

**Submission
No 408**

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

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Ms Lee Harris

Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Ethics Classes

I am writing to the members of the parliamentary committee investigating ethics classes to share with you my concerns at the consequences of repealing the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010.

The curriculum of ethics classes is inclusive and consistent with community values. The classes offer a secular alternative to SRE where students can build ethical frameworks to lead good lives. The current legal requirement to offer optional ethics classes to students who do not attend Special Religious Education classes (SRE) gives parents greater choice in determining how their child will be educated. Parents choose for their children to attend SRE, ethics classes, or neither at their own discretion and based on their own religious, moral and ethical perspectives.

The Rev Hon Fred Nile, one of the strongest proponents of this inquiry, has said in parliament that he is concerned that students will be taught philosophical or moral ideas that he does not personally agree with. It is important to remember that Special Religious Education also promotes religious perspectives that many parents and community members do not share. Under the current system, parents may opt out of SRE or ethics classes if they do not agree with the curriculum or teaching.

The ethics curriculum was the subject of thorough investigation prior to the recent commencement of ethics classes and is now again the subject of review by this committee. Meanwhile, religious groups have been teaching in public schools for over a century and in that time there has never been a parliamentary inquiry into the appropriateness of religious education or of the SRE curriculum.

I welcome the continued scrutiny of the ethics curriculum, but it is concerning that ethics has been singled out for investigation while SRE has never been reviewed - and is not to be reviewed by this committee. This strongly suggests that the inquiry may be used as a tool by some members of parliament to promote the teaching of their preferred religious views in schools at the expense of secular ethics.

Parents of various religious or secular beliefs should have the choice for their children to learn secular morals and ethics that are consistent with community values. The continued provision of a secular ethics course as an alternative to SRE encourages children of all backgrounds to become ethically and morally thoughtful members of our community.