

Submission
No 58

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 19/12/2011

Partially Confidential

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

19th December 2011

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am very much in favour of the continuance of Ethics classes as a option in the SRE timeslot at NSW Public Primary Schools. I am also very much in favour of the continued development of ethics classes to allow them to be available as an SRE timeslot option for all years from K-6.

I am also in favour of an additional separate inquiry into the methods, teacher qualifications, materials and content of SRE (scripture) classes offered by various faith groups (e.g. Catholics, Anglicans, Muslim, Buddhist etc.).

I have witnessed part of a Christian scripture class at one of my son's schools and I found some of the things that were said and done by the Christian (Catholic in this instance) scripture teacher to be profoundly disturbing and potentially spiritually abusive to the children.

On other occasions, because Christian SRE classes are the default SRE option in our (supposedly secular) public school and because our school's administration is far from perfect, my son has periodically been forced, against both his will and my written request to the school, to attend Christian scripture classes. This has had a negative impact on my son. And the behaviour of the Christian scripture teachers also led to him feeling somewhat traumatised.

There are, therefore, very good reasons for there to be a separate parliamentary public inquiry into the behaviour of faith based scripture teachers and the appropriateness of the current arrangements for faith based (SRE) scripture teaching in our public schools.

However, regarding the continuance of the option of ethics classes in our school;

I am a parent of a ten year old boy, currently enrolled in year 4 at _____ in Northern NSW. Next year I also hope to be a volunteer ethics teacher at his school - though maybe not in his class/year.

This year my son has been in year 4 and, except when three times forced against his will (and my written request) to attend Christian scripture classes, he was forced to sit in the school library with no meaningful activities during the SRE period.

He was not alone in the library, there were apparently 30-40 other children of his age range (a goodly proportion of the students) not doing scripture, but still he felt discriminated against.

Apart from the problem of discrimination against kids not doing scripture, I also think that a significant opportunity to help in his development is being missed.

I have a degree in psychology and am aware of studies that indicate that if children miss-out on opportunities for development of their ethical reasoning skills they may never develop them fully. In my view, this has negative implications for both the individual kids, their families and our society as a whole.

I perceive a large potential for my son to benefit from the ethics classes during the SRE timeslot.

I first encountered the idea of ethics classes as a option in the SRE timeslot at the NSW Federation of P&Cs annual conference in Parramatta in 2010. I was attending as a representative of

At the 2010 NSW P&C Federation conference there was much debate about the ethics program. But, when it came to a vote, I noted that well **over 90% of delegates** voted for the ethics program.

It was clearly the desire of an overwhelming majority of P&C conference delegates that parents and their kids should get a choice of doing ethics (or not) during SRE. My subsequent experiences (see below) suggest that the vast majority of parents support there being an ethics option during SRE.

At our next school P&C meeting we talked to our school's P&C about the ethics option and our P&C (which included several devout Christians) voted **unanimously** for a motion in support of the ethics option.

Our current school, also discussed a motion in support of the ethics option and voted **unanimously** in favour of parents having the option of ethics classes.

When it became possible to start ethics classes at our school I volunteered as an ethics teacher. However, since we had no ethics coordinator at our school I took on the coordinator's role instead of teacher until I could find a replacement coordinator.

As our school's ethics coordinator I had to communicate with our school's Principle and Assistant Principle and our school's parent community. All of the staff and parents I talked to (even those who will continue to send their kids to Christian or Jewish scripture classes) were in favour of parents having an ethics choice for kids who did not do scripture.

As coordinator I worked with our local Primary Ethics volunteer manager to vet candidate ethics teachers. We were lucky that six parents from our school community came forward to volunteer to teach ethics classes. We received 4 formal applications and eventually selected and trained two parents from our school community and selected another ethics teacher from the wider community.

Eventually we got a parent from our school to replace me as ethics coordinator so I could offer to teach, and after yet another selection procedure I was selected and trained to teach.

I have a degree in psychology, a professional background in adult education and workshop facilitation. I have an often demanding professional job as an international product manager for a large multi-national Japanese ICT company. But I think I have good skills and I feel that ethics teaching is important enough to take time out of my otherwise busy work life to go down to my son's school once a week and co-facilitate an ethics class.

This term we had 22 students from years 5 and 6 in the ethics class and in order to deliver quality ethical development we now have two volunteer teachers in the class.

The students are very engaged in the ethics classes and, judging from the feedback from their

parents and teachers, they like their ethics classes and are developing good skills in ethical discourse.

I'm not sure if I will be asked to teach ethics next year or if my job will leave enough time for me to volunteer. But I know the quality of the other teachers from our school community and the quality of the curriculum. So I am very happy that my son can join in the ethics classes starting in year 5.

I have now had a very good look at the Primary Ethics curriculum materials and first hand experience of the recommended teaching methods. I am very impressed and inspired by the ethics curriculum and the recommended teaching methods.

I am also impressed by the professionalism and thoroughness of the selection processes for school ethics coordinator and ethics teachers. The selection processes are very, and possibly unnecessarily, long and, while they may discourage some otherwise very suitable volunteers, they are quite thorough.

By being able to participate in the Ethics classes I believe my son will feel involved and not left out and discriminated against during the SRE period.

If the ethics classes were stopped because of pressure from certain faith groups I would feel that my son and his friends and classmates were being discriminated against and that my choices as a parent were not being respected.

It is my desire that my son (and other children of our community) continue to have the option of ethics classes.

If ethics classes were included in the normal curriculum and SRE continued there would be two problems, firstly "how to fit them in to an already full curriculum?" and also a large proportion of the students still being discriminated against by being left out of SRE.

We should either continue with ethics classes as an option in the SRE timeslot or include ethics classes in the curriculum and remove the SRE timeslot altogether.

For my son it is a choice between sitting in the library feeling discriminated against vs doing something positive and engaging in the ethics classes. **Please do not deny my son the opportunity.**

I ask that parliament respect my choice and my son's choice (and the choices of other parents and students) and do not deny my son and others the opportunities that ethics classes offer.

Yours sincerely