enacted in a truer sense of moral grounding not extreme activity. However, I am opposed to the 'way' religious education is implemented in schools. Firstly, religious belief is a personal belief and I believe that modern families should not have to be faced with such dilemmas as having their children indoctrinated into chiefly Christian beliefs 'at school'. Rather, I will choose to religiously educate my own daughter at home and will educate her of a variety of religions and their histories and beliefs. Instead what we have is, people of Christian belief coming into schools and teaching young children (who might I add not have the rational capabilities to comprehend such abstract concepts as a God) from their own viewpoint that 'their' religion is 'the' religion. I could go into depth here about what values are being taught such as God is male, and furthermore biblical stories endorse males superiority over females specifically. The imprinting on young child as fore-mentioned who do not have the psychological capabilities to comprehend such events in either abstract or historical capacities can have negative impacting on the way a child views the way the world order is. I could go into great depth on this matter but will refrain. This creates a situation where children are being taught 'what' to believe as opposed to being taught about religion from a more objective view point-this is what Christian or Buddhists believe it is their faith, there is a substantial difference to being told this 'is' how it is.

I firmly believe that it is religious study classes that should be under investigation and reviewed to align with a more modern and democratic, furthermore multicultural perspective. If we should be teaching religion seriously to our children then it should be taught from an educational point of view, 'not' from a personal point of view. We should be implementing a proper curriculum that is sensitive to religious beliefs being enforced onto our children. Moreover, schools should be teaching religion with their own staff not Christian people or

Islamic teachers coming into schools and teaching (this could be also implemented for ethics classes too) in order to gain a proper balance. Finally, there being four terms in a years a religion should only be taught for one term, hence children can gain a balance perspective of 'world' religions such as Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian (this being broken into Catholic beliefs, Church of England and so forth) studies in each term. Only through this type of implementation can we begin to have a more balanced religious studies curriculum that teaches our children a more global perspective encompassing not only tolerance but rather acceptance and embracing an understanding of other religious.

A third point is in regards to the NSW education legalization and policy that clearly states that children are not forced to attend religious studies classes with written exception from their parents. Furthermore the policy again clearly states:

Principals are responsible for responding sensitively to the beliefs of parents/caregivers and their children and for taking all steps to minimise feelings of discomfort or embarrassment on the part of students. This will be aided by the publication of a clear school policy and procedures statement for the benefit of staff and parents/caregivers and contain a statement about:

- the right of parents/caregivers under the Act to take this action
- the responsibility of the school to provide information about courses if requested
- appropriate supervision or alternative studies

(NSW Department of education and communities)

Again my point of major concern is that Rev. Fred Niles implements no rational argument against ethics classes, and further to this his wish to abolish ethics classes run contrary to what is stated in the NSW policy. Ethics classes are the only meaningful alternative we are offered for our children. What should be under investigation is the fact that schools are not providing appropriate alternative 'at all' when children are made except from religious studies classes, let alone the nature in which these religious classes are taught in a subjective and preaching manner to our children this is 'not' acceptable. Children have been made to clean the playground during the time when 'proper' supervision should have been given whilst not attending religious studies classes. Has this been addressed? In my own experience at the school my child will attend next year, we have been offered no acceptable alternative. An indirect experience at this same school their daughter was made to sit inside the 'same' classroom by herself facing the wall, what is this saying to other children and how is this poor girl to feel- she is made to feel not only isolated by as though she has done something wrong. Furthermore, sitting outside a classroom is not 'suitable' alternative either. Finally, being offered to take your child into school half an hour late so as to miss the class altogether is not acceptable either especially for those working mums and dads. Therefore, if this does not provide a sound and rational argument as to why it should be schools that should be the ones under investigate as to why there are not adhering to NSW policies in regards to providing a suitable alternative to religious studies class then I feel not only are we being let down by our school but also the NSW government. Furthermore, the 'way' religion is being taught in schools should be reviewed. I ask: when was it ever reviewed? How long have we been teaching religion in schools? Why are we not asking these kinds of questions if ethics classes are to be reviewed as suitable then why do we not examine what has actually brought about ethics classes, it is clearly because of the dissatisfaction with religious studies themselves, so what is this saying to us?

Ethics classes provide a meaningful alternative to religious studies classes that thousands of parents having been fighting for, for many years. I implore the NSW government to take a stand to up hold our democratic values and question: what argument is Rev. Fred Niles really putting forward? Is our education policy really being upheld for all concerned? Is fair that children are being pushed to being put into religious classes because we have no alterative? Or are children are being left with an unacceptable alternative and further being made to feel ostracized?

This really is a matter for deep consideration that concerns thousands of families in NSW, I can only hope that my letter and those of other parents are heard and given the due consideration needed.

Kind regards,

Rachel Griffiths

For any further correspondence in regards to this matter please use the contacts below:

Reference:

New South Wales Department of education and communities, accessed at:  
<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/policies/religion/assets/pdf/implementation.pdf>, accessed: December 2011.