

**Submission
No 185**

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

Organisation: Baptist Union of NSW

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Baptist Union of NSW
(Known as Baptist Churches of NSW &
ACT)

Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry
Conducted by the General Purpose Standing
Committee No. 2 to Report on the Education
Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011

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Introduction

The Baptist Union of NSW appreciates the opportunity to comment on issues relating to the introduction of Special Education in Ethics (SEE) classes in NSW state schools and the bill to repeal the Act. We note that the committee's terms of reference are to inquire into and report on the Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011, and in particular:

- (a) 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
- (b) whether the *Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010* should be repealed.

We note that the Committee is to report to the Legislative Council by 4 June 2012.¹

This submission is made on behalf of the Baptist Union of NSW.

1. Curriculum

(a) Availability of the SEE curriculum materials

The Baptist Union of NSW made a formal request to Primary Ethics staff for a copy of the curriculum and it arrived about four weeks later. We acknowledge that there is also a descriptions of course content published on the Primary Ethics website.

2. Implementation

The Baptist Union of NSW recognises that initially there may be teething problems while SEE classes begin to be introduced and schools learn how to accommodate them.

(a) Implementation of SEE classes

The Baptist Union of NSW does not oppose SEE classes as long as they follow the implementation guidelines as set out on the Department of Education and Communities website.

Following a decision of the NSW Government, from Term 1, 2011, schools may include a course in special education in ethics as an option for students whose parents have requested exemption from special religious education (SRE). Current implementation is for primary schools only.²

Students who are attending non-SRE options, may attend ethics classes if they are in Year 5 or 6 and there is a trained ethics coordinator at the school, there are trained volunteers and sufficient students to establish a class.³

¹ Details of the Inquiry are available at <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parliament/committee.nsf/0/3312B8C2F2E89AD2CA257948000E930>.

² See information for Principals <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/policies/ethics/index.htm>

³ See PowerPoint sent to Principals October 2011

Parents whose children attended special religious education in 2010 but who wish them to participate in special education in ethics classes must first, formally seek exemption from special religious education. This must be done in writing. Places should only be offered in special education in ethics classes (if available) after the written application has been confirmed.⁴

(b) Other possible kinds of classes

Given the fact that SEE classes have now been introduced to NSW state schools, a case could be made that these classes set a precedent for other “non-religious” groups to convene classes or other teaching and learning activities during time set aside for SRE classes. Legislation should prevent this.

3. Confirmation of SRE (Special Religious Education aka: Scripture)

The Baptist Union of NSW is committed to the support and provision of teachers for SRE teachers and affirm the Minister of Education, Adrian Piccoli’s letter of endorsement.

The NSW Government believes that a strong and vibrant SRE program an important part of a young person’s education. It also acknowledges the role that so many dedicated volunteers play in delivering the programs that the different groups that provide SRE have developed.⁵

4. Repeal

The Baptist Union of NSW does not support the repeal of the *Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010*,

Conclusion

We believe that, for students in NSW, an understanding of their community’s own faith background is an important part of their education. However if a student’s parents object to them receiving such teaching, and wish instead their child to receive teaching in a non-religious worldview such as the ethics course which the law now allows as an alternative in SRE time, we are not opposed.

For these reasons the Baptist Union of NSW does not support the withdrawal of Special Education in Ethics classes in NSW schools.

⁴ See information for Principals
<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/policies/ethics/index.htm>

⁵ Letter from The Hon. Adrian Piccoli MP, Minister of Education, to Mrs Ann-Maree Whenmen, Chair of ICCOREIS RML 11/6350