

Submission
No 405

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

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Date received: 23/02/2012

Partially Confidential

23 February 2012

To: NSW Parliamentary Committee Inquiring into Ethic Classes

I am one of the volunteers teaching the Ethics Classes at _____ Public. Both my children attended _____ Public, the second one leaving for high school at the end of 2009. While they were students there I helped out in the classroom and was a volunteer with the Reading Recovery program. I value being able to contribute to a school that was good for my children.

Being involved in the Ethics Course this year has been a profoundly rewarding experience. Although I have studied some philosophy at a post graduate level, and so was familiar with many of the concepts, I had not been involved in teaching large groups of children before. Over the year I have watched the children progress from simply stating a gut reaction to reaching the point where they listened to others' opinions, considered the basis on which they and others had formed their opinions, and learned to apply principles to their decisions.

I was in the first training course for Ethics Teachers in early February of 2011. We had two very full days of face to face training, as well as materials that we had to complete online in order to be able to lead a class. I left those two days invigorated and inspired to provide the children in my class with the kind of insightful experience that I had just had. Since that time I have also attended a seminar on classroom management provided by Primary Ethics and undertaken online training on the specific curriculum units. A number of the teachers from our school and others in the area meet from time to time to discuss issues raised by, and prepare and train for, classes.

I, and all the ethics teachers I have encountered, take the responsibility of teaching these classes seriously. Each class requires significant time to prepare - including educating ourselves about the philosophical background to the issue, preparation of materials and lesson plans.

Primary Ethics delivered a challenging and appropriate course to a large number of schools and volunteers with very little lead time before the first classes started. With so little notice and six years worth of material to provide, it is unsurprising that the course is still being developed. The materials have been delivered half yearly with time for us to prepare. The new materials and training reflect the experiences we have had in the classroom, and have taken into consideration the feedback we have given as well as the review of the pilot study. The level of the materials provided has increased in sophistication and has presented engaging and thought provoking issues for the children to discuss.

I have read in the media characterisations of the course as 'moral relativism'. In my experience this is as far from the truth as it could be. Neither do we attempt to force our personal views on the children, which has also been alleged in the media. I constantly challenge the children to reflect on their responses and justify their opinions based on principles. It is easy for children to apply principles by rote in situations which are simplistic, but our course asks them to think about the decisions they make and examine the basis for why they make them, and the wider implications of their decisions. We challenge them to examine the underlying principles and understand why and how to apply them. I have found the children to be articulate, thoughtful and insightful. I have also found them to be independent in their opinions, and willing to challenge ideas and think beyond the obvious.

I was a child of the public school system, as were my two children. I am only too aware of the egregious waste of time non scripture can be. It is not the Government's role to discriminate against children who do not share the views of the organised religions offering SRE classes. It is unacceptable that in a public school those children should be required to waste their time.

Ethics should continue to be given in SRE time as an alternative for children who chose not to attend religious instruction.

Under the NSW system, children whose parents send them to SRE are entitled to that instruction. The same consideration should continue to be extended to those children who have chosen to attend Ethics. Ethics Classes should be treated the same as SRE classes, and whatever inquiries, investigations and legal framework apply to one should apply to both. The Education Act (Ethics) 2010 should not be repealed. To be considering doing so when the course has only been in place for one year, and without thoroughly scrutinising the whole SRE system implies prejudice.

Your sincerely,

Amanda Hickie