

**Submission  
No 167**

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

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**Date received:** 16/02/2012

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EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES REPEAL) BILL 2011  
TERMS OF REFERENCE

That General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 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- b. whether the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 should be repealed.

**Submission to the Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No 2**

**By Jan Backhouse Primary Ethics Teacher Alstonville Public School**

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into the Primary Ethics Program. I am a Primary Ethics Teacher at Alstonville Public school and became involved at the end of 2011 as the program was taken up in the north coast schools. As a teacher I have witnessed the enthusiasm that Grade 5 and 6 children have shown in ethics classes. They understand both the ethical points and the idea of building on or countering each other's ideas and finding things from their own experiences to support or challenge a point of view. They also appreciate the fact that what is learned in these classes can help them across their other subjects by looking at a problem from many different angles. This first-hand experience of the program has confirmed my support for its continuation.

Points for Consideration

Firstly, I would like to question the need for an investigation into the ethics program at this point in time since the program has only recently been implemented. The pilot program was thoroughly evaluated by professional academics for the Department of Education as to objectives, curriculum, implementation, effectiveness and other related matters (*NSW Ethics Course Trial Final Report October 2010*). As a result of the evaluation, the State Education Department approved its roll-out across NSW in 2011. The new curriculum, which replaced the pilot curriculum, took into account all of the recommendations of this evaluation.

Secondly, I would like to point out that the demand for an inquiry is very unsettling to Ethics Volunteers, like myself, who have put many hours into training and class preparation in order to give children the opportunity to discuss real-life moral questions that may arise for them in their daily lives.

Thirdly, I would like to question the actual rationale and purpose of the inquiry, as the terms of the inquiry appear to be open-ended and vague. The “objectives, curriculum, implementation, effectiveness and other related matters” of the ethics program are to be investigated but it is not stated what the grounds might be for justifying “repealing” the Act which allowed for the introduction of the program.

Finally, I would argue that children who don't attend Special Religious Education (SRE)/Scripture in NSW public schools have the right to attend philosophical ethics classes as an option to 'private study'.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

For the above reasons I therefore urge you to support the continuation of the Ethics program so that Primary Ethics Teachers, like myself, can continue to give NSW students the opportunity to participate.

Thank you.

Jan Backhouse

Primary Ethics Teacher at Alstonville Public School.