

Submission
No 398

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

Name: Name suppressed

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INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION AMENDMENT [ETHICS CLASSES REPEAL] BILL 2011

To: Legislative Council, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

Submission regarding Education Amendment [Ethics Classes Repeal] Bill 2011

Date 28th February 2012

INTRODUCTORY COMMENT:

This submission supports the repeal of the Education Amendment [Ethics] Act 2010

The main issue from my initial study of ethics as presented by the St James Ethics Centre is the absence of foundational ethical values - **no sense of right and wrong.**

An Analogy: Present Ethics courses can be likened to a ship setting off on a journey around the world with the captain having no maps or any other navigational instruments. A ship with no goal or direction. An accident just waiting to happen. Present ethics courses have no moral compass to guide discussion and debate drifts off in any direction. Children's minds and social well-being are at risk.

WHAT IS ETHICS?

Suzanne Ross's article '**What is the value of Ethics?**' seeks to answer this question. [Suzanne Ross was the Director of Education and Accreditation at St. James Ethics Centre and is a Consulting Fellow]

The following is a selection of her comments:

Whilst acknowledging ethics has connections with codes, philosophical theories and morality, the points below show its broader, practical, everyday face.

- * *Ethics is about relationships.*
- * *It's about struggling to develop a well-informed conscience.*
- * *It's about being true to the idea of who we are and what we stand for.*
- * *It's about having the courage to explore difficult questions.*
- * *It's about accepting the cost.*

Ethics, therefore, is about examining, questioning, exploring, deciding and committing. The production of ethics or a code of conduct should follow that process.

Basic ethical dilemma model

[The following is condensed for brevity.]

1. *Determine the facts and the assumptions related to the issue.*
2. *Identify the significant stakeholders.*
3. *Tease out the ethical issues of the case,*
4. *What are norms, principles, rules and values relevant*
5. *What are the alternative courses of action...*

6. Compare these alternatives to the specified norms, principles, rules and values. ...
7. Evaluate these options in light of the three 'vertices of ethics' ...
8. What is the decision and is it the right decision based on all of your thinking?
9. One last check... has any new option emerged, if not why not? Can your decision be 'worked further'? Is this the fairest, most just decision?

The article concludes with the invitation to contact the St. James Ethnics Centre and seek the help from the Ethi-Call free service so you can ask the question - "What should I do?"

I appreciate the dedication and effort the St James Ethic Centre has made to help people with ethnical problems. What I have discovered from reading the articles published on the St James Ethics Centre website is that the organization has no ethic standards. How can an ethics organization teach ethics when it has no defined ethical standards. Articles published on the Ethics Centre website generally mention alternative viewpoints but the concluding comments are vague and non committal.

Expecting children to have the maturity to constructively participate in controversial debate is too ambitious and dangerous.

Dr Simon Longstaff the Director of St. James Ethics Centre concludes his article "***Is ethical progress possible?***" with the following comment.

'St James Ethics Centre exists, at one level, to provide practical assistance to individuals and organizations engaging with such issues. We also hope to prompt people to examine questions that might otherwise have seemed settled. Beyond this we try to stand for the possibility of ethnical progress as a hope worth holding and a goal worth pursuing.'

From the study of several articles published on the St. James Ethic Centre I cannot find any list of ethnics or values that the St James Ethic Centre embraces.

What are the ethics of the St James Ethics Centre?
 Where is the ethics syllabus for public review?
 To whom is the Ethics Centre accountable?

Where are the evaluation results of the 'Ethics' course trials?
 Are there favourable student and parent testimonies?
 What were the qualitative measures used to assess the Ethic classes?
 Are Ethic courses sustainable?

The basic flaw of Ethics Courses is that the classes have no ethical guidelines.

Anything goes, it is up to each individual to seek out their own set of values. How can one expect young impressionable children to participate constructively in such forums?

The whole basis of education is to study and learn. The big question to ask. **What are the children learning in ethics classes? Particularly when organizations such as the St James Ethics Centre, claim to be a leaders in the subject of ethics and a teaching resources, but have no ethical standands themselves.**

The biggest danger of the courses is that student discussions are more likely to create confusion in student's minds and the minds of their ethics teachers.

The comments posted by the executive of St James Ethics Centre on the organization's website do not provide, in my mind, constructive insight and wisdom on ethical issues.

The following question must be answered.

WHAT ARE THE ETHIC STANDARDS OF THE St. James ETHICS CENTRE?

From my investigations so far I have concluded the following:

THE St James ETHICS CENTRE HAS NO ETHICAL STANDARDS

The St James Ethic Centre, by its own philosophical viewpoint, has no list of ethical standards. It is up to every individual to establish their own ethical standards.

This is a basic flaw of the St James Ethics Centre and the school ethics classes it seeks to promote. The St James Ethics Centre logo depicting a wolf in sheep clothing has very meaningful connotations.

The people that support the ethics centre will most likely be insulted and deeply offended by my criticism. Being sincere, devoted and having a strong belief in an ideology or philosophical viewpoint does not justify the indoctrination of young people's minds which such deceptive, confusing values and an absence of moral standards.

The St James Ethics Centre has an 'Ethics Forum' where people log on and contribute to discussions on various topics. Below is a brief mention of a couple of the most controversial topics and includes sample comments submitted by participants.

Topic A: *Is it OK to have sex with kids?*

"How can society justify criminalizing having sex with kids if it doesn't hurt anyone."

"It doesn't hurt them physically [sometimes] but it can be seriously emotionally scarring for a child. It also opens doors which most parents would rather remain closed [sexual desires] until the children have grown up."

TOPIC B: *The man who chose death with dignity*

[Case study Perth quadriplegic Christian Rossiter]

"Everyone has a right to decide to end their life. Their life belongs to them."

"In my opinion the N drug that allows someone to kill themselves should be accessible in this country. If people want to kill themselves, they have the right to do so. It is not our choice, it is theirs."

[After winning the right to kill himself Rossiter reconsidered taking his life and said that he would seek further medical advice before ordering the removal of the fed tube to his stomach.]

CONCLUSIONS:

ETHICS CLASSES WITHOUT DEFINED MORAL BOUNDARIES ARE DANGEROUS AND MORE LIKELY TO BE A CORRUPTING INFLUENCE, PARTICULARLY ON YOUNG IMPRESSIONAL MINDS.

PARENTS THAT HAND OVER THE MINDS OF THEIR CHILDREN TO ETHICS CLASSES THAT HAVE NO MORAL STANDARDS ARE TAKING A BIG RISK.

ETHICS CLASSES PROVIDE A VENUE FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN TO EXPLORE ANY 'WAY OUT' TOPICS IN A COMPARATIVELY OPEN NON - JUDGEMENTAL ENVIRONMENT WITH MINIMAL ADULT INTERFERENCE. UNCHALLENGED BY BALANCED DEBATE ON COMMUNITY MORAL STANDARDS.

IT IS AN ABSOLUTE TRAVERSTRY TO ALLOW AN ORGANIZATION, SUCH AS THE ST JAMES ETHICS CENTRE, ACCESS TO THE MINDS OF IMPRESSIONABLE CHILDREN WHEN SUCH ORGANIZATIONS HAVE NO DEFINED ETHICAL STANDARDS.

RECOMMENDATION:

THE NSW GOVERNMENT MUST ACT IMMEDIATELY TO INVESTIGATE THE GOALS AND PURPOSE OF ETHICS CLASSES AND INVESTIGATE ADVERSE CRITICISM.

PAST STUDENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS MUST BE INTERVIEWED.

DOCUMENTED GUIDELINES ON THE PRACTICES AND TEACHING METHODS OF ETHICS CLASSES MUST BE EXAMINED.

THE RESULTS OF SUCH AN INVESTIGATIONS SHOULD BE MADE PUBLIC.

A NOTICE MUST BE ISSUED TO ALL PARENTS OF CHILDREN WARNING ABOUT THE DANGERS OF EXPOSING THEIR CHILDREN TO SUCH UNETHICALLY BASED FORUMS.

THE EDUCATION AMENDMENT [ETHICS] ACT 2010) MUST BE REPEALED.