

**Submission
No 229**

INQUIRY INTO EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES REPEAL) BILL 2011

Organisation: Braidwood Central School P&C Association

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

21 February 2011

Dear Sir/Madam

Support for an Ethics-based Complement to Special Religious Education

In June 2010 the Braidwood Central School P&C Association unanimously agreed to support the proposal put forward by the St James Ethics Centre for an ethics-based complement to Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW primary schools, and for this program to be made available at Braidwood Central School.

At BCS there are a growing number of parents who choose for their children to 'opt out' of SRE classes – these make up one third of all our primary students. Prior to the introduction of Ethics classes, the only alternative for these students was to do 'private study' under the supervision of a regular teacher. This involved being given a worksheet or something to colour in (no new work was permitted) and being sent to another classroom to be supervised by the teacher responsible for that class. This is both disruptive to the other class and a waste of valuable learning time for the students. Over the seven years spent in Primary school, each student who opted out would have spent up to 280 hours (more than 11 school days) at school not being taught because of this arrangement.

The ethics program was taught for the first time at our school last year: 16 students benefitted from the program. This year 23 (around one third) of our current Year 5 and 6 students are enrolled and are now able to experience this great opportunity to use the time allocated for SRE constructively to learn about ethics. Feedback from the students and their parents has indicated that these classes are extremely popular and engaging, lead to interesting and thought-provoking discussions both at school and between parents and their children at home, and have benefitted our school immensely. The demand for these classes is a clear indication of their value to our school community.

Braidwood is a rural community with relatively high levels of church attendance and a majority of parents who continue to choose for their children to attend SRE. Christian Scripture (combined Anglican and Catholic) is the only option currently available during the SRE period. Yet the BCS P&C decision to support the ethics program was unanimous. During our discussions on the issue, not one parent has raised an objection to the program or suggested that it would pose any threat to the continued teaching of SRE at our school.

The withdrawal of ethics classes would return us to a situation where these students would once again be forced to waste their precious time during school hours. It would mean they no longer would have the opportunity to think through and attempt to resolve difficult issues, consider their place in society, develop the tools to consider issues on a local and global scale, and under the guidance of their excellent ethics teacher, reach a considered understanding of ethical choices.

We urge you to base your decision on this matter on the views of those who are directly involved in this issue – the parents of NSW public primary school students who have chosen for their children to attend these classes. If we were not one hundred percent happy with these classes, we would not send our children to them. Please do not take this choice away from us.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bidda Jones'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Bidda' being more prominent.

Dr Bidda Jones, on behalf of the Executive Committee
Braidwood Central School P&C Association