

**Submission
No 388**

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

Name: Ms Kirsty Nash

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

Please accept this letter as my submission into the enquiry into Ethics classes in primary schools.

I am making this submission as a parent of primary school children, as an active member of Public School P&C committee (although do not regard this as an official submission on behalf of that association), as a teacher in training and as a concerned community member.

Scrutiny of Ethics and Special Religious Education (SRE) classes

I have no objection to periodic review of the content, objectives, and outcomes of ethics classes. I do however object to the waste of resources in the running of two such reviews within the period of one year. As an initial review was performed prior to the commencement of these classes, it seems a waste of resources to be undertaking another review so soon. As this has already commenced – not much can be done. Please note the objection.

While ethics classes it seems, and certainly almost every other aspect of the school curriculum is subjected to regular review and amendment, I also call for an investigation into SRE classes (which to my understanding has not occurred before). I am concerned that this regular aspect of most students' schooling has not been reviewed, subject to standardised content or even assessed.

Consequences of no ethics classes

I am concerned with the consequences of ethics classes not being available to students. For those students opting out of SRE classes, there is no educational instruction provided. These children are given nothing meaningful to do. I believe that this is discrimination against those children opting out. This is not an acceptable situation to me as a parent, as a teacher in training and as a community member.

Benefits of ethics classes

As a parent and as a teacher in training, I see the purpose of schooling as to provide children with the knowledge, skills and understanding that they will need to function as capable and participating members of modern society.

While training in a particular doctrine or religion will provide some knowledge (particularly historical knowledge) about some aspects of (typically the dominant) culture, I don't believe any SRE classes will provide exposure to the one element that all students will need to participate in modern Australian society: the ability to think. The opportunity to explore and develop ones own ethical framework, in a supportive and familiar environment is important.

Have a look at the video of an ethics class in action at <http://www.primaryethics.com.au/whathappens.html>. These children are developing and voicing their own opinions, while respecting the opinions of others. They are being challenged to consider what is right and wrong. They are being presented with ethical dilemmas relevant to their own environment. Ethics is not the study of what is legal or socially accepted or tolerated; it is the study of what is right and wrong. These children are trying to discover reasonable general principles that will help them decide what they should do when confronted with these issues.

Have a look at the curriculum topics at <http://www.primaryethics.com.au/k6framework.html>. To me these topics appear age appropriate and relevant to students' own experiences in Australian society. They will assist children to develop their own views on their culture, their environment, and their place in the world.

I'm not sure on what basis Mr Nile objects to the ethics classes. I agree with Dr Michael Jensen (*Ethics classes can lead children to faith*, Sydney Morning Herald, 20 October 2010), that in helping students to think in an ethical way, we are providing them with **tools** or a **process**, rather than answers. It is not a course in morality. The fact that the ethics classes are run at the same times as SRE classes has not shown a decline in attendance at SRE classes – the ethics classes have only been designed with the intent to provide an alternative for students who would otherwise be twiddling their thumbs.

In summary, ethics classes in primary schools should not be discontinued because of the objection of one person (Mr Nile). They are of huge benefit to all students. The federal government should allocate funding towards these classes so that the program can be rolled out to all schools.

Thankyou for taking my submission into account.

Your sincerely

Kirsty Nash