

**Submission
No 282**

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

Name: Mrs Jenny Collison

Date received: 24/02/2012

To: The Honourable Maria Ficarra - Inquiry to investigate ethics classes

I strongly oppose the suggested repeal of the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010.

My reasons for opposing the suggested repeal are as follows:

1. Discrimination against different religions and belief systems: If you do not want your child to attend SRE lessons for whatever reason (be it because you have different religious beliefs or because you are an atheist or agnostic), why should your child miss out on valuable learning opportunities as a result? All good parents (regardless of their religion or belief system) want their children to be taught how to become morally upright citizens. In a state-based, secular schooling system, all parents should have the right to choose whether their child attends either a faith-based or secular class during the SRE period.

2. Discrimination against children: Prior to ethics being offered as a complement to SRE, many children (whose parents had elected for them not to attend SRE) sat around effectively doing nothing. Or if they weren't "doing nothing", they were doing other time-wasting, non-educational activities - like picking up rubbish or sitting in a hallway outside the Principal's office (as if the child was on detention). This was clearly a completely unacceptable and morally reprehensible state of affairs and it should never be allowed to happen ever again.

3. Strong public support: The independent review of the trial ethics classes, conducted in 2010, clearly demonstrates that there is strong public support for ethics classes. I've been advised that 98% of the submissions for that review were in favour of the ethics classes. Furthermore, I understand that the Sydney Morning Herald conducted a poll on 4 August 2011 and that over 92% of the 26,744 respondents were in favour of ethics classes.

4. Strong parent support: I also understand that:

- in less than 6 months during 2010, over 130 P&Cs across NSW voted on a motion to change DET's policy to include ethics classes as a complement to SRE classes; and
- not a single P&C voted against the change to DET's policy, which means that 100% of school P&Cs, which were aware of the opportunity to vote on this issue, voted in favour of allowing ethics classes to be taught.

I would also like the Committee to consider the following additional questions:

5. Why are SRE classes not being examined as part of the inquiry? Any educational program should be reviewed on a regular basis. Why is the SRE program (which has existed since the 19th century as part of the state education system) not ever been reviewed by the Department of Education? Why does the current inquiry seek only to examine ethics classes and not to examine SRE classes at all? Shouldn't SRE classes be subject to the same process of inquiry and examination that is currently under way for ethics classes?

6. Why is there an annual celebration for only SRE teachers? Why has the government agreed to provide an annual celebration of SRE classes to acknowledge the efforts of SRE teachers and has not provided a similar celebration to acknowledge the efforts of the ethics class volunteers? Isn't it discriminatory to acknowledge the efforts of only one group of volunteers in a state-based schooling system - especially when the SRE classes and ethics classes take place during the same time slot in the school curriculum? Shouldn't any such state-supported and sponsored celebration of SRE class volunteers include ethics class volunteers (and ideally all public school volunteers) as well?

Yours sincerely
Jenny Collison