

Submission
No 331

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

24th February 2012

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

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee. I am writing as a member of the public, a former secondary school teacher and soon-to-be parent regarding the inquiry into ethics classes to express my concern at the efforts of the Christian Democratic Party to have the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 repealed. An evaluation of the classes with a view to their potential improvement would be welcome, but I strongly believe that to abolish them would not be in the best interests of the education of Australian children.

The decision about continuing ethics classes or the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 should not be influenced by a particular religious perspective, or even religion in general. Rather, as always in education, the focus should be on what is best for the children and what will best prepare them to function as constructive and successful members of society. We need citizens who are not just academically educated, but who uphold the sorts of values which promote the well-being of people and society, and to this end I believe ethics classes can play a crucial role. It is quite simply the case that there will always be children who do not attend SRE, and to support a case to abolish ethics classes, it would need to be shown that it is more beneficial for them and for our society to return to a situation where these students engage in nothing meaningful in place of SRE rather than participate in ethics classes.

While not yet a parent myself, I have heard comments to the effect that the ethics classes were considered so good that some parents whose children attended SRE wished to transfer them to the ethics classes instead. This, I believe, is the fear that motivates the agenda of some to abolish the classes. However, if what has been developed is indeed better than what we have had to date, that is progress. To stand in the way of such progress would be to not have the interests of our children, their education or our society at heart.

On the Christian Democratic Party's website, a criticism raised against the ethics course is that "The operation of this course...has ignored concern that course staff are putting their own personal values in the minds / mouths of the children." I would like to raise similar concerns regarding SRE classes, and suggest that we are well overdue for an inquiry into SRE classes to be conducted. Furthermore, such an inquiry into SRE classes should carefully review the content of the material presented to children, giving consideration to aspects such as:

- teachings that may be detrimental to the mental health of children, such as the teaching that friends and family members who do not believe will be punished forever in hell, or teaching them to believe in evil spirits
- stories which glorify behaviours such as genocide and racism, such as the well-known story of the falling walls of Jericho and the wiping out of its inhabitants "men and women, young and old"
- teaching as fact stories which are considered by the academic world as mythological, such as Noah and the flood or the Israelite slavery in Egypt

It is often argued that children should be educated in Christianity since it formed the values that our society is founded on. While I believe that it is important for children to learn about Christianity, other religions and non-religious worldviews, it is quite simply not true that our society's morals or laws are based on the Bible or any other religious text. The morals of Bible stories are very often a far cry from the moral values our society upholds today, and we still uphold values such as "Do not murder" not because it is in the Bible as though it were an idea that originated there, but because it is a basic human value that promotes the well-being of individuals and society.

Our society values freedom from discrimination on the basis of things like religion. While I would not be allowing my child to attend SRE classes, I would be very much in favour of them participating in ethics classes rather than being left with nothing to do except perhaps some homework while the religious classes were conducted. Children and parents should not be denied this choice on the grounds of certain religious perspectives about what should constitute an ethics class. I could not see this as anything but discrimination, and I would be but one of thousands of parents and citizens who felt the same. Review and refinement of the ethics course may be an excellent step if required, but to repeal the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 and remove the legal entitlement of children to receive education in secular ethics is an entirely different agenda. It is plain that to teach children to exercise their moral muscles is productive and for the benefit of

society generally, and I reiterate that **to support a case to abolish ethics classes, it would need to be shown that it is more beneficial for them and for our society to return to a situation where these students engage in nothing meaningful in place of SRE rather than participate in ethics classes.**

I trust that the Committee will reflect on the many positive outcomes that can be achieved by the ethics classes continuing, and the great loss it would be if children were denied this opportunity. I trust that the particular interests of Fred Nile and his supporters would not be upheld over public opinion and right to choose, and what is best for the education of Australian children.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and consider this matter carefully. **I would like to request that personal details such as my name and address be kept confidential.**

Yours sincerely,