

**Submission  
No 338**

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

**Name:** Dr Angus Ferguson & Ms Jennita Gay

**Date received:** 23/02/2012

---

The Director

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2

Parliament House, Macquarie St

Sydney NSW 2000

**Submission to Committee inquiring into Ethics Classes**

We would like to express profound support for the continuation of Ethics Classes in NSW schools which are currently under attack by MP Fred Nile. We believe that the Ethic Classes are extremely valuable, and if Fred Nile's agenda to have them scrapped is successful it would be a giant step in the wrong direction for our young people and our country. Our specific arguments are outlined below.

- As agnostic parents of three primary school age children, we feel it is vital that our children are given a valid and stimulating education alternative to special religious education classes. We were dismayed in the past when our children were simply put in front of a TV with minimal supervision while special religious education classes were held. This inequality based on religious preferences at a tax payer funded state school is completely unacceptable.
- The Ethic Class curriculum is a carefully considered and honed program developed by experts, and from what we have observed it encourages young people to think independently about moral choices, articulate their thoughts and respect the thoughts of others. How this could be construed as "Nazi ideology" as claimed by Fred Nile is completely beyond comprehension.
- The Ethic Classes can only help our society grow in a positive way by giving children with no religious affiliation access to moral and ethical instruction.
- Secular moral and ethical instruction is of growing importance in our multi-cultural society.
- The Ethic Class program is a grass roots initiative, born out of tireless lobbying over years by concerned parents from around the state. It is not a political football, but a deeply cherished

achievement of a galvanised community. Dr Simon Longstaff of the St James Ethic Centre has welcomed scrutiny of the program, however we urge the committee that this scrutiny should be directed at improving it rather than a justification to axe it according to Fred Nile's agenda.

- The assertion by Fred Nile that Christian religious education should be the only choice for moral and ethical guidance in our state schools is increasingly outmoded. The census facts are plain: adherence to Christianity has declined from 96.1% of the population in 1901 to 63.9% in 2006. In particular, most of this decline is in the Anglican faith. The numbers of Australians subscribing to other religions, or describing themselves as having 'no religion' or as being lapsed Christians is growing steadily.
- That Fred Nile should choose to blackmail the government to support his agenda, and in the process deprive Australian children of the right to high quality education choices is an outrageous abuse of his privileged position. Despite what Fred Nile would like us to aspire to, Australia is a secular society where religion should be an individual's choice, not something that influences politics or something that is rammed down young people's throats at school.

Angus Ferguson and Jennita Gay