

**Submission
No 226**

INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES REPEAL) BILL 2011

Organisation: Ferncourt Public School Parents and Citizens Association
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Ferncourt Public School *Parents & Citizens' Association*

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Submission from Ferncourt Public School P&C regarding Ethics Classes

Ferncourt Public School Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) support the continuation of ethics classes.

As Ferncourt Public School in Marrickville has such a diverse and multicultural school community, its students are offered a broad range of scripture classes. In 2010, Ferncourt Year 5 and 6 students participated in the Ethics Pilot Program. It was the first school to start ethics classes in February 2011.

Ferncourt P & C supports the ongoing provision and choice of attending scripture classes but also feels strongly that students who have opted out of scripture should not be discriminated against through enforced 'time out' from any meaningful activity while the scripture classes are on.

Ethics classes provide those students that choose not to attend scripture classes with an option to engage in some meaningful activity.

Ferncourt school community is fully supportive of the ethics classes continuing. This continues to be demonstrated by the number of families that enrol their children in the classes:

- 67% of Year 5 and 52% of Year 6 students participated in the pilot scheme
- 43% of Year 5 and 61% of Year 6 students enrolled in the program in 2011
- 50% of Year 5 and 54% of Year 6 children are now enrolled in the program.

These are students who otherwise would be confined to non curricula activities (ie time out) while the scripture classes are being taught.

Ferncourt School's experience has been that the ethics program (including the pilot) has not had a detrimental impact on the number of students enrolled in scripture classes; it has just

provided the option of a more meaningful activity for students who had already opted out of those classes. The students who have attended the ethics classes have thoroughly enjoyed the lessons and reported that they found them valuable and that they learnt many skills which have helped them in their daily life – how to listen to others, respect others' opinions, think critically and to think about issues that affect their lives. Students also reported that they preferred to attend the ethics classes to the previously offered alternative to scripture classes of 'doing nothing'.

The ethics teachers at Ferncourt come from the parent community and they are highly skilled people who are keen to volunteer their time to teach the program. They report that they have thoroughly enjoyed the experience and have been impressed by the enthusiasm of the students and their engagement with the material.

The Primary Ethics program is an outstanding program, which has been put together by experts and has undergone the most stringent testing to ensure the content is suitable for its audience. The teachers are skilled and dedicated and do an excellent job and it has the support of the school and its community. There would be a huge hole at Ferncourt, and across the public school system, if ethics classes were no longer available and Ferncourt parents and students would certainly find this unacceptable and protest to stop this from happening. We must all ensure that discrimination in the public education system against students who opt out of scripture classes does not continue.

Thank you for accepting our submission and we hope you conclude that there is a place for the continuation of ethics classes alongside scripture classes.

Yours sincerely

Trish Hellyer

P&C President

Ferncourt Public School