

**Submission  
No 330**

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

**Organisation:** Hunter Baillie Memorial Presbyterian Church  
**Date received:** 24/02/2012

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## Hunter Baillie Memorial Presbyterian Church,

Rev. Peter R. Dunstan, BSc.Dip.Hort.Sc.BD, minister

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24<sup>th</sup> February 2012

The Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

### **Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011 (Inquiry)**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write to urge the repeal or at least the amendment of the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011 to prevent the current problem of schools offering Ethics classes as an alternative and in competition to Special Religious Education (SRE) classes which have been taught in New South Wales Public Schools since the introduction of public Education into the then colony of New South Wales in about 1870, the main proponent of the Act being the Rev Dr. John Dunmore Lang MLA, who was also the first Presbyterian minister in the Colony.

As an ordained Presbyterian minister, and as it happens currently the minister of the Annandale parish established initially by Lang's son in law, I have been teaching SRE since 1987 so have some 25 years experience as a SRE Teacher using a range of curricula and in a number of different State schools both in country and city NSW, the last eight years at Leichhardt Public School, and so am able to assert that I do not teach ethics, rather I teach Christian Education which while it may hopefully result in ethical behaviour is a distinctly different subject.

The aim of Christian Education and particularly Special Religious Education is to impart knowledge of what Christianity is, what we believe, the historical basis and evidence for these beliefs and what it means in theory and in practice to first accept and then follow Jesus Christ as personal Lord and God, so that those taught may be able to make a reasoned and rational choice based on knowledge as to whether they in time decide to follow Christ and be Christian or take some other path.

Ethics has an entirely different purpose, it is designed to hopefully teach and promote "good" behaviour, ie behaviour that is appropriate and socially acceptable in the community in which we all live. Consequently I would argue that Ethics should be taught to every student, but not in competition to or as an alternative to Special Religious Education, hence an amendment moving the teaching of Ethics to a separate time slot and declared an integral part of the curriculum would have my support.

I would further suggest that the current Act which sets up Ethics as an alternative to and in competition to SRE is in breach of the undertaking and promises made to the Christian Churches in 1870 when almost all the protestant churches ceded their parish schools to State control, on the understanding that access to all students for Special Religious Education was guaranteed. I have even

heard it suggested that the State should therefore return all school property ceded to the State by Churches in 1870 be returned to the respective churches and if necessary then bought back by the Government, (but I digress).

While proponents of the current Bill cite problematic situation of children whose parents withdraw from SRE, the current situation has in fact not changed that situation. For example at Leichhardt Public School where I teach SRE, there are still significant number of year 5 and 6 children simply listed as non Scripture, but whose parents have declined to direct into the ethics classes, where as SRE classes for 5& 6 have been decimated as parents having been offered Ethics as an alternative to SRE have made that choice, despite Government and Education Department assurances that Ethics would only be available to those children already nominated as non SRE.

I therefore strongly urge the repeal of the Ethics class legislation or at least its amendment to shift make Ethics class available to all at a time other than that available for SRE

Yours Faithfully,

Rev Peter R Dunstan BSc. Dip Hort.Sc, BD

Minister Annandale Leichhardt Presbyterian Church