

**Submission
No 190**

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

Name: Ms Mary Macrae

Date received: 22/02/2012

Mary Macrae

February 22nd 2012

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

Dear Director and Committee,

Regarding the Committee Inquiry into Ethics Classes NSW.

I am a parent of a year 3 student attending Public School. Our school incorporates elements of ethical behavior in its school values. The school values of tolerance and support for one another are what parents in the 20th century expect as a reflection of the mixed cultural society we live in.

The school also offers SRE classes across a variety of language groups and religious beliefs. This year we have the opportunity for the first time to implement the Ethics Classes for our year 5 and 6 students, 40 of which do not attend SRE. 22 of those will have an opportunity to attend Ethics. The remaining 18 will remain discriminated against with nothing constructive offered to them.

My child has spent time in various SRE classes over the last three years as he explores concepts of belonging and religion. We encourage this as Christians. However, he has also spent time in non-scripture classes as the content of some SRE lessons were found to be "scary", "mean" and in conflict with the lessons of tolerance and inclusion he encountered elsewhere in the school and at home.

In non-scripture "classes" he came to expect the same 25 minutes of the same DVD each week. No opportunity to do homework, read or undertake any other activity. This is unacceptable.

Ethics classes provide a framework to support the values we hold as a multi cultural society, in a teaching forum. This offers our older students the same learning opportunities a SRE class should. Currently students not attending SRE are discriminated against with a timeout of school in which nothing meaningful is achieved or encouraged.

Ethics classes are a potential foundation for study of other religions in secondary school, of philosophy (undertaken in some primary schools), and encourage children to engage with their thoughts, problem solve, encourage empathy and mindfulness, can be a support for other programs in the school like peer support, anti-bullying and restorative practices. Responsibility for choice and resulting behavior is encouraged – children are being given the opportunity to learn outside of a religious framework and outside of a greater being, acknowledging that they have control and that is a very positive outcome for a society as a whole.

I am aware my child already has a questioning nature, a curiosity about others belief systems and an awareness of our multi cultural population and of racial intolerance. Our school population has a variety of Christian believers, orthodox to charismatic, we have a large population of Arabic children – Christian and Islamic, Islamic Indonesians, Hindi Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, and many Asians. All around the school kids are aware that they share similarities and differences. It was beautiful to see that in kindergarten and year one the classes were colourblind – no-one was described as “the brown one” or “the white one”. I am looking forward to him having the opportunity to participate in Ethics classes in year 5 and only wish it were sooner. Our children learn everyday, and never again as intensely as the ages 4 – 12, our opportunity to really provide a good education is in these early years. Teaching our children to be good citizens and considered thinkers is a crucial part of that education.

Ethics enables children mixing in a considered “what if” way – assisting them in considering hypotheticals of action and consequence, and strengthens the bonds of friendship across race and religion. It lays the foundations of the society many of we adults strive for in our lives. Ethics teaches past the constraints of religion and encompasses all of us, providing Ethics as a voluntary learning experience should be maintained.

Your Inquiry into Ethics is welcome, it is a program in its infancy, we have the opportunity to hone it into a welcomed and valued place in education. I would also be very pleased to see an inquiry into the SRE program alongside it, and be sure that the values being taught in these classes are illuminating, relevant and enjoyed by the children being taught.

I submit that the Ethics Classes be continued in our Primary Schools and the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 be maintained.

Yours Sincerely,

Mary Macrae