

**Submission
No 212**

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

Name: Ms Julie Worsley

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1.
SUBMISSION
EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES REPEAL) BILL 2011

From: Julie Worsley
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* Please delete my address
and phone number from any
publication of this submission

To: The Hon Marie Ficarra MLC (*Chair*),
The Hon Paul Green MLC (*Deputy Chair*) and Committee Members
GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 2.
NSW PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY.

Dear Hon. Marie Ficarra MLC, Hon. Paul Green MLC and committee members,

Thank you for your consideration of my submission about important issues related to the
"Education Amendment (Ethics Classes Repeal) Bill 2011".

I will address my comments to both specific terms of reference being considered by your
committee. Firstly:-

- a. **The stated objectives, curriculum, implementation, effectiveness and other related matters pertaining to the current operation of 'special education in ethics' being conducted in State Schools.**

A) "The stated objectives" and "curriculum" of 'special education in ethics'.

The following statement in "FAQs- Complement to Scripture" St James Ethics Centre" states:
"Any material developed for an approved program of Special Ethics Education will be made available for use as a free, public good – accessible to all, including faith groups. Those developing this material will do so on the explicit understanding that the intellectual property will be secured for common use in service of a common good." 1.

Sadly, I have found it impossible to access a copy of the ' special education in ethics' curriculum, despite a concerted effort to do so. 2.

Open and transparent discussion about the educational merits of 'ethics' stated objectives and curriculum has been rendered impossible.

A representative of Primary Ethics (phone conversation, 10th February) said that a distinction has been made between material that was "developed to teach during the pilot program" and the material that is "approved".

"A plain reading" of the "FAQs" quote (above) is not consistent with actual practice, as the material *Primary ethics* has developed is certainly not "accessible to all". Therefore, how can it be "*secured for common use in the service of a common good*" if it is not available as part of the public record? Keeping 'ethics' curriculum available to only a select few effectively silences the possibility of open and transparent discussion about its various educational merits or otherwise.

1. "FAQs- Complement to Scripture" St James Ethics Centre" retrieved 4th February 2012.
2. My attempts to access 'special education in ethics' curriculum include check Primary Ethics web site, phone the office of Adrian Piccoli MP (Minister for Education), phone Kristy Smith at Board of Studies, phone Leith Brooke General Manager Primary ethics, email and visit Cheryl Clendinning editor SRE educational material Baptist Education, email Peter Adamson Presbyterian Education, phone Anglican's Youthworks, phone Uniting Church education (who have a copy of the Ethics Curriculum. However, they were not at liberty to share it with me, even though I teach three SRE classes per week for the Uniting Church).

B) “Effectiveness pertaining to the current operation of ‘special education in ethics’.”

It being impossible to access *Primary ethics* approved curriculum, I have downloaded lessons available from the trial, entitled “Fairness” and “Lying and Telling the Truth”.

I am making the **reasonable assumption** that these are both representative examples of what is taught to students in ‘ethics’ classes.

Comments on the Educational merits of Trial lessons “Fairness” and “Lying and Telling the Truth” regarding the PROCESS.

- There is benefit for boys and girls in problem solving, tussling over potential scenarios and having to justify their thoughts to their peers.
- These benefits are the development of logical and analytical thinking, the development of empathy and an ability to verbalise thoughts clearly.

Comments on the Educational merits of Trial lessons “Fairness” and “Lying and Telling the Truth” regarding the CONTENT.

- The philosophical basis of ‘ethics’ classes is **Moral Relativism**. Hence there is “no right or wrong”.
- **Morally relativistic teaching** is in **DIRECT CONTRAVENTION** to the **VALUES EDUCATION** program implemented in NSW Public Schools from March 2004. 3.
- The following quotes show that **VALUES TAUGHT by NSW Public Schools ARE NOT changeable or RELATIVE, but secure and ABSOLUTE.** 1. “Schools in NSW share with families and the community the responsibility for **teaching values**. ... parents and the community have **high expectations** about commonly held values also being **taught in schools**. **The demonstration of these values in all areas of public education is both the aim and a measure of success for public schools.**”⁴ 2. “Values are taught explicitly in classrooms In schools, core values 5. ... are reflected in the policies and procedures of schools and the Department.” 6.

C) SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION FOR “TERM OF REFERENCE a.”

- “**EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES) ACT 2010**” should be repealed.
- **REASON 1** – that the **contents** of the “ethics” classes **CONTRADICTS** and **CONTRAVENES** the pre-existing “Values in NSW Public Education” 2004 document.
- **REASON 2** – the logical extension of the teaching of **Moral Relativism** to children who are still forming their views is **confusion** about “**right and wrong**”, which leads to **confusion** about how to **act as morally responsible persons in society**.
- **REASON 3** – the process used in “ethics” classes is appropriate for Year 5 & 6. However, **this process taught in the context of “moral relativism”, contradicts principles outlined in “VALUES in NSW Public Schools” document.**
It is good for children to grapple with difficult scenarios, but **only within the context of “right and wrong” moral values**, which also provide **clear and secure moral boundaries**.

3. “**VALUES in NSW PUBLIC SCHOOLS**” document.

4. **NSW Public Schools**, Web page “Values Education in NSW Public Schools” retrieved 21/2/12

5. **9 Core Values** - Integrity, Excellence, Respect, Responsibility, Care, Cooperation, Participation, Fairness, Democracy. Retrieved 22/2/12

5. **NSW Public Schools**, Web page “Values Education in NSW Public Schools” retrieved 21/2/12

The second term of reference, which I'll address now, states:-

b. whether the Education Amendment (Ethics) Act 2010 should be repealed.

A) Consideration 1 – Parents Always Retain the Right to Choose a particular SRE class for their Child.

This statement is clearly true in all situations regarding the religion, denomination, no religion or 'ethics' class that they believe is the best choice for their son or daughter.

B) Consideration 2 – That students who “Opt out” of SRE (Special Religious Education) waste their time.

As a permanent primary school teacher in Public schools for over 30 years, and as one who co-ordinated SRE and 'non-Scripture' within the school for 16 years, I have a sound working knowledge of how students who 'opt out' of SRE lessons spend their time.

Students who attend 'non Scripture' usually spend their time in the library, completing unfinished work or other private study activities **set by their teacher**. Some research from books and / or internet sources. Younger boys and girls usually complete stencils pitched to their age and stage and read library books in a quiet working atmosphere.

It is fallacious to claim that these activities are “a waste of student’s time”. The time allocated for SRE lessons in most public schools is 30 minutes per week (which is 0.02% of weekly learning time). **To maintain that students spending 0.02% of their weekly learning time in quiet supervised study is “a waste of their time” is a preposterous assertion.** It actually benefits students to engage in quiet supervised private study.

C) Consideration 3 – Sound Historical Reasoning behind Education Amendment Act 1990 Statement that no other structured lesson be offered at the same time as SRE.

The reason that that no alternative prescribed planned lessons are allowed during SRE time remains relevant. It is to alleviate any angst parents or students may experience having a conflict of choice between lessons offered.

The *Education Reform Act 1990* states:-

“ Schools are to support SRE by ensuring that no formal lessons or scheduled school activities occur during time set aside for SRE. Such activities may create conflict of choice for some parents and for some students attending SRE.” 7.

“ Schools are to provide appropriate care and supervision for students at school not attending SRE. This may involve students in other activities such as completing homework, reading and private study. These activities should neither compete with SRE, nor be alternative lessons in the subjects within the curriculum or other areas, such as ethics, values, civics or general religious education...” 8.

The 2010 decision to offer 'ethics' classes concurrently with SRE has disrespected the wisdom of 130 years of educators who could see the reasonable position of this rationale, 9 which position continues to remain entirely relevant in 2012.

7. *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*. Responsibilities of Schools. Point 3. page 3 Retrieved 10/2/12

8. *Ibid.* Point 10, page 3. (Retrieved 10/2/2012)

9. Appendix 1 – A Summary of History of Education in NSW .

D) Consideration 4 – Logical extrapolation of embracing the personal belief espoused by “Secular Ethics” .

1. **The message of secular ethics is “anti-community”.** Specifically, as there is no “right or wrong” it is left to each individual to come to his or her own understanding of what is “right or wrong’ for him or her self. There is, therefore, from that individual’s perspective no secure community or group that shares values and acts on these.
2. **A degree of isolation at a subtle level is instilled,** and may lead to hopelessness. This is damaging to girls and boys who strive for ideals and want to gather for causes, even team spirit, one spirit- one set of ideals operating in the group is compromised.
3. **Individualism,** contrary to the conviction of some about being the way to freedom, is for adolescents the road to loneliness and isolation. Australia’s suicide rate for 18 – 24 year olds is one of the world’s highest, and is to a large degree caused by the emotional and social isolation of individuals. **To teach secular ethics, is, therefore, naïve, irresponsible and destructive for the most vulnerable in society.**

E) Consideration 5 –The Misrepresentation to Parents and Students of the Content of “Ethics” classes Suggested by the Misnomer “Ethics”.

It is a travesty that Government has allowed the “Ethics” course that is actually “philosophical ethics” to proceed under a name that is clearly deceptive. Parents and students need to be given the respect they deserve by naming the so-called “Ethics’ course with a title that does not misrepresent the content of the classes.

The common understanding of the word ‘ethics’ implies that students will be taught an understanding of ‘right and wrong’ in thought, word and deed. In practice “ethics’ classes have no intention of this occurring. It is simply a ‘pooling’ of students own ideas with no moral guidance intended. If the course continues, I ask the Government to change its title to reflect the true essence of their content.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION FOR “TERM OF REFERENCE b.”

- It will always be the right of parents to choose which Special Religious Education class or not, that their child attends.
- Quiet supervised study in lieu of SRE is not “a waste of students’ time”.
- There is sound reasoning behind the position that no other organised lesson including values or ethics should be taught at the same time as SRE. This reason continues to be relevant.
- To teach “secular ethics” in Public Schools is irresponsible.
- Do not continue the falsehood of calling the “secular ethics” course “ethics”. It is a deceptive title. It should be changed immediately to reflect the true nature of the course.
- **“EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES) ACT 2010” should be repealed.**

My overall recommendation therefore is that:-

“EDUCATION AMENDMENT (ETHICS CLASSES) ACT 2010” BE REPEALED.

Yours faithfully,

Julie Worsley (B.Ed.)

ADDENDUM- Please note that I am willing to attend the Parliamentary Inquiry to speak in person.

APPENDIX 1.

A brief History of Public Education in NSW with emphasis on the Respective Responsibilities of the Church and State in Education.

- 1793-1848 All schools were initiated and managed by Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. The curriculum was set by churches. Government grants were given for land, buildings and salaries. 1.
- 1833 Concept of “public secular education based on a ‘common Christianity’”² was introduced.
- 1848-1860 Dual system- a National board supervised government schools and a Denominational board supervised private schools. 3. Government grants extended to books and apparatus. 1.
- 1860-1880 Most administration was taken over by central boards. Conditions for qualifying for government grants were more stringent, until (1866) all state aid was removed from all private schools. 1. As a result most protestant schools handed the role of the education of their children over to the state, while the Roman Catholic denomination continued to trust in almighty God to provide, despite the enormous pressure that lack of funds created, and they persevered. 4.
- 1880 the concept of “Religious neutrality” was introduced. The *NSW Public Instruction Act 1880* was implemented. Section 17 read:
“17. In every public school four hours during each day shall be devoted to secular instruction exclusively and a portion of each day not more than one hour shall be set apart when the children of any one persuasion may be instructed by the clergyman or other religious teacher of such persuasion” 5.
- 1961 *Wyndham Report* proposals were adopted in the *Education Act 1961*. 6
- 1965 State funding to private schools was reintroduced. 7.
- 1990 The *Education Reform Act 1990* includes these point from Section 32:-
“ In every government school, time is to be allowed for religious education of children of any religious persuasion, but the total number of hours so allowed in a year is not to exceed, for each child, the number of school weeks in the year.” 8.

“ Schools are to support SRE by ensuring that no formal lessons or scheduled school activities occur during time set aside for SRE. Such activities may create conflict of choice for some parents and for some students attending SRE.”⁹

“ Schools are to provide appropriate care and supervision for students at school not attending SRE. This may involve students in other activities such as completing homework, reading and private study. These activities should neither compete with SRE, nor be alternative lessons in the subjects within the curriculum or other areas, such as ethics, values, civics or general religious education. When insufficient teachers or accommodation are available the school’s policy on minimal supervision will operate.” 10

FOOTNOTES.

1. Kotlowski, Elizabeth; "Southland of The Holy Spirit" Christian History research Institute, Orange, NSW. Page 117 quoted Brother Ronald Fogarty, *Catholic Education in ASustralia: 1806-1950* (Melbourne :Melbourne University Press, 1959) page 26, Quoted in
2. Ibid. Page133
3. Ibid. Page 134
4. Ibid. page 137,8
5. Ibid. page 138 – a quote from NSW Department of Public Instruction. *The Public Education Act of 1880 and Regulations Thereunder, Section 17* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1912).
6. Ibid. page 142
7. Ibid. page 142
8. *Implementing Special Religious Education; Guidelines for Schools, Providers of SRE and Parents*. NSW Department of School Education (195) page 2.
9. *Religious Education Implementation Procedures*. Responsibilities of Schools. Point 3. page 3 (Retrieved 10/2/2012)
10. Ibid. Point 10, page 3. (Retrieved 10/2/2012)