

**Submission
No 377**

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

Name: Mrs Jessica Norris

Date received: 24/02/2012

Dear Sir / Madam,

I would like the committee investigating Ethics classes to consider also investigating SRE at the same time. I have long felt that in a secular school system we should be very careful of how we allow religious (or indeed any external non-school organisations) access to in-school time for teaching their own agendas, rather than the school curriculum. Those agendas *should* be scrutinised, and although I welcome scrutiny of Ethics classes, I feel that SRE should be examined at the same time.

I also have a great concern that parents' wishes are not being respected when it comes to allocating their children to a class during SRE time. In my local primary school I have recently heard two examples of children being allocated to Protestant scripture classes against the express wishes of their parents, who had indicated they wished their child to opt-out of SRE. I find this particularly disturbing, as the parents have only found out their children were attending scripture after they came home with religious material in their bags. There does not seem to be a proper way of notifying parents of either the SRE / non-scripture options available, nor of telling them where their child has been allocated. If the school can make mistakes like this, which greatly offends the parents involved, I have to question why SRE is able to be offered during school time at all.

As to the Ethics classes in particular, I feel that Ethics is a very useful subject for children to learn: it teaches children how to question and explore areas which are not necessarily black and white, and hopefully encourages them to make informed decisions about these topics. For children who are not attending an SRE class, and who are forced to spend their time deliberately unprofitably, Ethics is a very useful alternative that does not give them any scholarly 'advantage' over a student attending SRE classes. As ethics are often covered by SRE classes, they are simply covering the same material, but without a religious aspect. I see no reason why these classes should be repealed when SRE classes are allowed to continue. Removing a secular Ethics option from children attending secular schools seems to be particularly inappropriate!

If Ethics classes are removed as an option, many students will be forced to return to basic non-scripture classes where they are not allowed to spend their time doing any useful work. As a parent of a student who has just begun taking an Ethics class instead of reading a book in a classroom, I find this galling. Do I really send my child to school so that they can spend a period of their day *deliberately not learning anything*, during school hours? I would much prefer that *all* SRE time be re-allocated to curriculum uses, and SRE classes offered outside of school hours, than to have children wasting their time in this way using government money and resources.

I understand that there are historical and political reasons for allowing SRE time in school hours. I accept that these classes exist, and are there to give children access to religious education that their parents feel is important for them. I don't believe that the parents of non-religious children should be discriminated against, by refusing to let them attend a useful class in the same as other SRE classes are held. I think it is time we levelled the playing field and applied the same standards to SRE as we do to non-SRE.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make this submission.

Regards,

Jessica Norris