

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

Name: Ms Samantha Yorke

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Monday 6 February 2012

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

Dear Madam/Sir,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into the stated objectives, curriculum, implementation, effectiveness and other related matters pertaining to the current operation of 'special education in ethics' being conducted in State schools, and whether the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 should be repealed.

I tender this submission as a private individual, a parent of a child being educated within a New South Wales state school and as a volunteer Ethics Teacher. I strongly believe that children who do not attend special religious education (SRE) should be provided with an alternative opportunity for learning an ethics based value framework. My fundamental concern with SRE is that it is not taught as a belief based ideology, rather it is taught as fact. Ideally, I would love my son and other children who do not identify with solely one religion or faith to learn comparative religion in an objective and factual environment however this option is simply not available to us at present. I welcome the attention that is being paid to the introduction of ethics based teaching within schools although note that no such investigation has ever been paid to SRE in schools and SRE has been around a lot longer.

I learnt the value of the ethics curriculum first hand during my training as a volunteer ethics teacher. The content has been thoroughly researched and is based on rigorous philosophical frameworks. The curriculum, and method of teaching, is designed to stimulate conversation on topics that elicit strong moral reactions (such as killing animals for food and stealing) which in turn encourages children to consider countervailing points of view, to challenge their own assumptions and to test new arguments in a safe and unthreatening context.

If the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 were repealed, there would no longer be an explicit legal requirement to offer ethics classes as an option for children not attending SRE classes. This move could return us to a situation in which children opting out of SRE are given nothing meaningful to do and no context outside of the home to have these sorts of conversations. This decision would arguably discriminate against children who choose not to attend SRE and would be entirely unacceptable to the parents, children and other members of the NSW community who support ethics curriculum in schools. I implore you to reject the suggestion that the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act be repealed in order to give children in the NSW state school system more choices with respect to their education, rather than robbing them of this very important opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Samantha Yorke