

Submission
No 112

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 9/02/2012

Partially Confidential

Thursday 9 February 2012

The Director

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

Parliament House

Macquarie St

Sydney NSW 2000

To whom it may concern:

RE: Inquiry into Ethics Classes

As a parent of two pre-school aged children I am very concerned about the possible erosion of the Ethics Classes. My eldest will be commencing school in 2013, and I expect that she should have the opportunity to attend Ethics Classes, as should every child. I do not want my children attending SRE classes, and believe that they deserve a meaningful alternative.

When I was a child I attended religious education at school, if it is fair to call it education, when the "teacher" in fact has no formal teaching qualifications, and is not adhering to a stringent national curriculum. During these classes I was "taught" that my parents were going to suffer eternal damnation because they divorced, that my deceased infant brother would not be in heaven because he died before he was christened (and that my mother's sin was probably responsible for his death), and that I would surely spend an eternity in hell if I used swear words or took the lord's name in vain. As I child I had no ability to critically evaluate this information, and as a consequence I was

placed in a state of heightened anxiety, fearful that the two people whom I loved most in the world were damned, and I was helpless to save them. No child should have to endure this kind of emotional abuse.

I believe that anyone who is privileged with the responsibility for shaping young minds should be subject to a rigorous and extensive process, not merely a working with children check, but formal training, and the development and implementation of a clear and structured curriculum. As such I welcome scrutiny of the Ethics Class.

However, I believe this should be extended to an investigation of SRE classes. Simply wanting to spread the good word is not enough. School is not the place for proselytizing. If religion is taught in schools, it should involve a thorough exploration of comparative religion. As Australia is a multicultural society, it seems short sighted, and somewhat offensive, to only cater to the Christian denominations. Surely a more open and inclusive SRE would foster understanding and tolerance of different religions. This can only be done by having appropriately trained and unbiased tutors deliver a robust curricula that has been developed by an impartial committee to meet nationally identified competencies. My understanding is that this is not the current practice with SRE. Furthermore, I do not believe that denominational religious instruction has a place in public schools., It is every parent's right to choose which religious instruction best suits their child, and if they wish for this to be part of their child's education there are a plethora of religious schools for them to enrol in.

After my terrifying early experiences of religion, I became an atheist. I am raising my children to be respectful of religion, but also to think critically. I am raising them to be good and moral citizens, and already they are intelligent, compassionate and kind. I object to my children enduring the same or similar dogma that created such dissonance for me. While SRE remains an opportunity to preach to those too young evaluate the messages by unqualified persons delivering unregulated content – especially when those messages contradict information they learn in formal education (such as

creation stories) or contradict their experiences at home –I can not in good conscience allow my children to participate.

If the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 were repealed, there would no longer be a legal requirement to offer ethics classes as an option for children not attending SRE classes. This move could return us to a situation in which children opting out of SRE are given nothing meaningful to do. This is an act of discrimination against my child, and any other child who is not raised in the faith that the SRE teacher is delivering.

Ethics classes are an important alternative for children of atheist, agnòstic, or other faith parents. I believe that secular ethics should be offered in every school in our secular and multi-cultural society. My children will never attend SRE classes, regardless of whether Ethics classes are offered or not. However, they deserve a valuable alternative that challenges them to think, enquire and evaluate, and encourages them to develop compassion and empathy. Minimal supervision in a library is not enough.

I urge the committee to resist the discriminatory pressure to repeal the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010. Our children's future depends on it.

I also urge the committee to review and evaluate SRE classes, and to assess how this instruction can be better placed to educate young minds in a modern multi-faithed society.

Sincerely,