

Submission
No 389

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

Name: Mr Andrew Fernon

Date received: 24/02/2012

Partially Confidential

Opposition to Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011

This submission is written to voice my strong opposition to the current Bill proposed by Reverend Fred Nile to repeal s.33A of the Education Act and thereby repeal the right for parents to have their children attend secular ethics classes at public schools in New South Wales. I preface my comments by stating that I am a Catholic and my children receive religious guidance at their respective schools.

I am a parent of three children all of whom are or have attended several parents of . This submission is also written with the support of who are listed below.

The right to secular ethics classes was included in the Education Act in 2010. After little more than a year, with a change of State government, it is now proposed to remove that right. Why? Because as Reverend Fred Nile states, he does not believe ethics classes "teach children right from wrong but promotes the secular humanist relative philosophy where there are no absolutes" (quoting from Reverend Nile's second reading speech).

Such reasoning is entirely fallacious:

Firstly, the whole concept of what is ethical or right involves, as a matter of logic, what is not ethical or wrong. What is right or wrong is fundamental to any ethical reasoning, which is based on the human conscience. The human conscience, for the vast majority, recognises that "You shall not murder", "You shall not lie", and "You shall not steal" (again quoting from Reverend Nile's second reading speech). To suggest that such beliefs are those of only the Christian or religious population is an insult to the large secular society in Australia. It is also simply wrong. In any event, for religious believers, such as Reverend Nile, the conscience is seen as a gift from God. Yet he appears to place very little faith in its performance.

Secondly, in the vast majority of human endeavours, beliefs and reasoning, there are no absolutes. Even in the 21st century with a world population touching 7 billion, peoples' views of what is right or wrong in an infinite number of situations will vary. Such variability of views is not only right but it is essential to the concept of being human. The Bible itself is full of numerous contradictions and its interpretation has changed significantly over human history as society has changed. Ethics and our conscience allow humans to act and react to these infinite situations and human experiences that we are all individually exposed to. With very few absolutes, ethical guidance in making the right decision when acting towards each other is a fundamental need and right for our children.

Thirdly, public education is based upon a secular belief. If ethical guidance is to be offered on a religious basis, it is wholly proper that it is also offered on a secular basis.

Fourthly, the structure of the Education Act is that ethics classes are only offered to those families whose parents have objected to receiving religious guidance. The children of such parents will, if ethics classes are removed, have no opportunity within the education system (and possible at all) to receive a structured guidance in ethical thinking and reasoning. To remove that opportunity, which has only just been implemented, is contrary to what is right on any logical basis. To deny a child the right to ethical guidance because of any absence of a religious belief is abhorrent in Australia's society.

Fifthly, in a broad religious, secular, ethnic and tolerant based society, the right to experience a broad educational base and guidance is surely the right of all of us. It is not for those who have very strict, narrow and limited religious beliefs and experiences to seek to impose such strictness, narrowness and limitations on the balance of society. The current Bill seeks to do just that.

Reverend Fred Nile is entitled to his beliefs. But so is the rest of society. Our children are entitled to have the opportunity for secular guidance. It is not Fred Nile and others who support this Bill who know best. As our parents always taught us who are now parents, "mummy and daddy always know best", particularly in relation to our children. So let us have the opportunity to show it. The Bill should be rejected.

Regards

Andrew Fernon
24 February 2012

Parent

This Submission is also supported by the following parents (or recent parents) of

Cymone Rose
Lisa Justice
Helen Eavis
Simone Notley
Michael Sestanovic
Beth McGregor
Mark Sablatnig
Nanette Bowen
Louisa Cochrane
David Cooper
Nyree Osborn
Trevor Osborn
Jody Green
Alex Green

Kelly Barr-Jones
Jennifer Everett
Peter Everett
Julie Morris
Peter Morris
Simon Watts
Grant Morrell
Petra Morrell
Gwenllian Jones Palmer
Lisbet Olsson-Veal
Michelle Parratt
Julie Lachelle
Pebble Johns
Olivia Greentree
Kirsty Metzke
Susan Bennett
Ian Bennett
Dee Montague-Jones
Rowan Barker
Stephanie Barker
Sooze Cooper