

**Submission
No 32**

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

Name: Dr Kim Fenton

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5th of December 2011

Dr Kim Fenton

To: The Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee 2

Cc: The Hon. Barry Robert O'Farrell

Regarding: Ethics Classes in NSW Schools

It is with concern that I send this message to you regarding the investigation into Ethics Classes. It is my understanding that Reverend Fred Nile has requested an investigation into NSW Ethics Classes with the view to having the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 repealed.

On its own, I have no objection to an investigation into Primary Ethics, or the Ethics Classes it offers. The Ethics Classes are an educational opportunity of which NSW schools should be most proud. It is the mention of the potential of having the Act repealed that is of concern. My specific concern is that Reverend Nile is of the opinion that these classes are a threat to his religious priorities and as such, he is intent on removing them as an option for school students, irrespective of their value to children in public schools.

I should note that I have no objections to Scripture Classes and my child currently does Scripture at her school, as we are Catholic and Scripture is a priority for our family. My child will continue to do Scripture despite my support of Ethics Classes. I believe both are of value and I strongly advocate a parent's right to choose what is of most value in their family.

Currently those who opt out of Scripture are involved in "private study". They are not given the opportunity to learn or grow during this time and many view it as "free time". Despite the fact that there is no structured education on offer for those who opt out of Scripture, these families opt out anyway. Ethics Classes are also optional classes and will be able to fill what is currently an educational void for many students. For the students who choose Ethics Classes, they will have the opportunity to examine, discuss and learn about issues such as Fairness, Lying, Graffiti, Stealing and The Treatment of Animals. These all support Christian values and our way of life. Ethics Classes are the only forum children who opt out of Scripture have, within the educational system, to deeply examine these social issues.

Ethics Classes are of such great value that I have taken on the role of volunteer Ethics Coordinator at my child's school. Teaching children ethics is a priority for our community, and the government is obligated to provide the opportunity for our children to gain this valuable social knowledge, particularly as children currently gain no knowledge at all during the Scripture Classes they do not attend.

If the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 were repealed, there would no longer be a legal requirement to offer Ethics Classes as an option for children who opt out of Scripture. This could swiftly return us to the educational void those children currently face.

Again, I welcome a review of Ethics Classes, despite the fact that they were independently reviewed in 2010 prior to their introduction. If anything else can be improved, we'd be pleased to know it. We ask that this review be balanced and objective and we hope the committee ensures it is not contributing to a religious power struggle. It is the children who will be caught in the crossfire of such a crusade.

We also ask that an equally thorough review of Scripture Classes be conducted in parallel with the Ethics review. There has been no review of Scripture Classes since their introduction in the 19th Century and the current structure of Scripture Classes should be examined to ensure that the teachings are in line with modern social issues and views.

We value both Scripture and Ethics based educational options for Australian children and we believe that both Ethics Classes and Scripture Classes can exist in public schools in harmony. I trust that you will consider the views of the public and parents before recommending any changes to the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010.

Yours sincerely,

Kim Fenton