

**Submission  
No 63**

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

**Name:** Mrs Elizabeth Crane

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The Director

Mrs Elizabeth Crane

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

Parliament House

Macquarie St Sydney NSW 2000

To the Director and Inquiry Committee

My daughter has attended a NSW Public School for six years and my son attended for almost three years. When we moved to NSW from Victoria – I was shocked to find that my daughter would have to attend Scripture classes.

I attended Sunday school and the Anglican Church and was 'Confirmed' but I no longer attend. My husband and I thought we should allow our daughter to be exposed to and learn about the Christian religion in the safety of her school, the confines of the approved curriculum and the supervision of the classroom teacher. I was regularly dismayed at the content and delivery method of the Scripture classes and the lack of formal qualifications of the volunteers. A curriculum workbook arrived home at the end of each year with very few pages completed, this raised questions about what the Scripture teacher was actually 'teaching' my child. The content of the "Connect" workbook was of extreme concern for me but I was even more concerned that the volunteers seemed not to be adhering to the curriculum. So what was my daughter being taught in these sessions?

I am a trained and experienced teacher and have several friends who are teaching in NSW schools. I have had several "fire and brimstone" accounts of Scripture classes relayed to me by my friends. I have been told that some children go home and attack their parents for their beliefs – based on the testimonials and stories told by the "kind old Scripture Lady".

I don't understand why there is so much scrutiny of every other aspect of schools and education but somehow SRE is exempt? Where are the results of the SRE investigation?

Apparently I should have been able to 'opt out' of Scripture for my daughter – but opting out at our school meant being ostracised, being made to sit in the back of the SRE class (within earshot and vision of the SRE session) and made to feel 'different'. To my understanding – the NON Scripture students should have been allocated to a separate classroom where they would not be allowed to do anything meaningful.

Is the intention of the Education Act – to force students to do SRE? Is it the intention of the Education Act to teach children from a very young age that discrimination based on religion is acceptable? After I opted my daughter out of Scripture – she was made to feel like there was something wrong with her and so after only a matter of weeks – she asked me if she could return to SRE. Her reasons for a return to SRE were not positive. If she had said she enjoyed SRE or felt she was learning something – I would have happily allowed her to return to SRE. My daughter has now participated in five years of SRE without my consent.

I was Secretary of our P&C for some time and have followed the Ethics pilot and have insisted it be discussed at our meetings. Our P&C supports choice.

I trained to become an Ethics Teacher and have been teaching 22 year five and six students for three terms. The curriculum and support from Primary Ethics volunteers has been outstanding, the classroom teachers have been extremely supportive. The students have enjoyed the sessions and are disappointed when it is time to go. My daughter is in the group. Here are some quotes from the students. I have removed names because I respect confidentiality.

*"We discussed our reactions towards problems in a circle." "I had fun talking with other people about the topic." "I felt very strongly about all of the dilemmas." "Play fair and don't cheat because no-one will let you play if you cheat." "We discussed in a group about what was fair and what wasn't fair. I was surprised about some of the results." "Being fair is very good. If you be fair other people will be fair to you." "Always be fair and give everyone an even opportunity." "I think that everyone should never, ever lie." "I had fun debating with other people about when it might be acceptable to lie." "It felt very good to talk about telling the truth." "We talked about Graffiti and if it is ok." "Respect people's property." "We all agreed that moral rules are important, everyone has their own moral rules." "Moral rules have been working well in this education class." "We are all aware of moral rules without realising." "I believe animals deserve a good life and should be treated fairly." "I had fun in this activity but it made me sad about the things." "I felt strongly about this topic." "I think that animals should all be treated fairly." "I felt very strongly*

*about using animals for some things, it can be very wrong.” “Be respectful of our earth and think about the future.” “It was interesting learning about Virtues and Vices.” “Everyone has virtues and vices. There is no such thing as completely virtuous.” “The stories were fun and they helped me to understand about virtues and vices.” “I enjoyed writing stories and working with this.” “We talked about things like being handicapped and then have special care. Then we said our opinions.” “Children should have the right to debate.” “Lots of people paid attention because we are children.” This was my favourite because we all argued a lot.” “My Grandfather died from cancer and when he was sick – he still lived a good rest of his life.” “There were many opinions which opened up big discussions (which I liked). The bottom line is to lead a good life you have to be happy.” “Everyone had many opinions and the cards got moved a lot.” “I think to have a good life you must have fun.”*

These quotes are outstanding in my opinion – the students are questioning, giving opinions, giving reasons for their opinions and listening to other people’s reasons and opinions. They are learning how to conduct themselves as equals and to understand why somebody might disagree.

My vote, my opinion and my choice is equal to any from any person within government or within our community. There are 90 Religious groups approved to teach in NSW public schools. This implies that the Education Act encourages choice.

- If a family practises a religion that is not offered in local school SRE classes then they should have the choice of NON-SRE, SRE or Ethics.
- If a family does not practise religion at all then they should have the choice of NON-SRE, SRE or Ethics.
- If a family practises a religion that is offered in local school SRE then they should have the choice of NON-SRE, SRE or Ethics.

Researching the NSW Schools website I came across the following “*Schools also provide general religious education in human society and its environment (HSIE). These lessons explore the place of religion in society, the diversity and history of religions, and the importance of religious beliefs for particular individuals and communities*”

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/learning/yrk12focusareas/religioused/index.php>

Please tell me how the SRE curriculum satisfies the HSIE aims and outcomes? If a student selects NON-SRE – are the HSIE aims and outcomes satisfied? Do schools rely on SRE to satisfy HSIE aims and outcomes or does the school provide additional learning experiences to satisfy HSIE aims and outcomes?

Each time there is another inquiry into Ethics classes – the children, families and volunteers experience anxiety at the possibility that things will go back to the way they were. It seems unfair to me and I feel certain the students would experience a range of emotions which they would probably like to pass onto the Inquiry if given the opportunity. (SRE and Ethics classes have finished up for the year) Ethics in schools has wide support in many communities and will continue to provide a fair option for NSW families as long as it is able. We really do welcome inquiries but we do wonder why Ethics is treated so differently to SRE.

I do appreciate your consideration of the points I have made and the questions I have raised in this letter and have the hope that Ethics classes will continue to be offered in NSW schools.

My sincere regards

Elizabeth Crane