

Submission  
No 102

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Submission to the NSW Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 in regard to the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) 2012 (Inquiry)

*I write in support of the recently instituted ethics classes in NSW Primary Schools. I strongly encourage the Committee to recommend that the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 be retained unamended.*

The ethics classes instituted by the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 have been highly successful in their objective to educate children in how to make ethical judgements and to act responsibly.

This was clearly established through the thorough trial of ethics classes, prior to their introduction in NSW schools. The trial involved ten schools and was thoroughly and systematically assessed by Dr Sue Knight from the University of South Australia and other leading academics. Over 750 submissions were made as part of the trial, with 97% offering support for the introduction of ethics, indicating the extent of community support for the classes alongside the professional evaluation of the curriculum conducted by Dr Knight.

In the first year of operation, over 400 skilled and highly motivated volunteers have been recruited, trained, and accredited as ethics teachers, serving over 150 schools. Over 3500 students have already joined the classes, with the vast majority of these students being drawn from the pool of students who has previously elected not to attend scripture. This further demonstrates the depth of community support for the ethics classes.

Opposition to the classes has largely come from certain religious groups. However, it is worth noting that, contrary to popular perception, many religious groups have always supported the introduction of ethics classes. For example, the Uniting Church in Australia supported the introduction of ethics classes in its submission to the evaluation of the trial. In commenting on the submission, the Executive Director of the Uniting Church NSW Board of Education said:

*“It is also part of our commitment to the values of Jesus that we must advocate for justice for ‘non-scripture’ students who are denied a meaningful educational experience during SRE times, simply because of their parents’ decision to opt them out of Special Religious Education. The ethics classes provide a meaningful alternative.” (Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT, Media Release, August 16, 2010)<sup>1</sup>*

This demonstrates that for many Christians, practicing their faith actually leads them to *support* the ethics classes out of a sense of social justice for all people, not just those who adhere to their religion.

Furthermore, some religious groups who previously opposed the classes have since changed their position in the light of the trial, their own review of the curriculum, and the success of the classes in their first year. For example, since the introduction of the ethics classes both the Anglican Church and the Catholic Church have reversed their opposition to the ethics classes:

*“The leading opponent to the introduction of ethics classes in NSW schools, the Anglican Church, has reversed its position and says they should be retained, while the Catholic Church now argues they should not be removed as they have ‘little impact’ on the teaching of scripture.” (Sydney Morning Herald, 21 July, 2011)<sup>2</sup>*

To this I add my personal support for the ethics classes as a practicing Christian with three young children, all of whom are currently in primary school attending weekly SRE classes. I am delighted to see friends of my children who had previously opted out of SRE have the option of undertaking ethics classes. I also note that the ethics curriculum has been constructed to allow faith based organisations providing SRE to use it as a base, modifying it to reflect their own religious tradition. Indeed, as a person of faith, I look forward to the continuation of the ethics classes providing much needed impetus to improve the quality of SRE provided by my own religious tradition.

In summary, the ethics classes have been highly successful in achieving their stated objectives; the quality of the curriculum has been confirmed by independent, expert review; the implementation has been successful and effective in establishing a strong base of trained and accredited volunteers in such a short space of time; and, the community support, including that of many religious communities, remains overwhelming.

*I strongly encourage the Committee to recommend that the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 be retained unamended.*

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> <http://nsw.uca.org.au/documents/bylaws/releases/Church%20supports%20ethics%20classes.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/nile-isolated-as-anglicans-back-ethics-classes-20110720-1hp05.html#ixzz1TGSCIAP3>