

**Submission
No 315**

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

Organisation: Taverners Hill Infants School P & C Association
Date received: 23/02/2012



Taverners Hill Infants School P & C

Elswick Street, Petersham NSW 2049
Phone: 9569 6396 Fax: 9564 2120
E-mail: tavernersh-p.school@det.nsw.edu.au

22 February 2012

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to the Inquiry into Ethics Classes

On behalf of the Parents and Citizens Association of Taverners Hill Infants School, Petersham, I am writing to register our strong support for the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010. Our Association unanimously supported the Act when it was introduced, and we are firmly of the view that any move to repeal this legislation would be detrimental to the educational rights and opportunities of the children of this State.

We believe that all children should have equitable access to structured learning in the area of ethics and values. Such education is an important element in developing the next generation of responsible citizens. It would be fundamentally unfair to deny these opportunities to a group of children simply because they or their parents do not subscribe to the belief systems of specific organised faiths.

Public education in NSW has a proud history of offering all children access to a quality curriculum underpinned by values such as honesty, integrity, tolerance, compassion and fairness. Allowing secular ethics classes to operate alongside scripture classes is the logical affirmation of this heritage. We believe that all children should have equal opportunity to learn ethics and values. Children whose parents do not follow a particular faith should not be deprived of the right to develop an understanding of ethics and values as part of their education.

Providing structured lessons only to those children whose families belong to the specific religious affiliations chosen for scripture classes sends a negative signal to the children not attending these classes. Why should these children not be equally worthy of a structured lesson plan and the opportunity to explore ethical issues? The only alternative that would be on offer if ethics classes were not allowed – supervised non-learning activities – is a waste of children's valuable learning time.

A commitment to structured ethics education as a complement to Special Religious Education in no way implies hostility towards formal religion. For example, there are members of our P&C whose

A community dedicated to a caring environment for growth.



Taverners Hill Infants School P & C

Elswick Street, Petersham NSW 2049
Phone: 9569 6396 Fax: 9564 2120
E-mail: tavernersh-p.school@det.nsw.edu.au

children already attend scripture, and who intend this to continue, but who feel strongly that all children should be provided the chance to explore ethical issues in depth.

In fact, a basic grounding in ethics for children will likely make them more interested in learning about religion as they become older. It is more likely to make them appreciate the moral grounding that religious worldviews offer. On the other hand, returning to a stark division between scripture classes and non-scripture could signal to some children that religion and ethics are simply not for them.

No school can offer scripture classes in every faith and denomination so there will always be families whose beliefs are not provided for. For instance, of the 77 students at our school, 19 are currently enrolled in non-scripture and 15 in an alternative to mainstream religion, meaning that a total of 44% of our students are not taking classes in traditional scripture. A suitable secular ethics class would provide their parents with a valuable alternative to the narrow choice of putting their children into non-scripture or a scripture class that does not match their beliefs.

We would be grateful for your consideration of our views on this important matter.

Yours sincerely

Kelly Stephens
President, Taverners Hill Infants School P&C

Contact details: