

Submission  
No 312

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

**Name:** Ms Tinny Hon

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Partially Confidential

## Parliamentary inquiry into Ethics

Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my support for ethics classes. I am also writing to you as a voter, insisting that the government keep its promise to allow families like mine the right to have a secular alternative at scripture time in our secular public schools.

I have been associated with Primary Ethics since mid 2011 when I became the ethics coordinator for my children's school. In August last year, I asked to be more involved and was appointed Volunteers Manager. As Volunteers Manager I oversee the work of nearly 200 volunteers for Primary Ethics. We live in [redacted] a suburb well serviced by churches. Accordingly, the various scripture groups are well catered for at my children's school. My children are in years 2, 4 and 6. They have been in non-scripture their entire school lives. My youngest child sits on the floor in the store room with a handful of other children during scripture time. My two older children have been having non-scripture in the library. Usually they draw or colour-in. They're not allowed to talk to their friends or play or have a nap, things I wouldn't mind them doing every week. I volunteered for Primary Ethics because I was overjoyed that I could contribute to the establishment of ethics in their school, both so that children could have something good to do in that time and because I love ethics.

My daughter [redacted] is 11 and in year 6 this year. She attended ethics classes last year, and does so again this year. Her lessons have inspired some passionate and thought provoking dinner table discussions. We have always enjoyed debating ethical dilemmas as a family and ethics classes is precisely what children need to hone their skills of inquiry. It helps them weigh and assess their own beliefs and those of others. We often come to a deadlock, for example we might conclude something is right and ethical yet also something we do not do, or are reluctant to do. It is important to me that my children learn that decisions are not black and white, that life is a complex web of interconnecting points, and that humans often do what is unethical, or feel compromised even when they do what they think is right.

I also have a long standing personal interest in ethics. It is my main area of research both academically and for leisure. Its charm lies its relevance to our daily lives. This is isn't something just for green Arts students to hypothesise without the constraints of reality. An understanding of how to form a rational, sensible and robust ethical principal is something we should all cultivate because the capacity to communicate with others, being able to say what you mean and support what you say, is what defines us as special amongst animals. It is how we form societies, communities, and our deepest friendships. The ability to exchange ideas with others is what makes life most interesting and rewarding for me.

From the point of view of someone involved in the implementation of ethics classes in schools, I have had the privilege of watching the curriculum evolve and refine. The topics are always relevant and interesting, always giving children something to think about, suggesting that they might double check, then maybe challenge, some of their assumptions. The

curriculum has been carefully crafted to be suitable for primary school aged children and I know from my own experience at my children's school that children often say flippant things or get sidetracked and stray on irrelevant tangents in class but the underlying ideas and themes and questions stay in their heads. They talk about it with their friends in the playground, they talk about it at home, I love to overhear my children talk things through amongst themselves. I love that they are starting to seek validity in arguments, that they can think of counter examples, that they can spot faulty logic and straw men.

At \_\_\_\_\_, we have 15 students from years 5 and 6. We have two teachers; one is a local resident, university student and is an ex student of \_\_\_\_\_

Our other teacher is a parent from school. He is also studying, undertaking a Masters degree in primary teaching. His child is in year 2, so while neither of my teachers have children who can attend classes, they both feel strongly enough about classes that they have carved out time in their busy lives to meet these children every week. Across my school regions I see this repeated frequently. Grandparents, retired locals, local business people, stay at home parents who have a morning without their charges, all give up their spare time to come lead an ethics class. Assessing the volunteers before they are appointed is one of my core tasks as Volunteers Manager and I see that they are different in many ways but very similar in some striking ways. Most of our volunteers have impressive educations, many of them are business owners, and most of them have professional work backgrounds. Classes a get started more quickly and easily in the more affluent parts of Sydney. I believe it is a combination of people having the time and/or flexibility to volunteer, and having had enough education to understand the value of what we do. I mention this not because I find entrepreneurs, lawyers, and academics better for ethics than others, but to show that Sydney's busiest and brightest people flock to Primary Ethics. This is what they want to make time for. These people could give their time and energy to any cause, but they choose to support ethics for our children.

We now have hundreds of volunteers in hundreds of schools, and more demand every day. Many schools have class numbers that have doubled from last year. One school I manage, \_\_\_\_\_, has gone from less than half a class (9 students in Dec 2011) to enough children for four classes (75 wanted to opt-in in term 1, 2012). Even in areas of Sydney with a high proportion of active church goers, our schools are finding interest for one or two classes. It is undeniable that there is great demand and acceptance of ethics classes.

The Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 should not be repealed because not only does the public want them but it is time for our secular government and its secular public schools to be as open to ethics classes as they are to Scripture. No child should be discriminated against because their parents don't want them to join the available scripture classes. Philosophy and ethics are an enduring and respected part of University humanities programs worldwide so the content can't be abhorrent to the reasonable member of the public. It's certainly not something we need to shield our children from. Primary Ethics welcomes questions and scrutiny but as a citizen and a member of my community, I do not understand why similar scrutiny has never been cast over the curriculum of any scripture providers. Perhaps it is because we, as a society, accept that people believe different things. Rev Nile does not seem to object to different gods, and their corresponding values systems, being

taught to children during SRE, yet he cannot accept that some of us want our children to learn how to form their own beliefs based on truth, facts and logic, fostered in a circle of peers listening and talking to each other.

The truth is Mr Nile is not that illogical or ignorant. The public can see the artifice in this inquiry. The word 'unethical' comes up a lot in the accompanying discourse. I urge the government to act ethically and maintain our right to give our children the tools to make good decisions without reference to any god.

(Ms) Tinny Hon

**Ethics Coordinator :**  
**Volunteers Manager :**