

**Submission
No 129**

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

Name: Ms Sarah Heesom

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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Committee Members

Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011 - Inquiry Submission

I am writing to express my opposition to the *Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011*.

As you will be aware, there are now 2,700 children involved in ethics classes at 128 primary schools across the state. Removal of ethics classes from scripture periods will have a grossly unfair impact not only on these children, but also on those children in years K-4 who have not yet had the opportunity to enrol in ethics.

When my daughter commenced Kindergarten, my husband and I decided not to enrol her in scripture, genuinely expecting that she would be engaged in some form of educational activity while her peers studied their parents' respective faiths. We were dismayed to learn that, on the contrary, at five years of age she was required to entertain herself for up to an hour per week every week of the school year. Within a very short time, 'non-scripture' was causing her considerable anxiety, notwithstanding our attempts to entertain her with colouring-in books and other activities brought from home.

In term three of her Kindergarten year, my husband and I reluctantly enrolled our daughter in scripture, where she remained until the middle of Year 2. We were forced to move her out of scripture when she complained that she felt uncomfortable about being asked to stand up and tell the rest of the class why she loved God. We were also influenced by the fact that her scripture homework included 'games' that required her to teach her parents religious verses.

Once again, our daughter now spends up to an hour every week entertaining herself at school, along with many other Stage 1 and Stage 2 children. Our son has just commenced Kindergarten and faces the same prospect. Our sincere hope and wish is that Primary Ethics will be permitted to introduce its age-appropriate philosophical ethics classes into each year level, from Kindergarten to Year 6.

Although we share a deep respect for the right of all persons to freedom of religion, my husband and I are not religious, and we believe strongly that it is possible to be ethical without having religious convictions. We are delighted that the introduction of ethics classes has begun to address the discriminatory situation that previously prevented students attending non-scripture from receiving any form of tuition during scripture periods.

We urge the NSW Parliament to respect and promote the internationally protected right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions¹, and to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of our state school community by supporting ethics classes.

Yours Sincerely

Sarah Heesom

¹ Article 18.4, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*