The final report on the Ethics Course Trial was published on the Department of Education and Training’s internet site 20 October, 2010. Members of the public were invited to make submissions on the content of the report for the Minister’s consideration. The deadline for feedback was close of business, 5 November, 2010.

Submissions were received by email and post. In total, 745 submissions were received from individuals, groups and organisations. All submissions were made available to the Minister.

Following is a collation of a significant proportion of these submissions. All efforts have been taken to protect the anonymity of the individuals, groups or organisations that have made a submission. Where this could not be reasonably done without affecting the overall message, the submission has not been included for publication.

Responses appear as received – responses are unedited. Areas that are blacked out refer to potentially identifying information.
I am writing in response to the decision to hold ethics classes at the same time as SRE classes in NSW Public Schools.

In the Education Act which allows SRE classes to be taught by appropriately trained volunteers from the community, I understood that it was also required that other classes should not be taught at this time. In putting on Ethics classes surely this is going against the Act?
If, as the report on these classes suggests that they are valuable and the students involved gained some valuable skills, why are they restricted to only a few students. Why is the course not officially trialled for all students in NSW Public Schools and added to the school curriculum?
For these two reasons, I am strongly opposed to the implementation of Ethics courses to run concurrently with SRE classes.

I strongly support the teaching of ethics in public schools.

As a young child I had a minister ask the class is there anyone with the surname of Black?

When I said yes that was my name he said too bad I’m going to use this example anyway of the black sheep.

I also remember being assigned to cleaning up the playground in high school because I didn’t attend religious ed.

The local school at Sorrel in Tasmania lost their best fund raiser a few years ago over this sort of treatment to his sons.

With a prime minister who isn’t a god botherer lets go for it before the mad monk gets in.

I think the ethics classes are a wonderful idea and can only hope they will be approved and implemented in 2011. Just yesterday I attended orientation at [Redacted] Public School with my 5 year old son who will be starting kindergarten next year. I was asked if I would like him to do Catholic or Protestant scripture and whilst there is a non-scripture class, this is usually unstructured and makes children feel that they are missing out.

From speaking to other parents, I have no doubt that ethics classes would be welcomed with open arms. There will always be a place for religious studies but there also needs to be an alternative for non-religious students that doesn’t make a child feel like they’re in detention!

This is to express my full support for the Ethics course in Primary School.
All responses are unedited

In Response to the NSW Ethics Course Trial - Final Report
I would like to add the following comments

NSW Ethics Course Trial - Final Report Pg 2
The call for an ethics based complement to Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW Government schools (not compete with)
Sections 15.7,15.8,15.8.1 of the school manual of the DET guidelines state that "SRE occurs in non-competitive period The Director–General’s memorandum (DG memo) on SRE no.93.3316 28/9/93b)"
Ethics, if to be offered as a compliment to SRE, should be in a separate time slot, offering it to those who would like to attend both, unless Ethics is classified as a "Religion", this then brings in additional complications of exactly who is the "Spiritual leader" & what Do they "Practice"?

NSW Ethics Course Trial - Final Report Pg 76
Overall, students were keen to voice their opinions on the issues being discussed and to give reasons in support of them, but in many cases they appeared to lack relevant factual knowledge,

This is then opinion being expressed without ability to understand where that idea came from.
It is a good thing that the children in the ethics classes are reflecting on the values they have been exposed to, but please do not imagine that they have the tools to make these decisions alone.

NSW Ethics Course Trial - Final Report Pg 96
From what I have been able to find, The full content of the ethics classes seem to be the subject of copyright and have therefore not been made available to the general public. There is only an outline available, of the 10 week pilot, and a sample lesson provided on Pg 96 of the final report.

All other school curriculum is open for public viewing, inspection and scrutiny (including SRE material)
There is no transparency in just what exactly is being taught in ethics, it is very much someone’s opinion not factual information.

RECOMMENDATION 3
That in any future iteration of the course, training be extended in order to allow for:
a. a consideration of the issues around moral relativism;

Regarding Moral Relativism, the thought that "What is true for you, may not be true for me" brings about the problems of
-each one of us can determine our own "truth"
-So who then determines the final say on what is the "Truth"?
-The moral absolute of Right & Wrong then would be easily swayed by
what "I Feel" like at the time, does it suit me & depending on the "circumstances"...

EG- is it OK to speed & break the law? Depending on the "circumstances"...., YES.
Is it OK to lie? ? Depending on the "circumstances"...., YES.
Is it Ok to kill someone? if it's OK to break the law & lie, why would this be any different?

The problems addressed here are not a full assessment of all the issues of introducing Ethics as a substitute for SRE.
Ethics needs to be classified differently to SRE, therefore must be held in a different time slot to SRE.
That is providing that the curriculum materials reach the level of soundness required to be taught on fact not theory.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment
I hope that these and the many other problems with Ethics in the curriculum are rectified before it is introduced again as a 'reputable' subject.

I feel very positive about the ethics trial and recommendations. It appears all due diligence has been taken to ensure all stakeholders were well informed and included, despite some minor misunderstandings.

The recommendations and conclusion appear to place an equally congruent emphasis on the importance of making its own report ethically balanced and considered. As one would expect from a trial of anything new, the ethics classes could benefit from adjustment and improvement. The relatively minor changes recommended are testimony to the rigorous approach taken by the DET and St James Ethics Centre to provide a relevant and pedagogically sound alternative to SRE.

Without wanting to denigrate the place of SRE in our schools, I’m sure the DET will have a greater knowledge of what goes on in that instruction time during ethics classes than for SRE classes. Likewise the educational relevance of the ethics classes is more defined and follows an approved curriculum (highlighted in Recommendations 5 & 6), which can only strengthen the importance of their inclusion.

If, in some distant future, SRE is deemed irrelevant in our schools, I would hope that a program such as the ethics classes be part of the core curriculum. The pace in which modern society operates, including the impact caused by the rapid advances of technology, it is easy to see how the blurring of right and wrong can occur for children. As we can all appreciate, the foundation of any individual is based on the lessons and values acquired in early developmental years. Without developing the analytical skills required for ethical judgement, these lack of skills are more likely to remain into adolescence and adulthood. Given the natural desire for greater autonomy in adolescence, it would seem logical that without the appropriate skills, misguided decisions, often with far broader consequences, for the individual and society as a whole, are more likely.
I would implore the government to endorse the recommendations of Dr Knight’s report. Whilst change costs money, the investment in such a program would yield a social return that is difficult to estimate but would undoubtedly be extensive. At up to 35 hours a year lost by students doing nothing in this time, the ethics classes would indeed be a sage investment in these children and, as they mature, be of benefit to Australian society (perhaps DET could link this to a long term study on society’s moral trends).

Additionally I think it important that a change in policy not be in vein and at the behest of a change in government. That is to say, if endorsed, let not the time, effort, and cost of this trial and findings be wasted by allowing it to be simply overturned. Close the loopholes so that the program is given sufficient time to prove itself more broadly and allow supporters of SRE to see it is in no way a threat to religious freedom.
Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the trial of ‘Ethics’ classes recently conducted in NSW primary schools.

We offer the following comments –

1. We are most concerned that the introduction of a so-called ‘Ethics’ course into NSW primary schools seems to be a forgone conclusion. Media reports clearly indicate that the Minister’s view is that an ethics course should be provided as an alternative to Special Religious Education (SRE) as a means of engaging children not involved in SRE in meaningful activity.

2. We would argue that ethics is not an alternative to SRE in either subject matter or delivery. According to the report of Dr Sue Knight ethics is a branch of philosophy (pg.8) which teaches a framework for rational processes of argument & justification (pg.8). As such the course is not about teaching right from wrong. To name the course as “Ethics” is therefore misleading as the current popular understanding of ethics is that it teaches children about right and wrong. If the course were introduced then it should be named as a course in “Secular Philosophy” or “Philosophical Enquiry”. The word “Ethics” should be dropped as it is confusing.

3. The school curriculum is already crowded to the detriment of basic literacy & numeracy. To introduce the ethics course is only to introduce another “new thing”. We think that it is better to concentrate on ‘values’ education which is already present throughout the curriculum.

4. The essential reason for trialing the ethics course was a perception that children not engaged in SRE classes are unsupervised and not meaningfully engaged. This is not the case. The DET has a policy for the management of students during SRE time. It is however an unfortunate fact that some schools do not adequately implement the DET’s own policy.

5. The real question is about student management. Those children who are not allowed to attend SRE have a right to be meaningfully engaged. But this is no different from a child who is unable to participate in any other class, or sport or any other subject. The child must be adequately supervised & engaged in a meaningful way.

6. What will happen to those children who ‘opt out’ of both SRE and ethics classes? There may be children who prefer to do SPAR instead of ethics or SRE. Will ethics be made compulsory for any child who does not attend SRE? The proposed ethics course does not actually solve the problem. The solution lies in proper adherence to the DET’s existing policy.

7. If as expected the ethics course is introduced as an alternative to SRE the we would expect the course to be provided on a level playing field with SRE.

   a. SRE teachers are volunteers from local communities many of whom are qualified teachers who give their time unpaid for SRE. Ethics should not be taught by DET teachers paid on school time.

   b. SRE teachers undergo vetting, training & accreditation by the various SRE providers. This includes (very importantly) child protection vetting & training. The proponents of the ethics course should source volunteer teachers from the community who are vetted, trained & accredited to the same standard as SRE teachers.

   c. Ethics should be provided as ‘opt in’ course. SRE should remain as ‘opt out’.

   d. The report of Dr Sue Knight mentions the difficulty during the trial of delivering the ethics classes within the 30 minute timeslot allocated to SRE. Both SRE & ethics should be allocated the same amount of time.

   e. The SRE course and its providers are vetted & approved by DET. The same standards should apply to the ethics course before it is introduced.

SRE has a long history in the NSW public education system and should not be lightly dismissed as irrelevant in the life of modern children. We believe that SRE remains valid and has a distinctive part to play in the ongoing development & education of our children.
I write to express my strongest possible support for the ethics lessons as proposed. It is most appropriate to have these taught at school and I would find opposition to this by any religious group to be a most disturbing impost on our society. I might add that it is the clear wish of my children aged 10 and 12 that such an alternative be available.

we strongly agree that NO ethics classes should run during time set aside for SRE .and those kids that don’t have a believes should ether be supervised by teachers that they just gives them some home work or any activities or offer them to go and try some of the religions to learn about it and decide for them self .and other things our government should do instead , watching out for some religions and what they teach the young finely hope that our leaders be so wise to make the right decision thank you

Hooray! I am a 67yr old grandmother, who for most of my adult life was an athiest as was my husband. We did not want to control our children to our beliefs, therefore sent our son to a public school, were he would sit out of class when scripture was on and mess up most of the time (where was an ethics class then?) We decided to send our daughter to a Catholic School, luckily she was embraced by them, but always felt left out when religious instruction was done, which was a lot of the time. Another mistake of ours. I envy the parents who are in our position, if they are lucky enough for the ethics program to go ahead. My son is an Athiest, our daughter a caring spiritual woman.

Good luck to the introduction of ethics classes.

I am very pleased that the report found the trial to have been beneficial. I think the recommendations are eminently sensible. In particular, the involvement of the St James Ethics Centre is clearly invaluable. I hope that school students will now be able to benefit from an ethics course (suitably named).

I am not in favour of ethics classes as i do not believe they such classes be ethically neutral. I am not in favour of introducing such new roles of government agency into our children's lives.
I am confident that the vast majority of parents view this as a peculiar function of their parenting.

The proposed ethics class is a great idea and long overdue.

While there will always be a place for religious classes in public schools (or rather the choice of being taught reliogion) I believe that for those parents who choose not to send their
children to religious classes, the children should be engaged in thinking about issues of morality.

While I classify myself as a Catholic and have baptised my children, I would prefer to send my children to ethics classes over religious classes. The religions of the world do not have a monopoly over morality and in actual fact some of the problems of the world can be attributed to religion. As a footnote I believe in a strong and secular public school system.

It is not only a question of using the children’s time constructively but the teaching of morality and ethics is crucial in preparing children to be responsible and compassionate members of the community when they are adults.

I support the trial of the ethics class and hope that it will be implemented as a permanent part of the public education system.

Finally I also believe that a comparative religious component should be included in both religious and ethics classes. Comparing religions would reveal how much in common there is among the different religions and hopefully, as a result, the next generation will be a little more open minded and less prejudiced.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

As a parent of a young child who began school this year, I really endorse the new Ethics class. My view is in fact ALL STUDENTS should be taught ethics so I wonder if it could be introduced alongside the existing scripture streams rather than constitute an alternative.

I want to comment on the report of the Ethics trial.

I am most concerned that the proposed continuation of Ethics courses are to be run at the same time as the Religious lessons and will be seen by many students as an alternative to the teaching of religion.

In addition, the Christian Scripture lessons have a much broader range of material that is taught to the children, apart from ethics. The two (religious classes and ethics courses) are very different and should not be run at the same time.

I strongly support the continuation of religious lessons in our State Schools.

I have a child at a state primary school and currently send him to SRE education classes. I am not particularly "religious" but do see SRE as an important part of my child’s education (much of the traditions and institutions and cultural understandings of our society come from a Christian base).
In my opinion the ethics classes look to be an excellent program for young children and I would be very unhappy about my child missing out on the opportunity to attend ethics classes as they will be held during SRE time. I imagine many parents who send their children to SRE will now be placed in this difficult position. (I understand that parents who do not currently attend SRE education are also in a similarly difficult position now).

The Minister has said today that the materials from the St James Ethics Centre will be made available to SRE teachers and that this dismisses parents concerns that SRE children will now miss out on the ethics classes. I would like to see SRE teachers receive the ethics class materials from the St James Ethics Centre - although I am not sure how they would use the material as it must be acknowledged that the essence of SRE education is NOT the same as the ethics classes. SRE deals with spiritual life, ethics deals with moral behaviour and decision making (a moral-philosophy based course Recommendation 5). There is some overlap but the two are not the same.

I agree with Recommendation 6, that fact sheets on the content of SRE classes should be made available to parents.

Comments on

The “NSW Ethics Course Trial” Report

“Ethics-Based Complement in NSW Government Schools”

(1) At the top of page 9, the report states that “it is argued that it is both discriminatory and harmful to youth mental health to deny non-SRE children the right to examine what it means to lead a morally good life, a right which SRE students are granted through participation in their SRE courses”.

The report does not make any mention of the unalienable parental responsibility to give their children a good moral attitude. The report also goes further and implies that parents who opt out of sending their children to SRE are at fault. This must be so, as their children are non-SRE and therefore (according to the report) such children are discriminated against and harmed! Low cost solution involving no extra staff, all children to attend SRE.

Who has decided that “examining what it means to lead a morally good life” is a ‘right’ to be taught at school and who has argued so? Is this in any charter? Also, I cannot imagine that these type decisions are within the scope of DET.

(2) The second part of the statement on page 9 reads “In an assessment of these claims, the ‘discrimination’ argument is judged to be sound and the conclusion of the ‘mental health’ argument to be established, conditional on the truth of the research-based premises”.

Regarding the ‘discrimination’ argument’. Who were the judges, were they the four people who ran the course and prepared this report? I am sure that a sizeable majority of thinking people would disagree with this so called judgment.
Regarding the ‘mental health’ argument to be established. Presumably, the same 4 people ‘established’ the argument. What premise did they use? Again, most thinking people would disagree.

This judgment and establishment are both “conditional on the truth of the research-based premises”. Therefore, both arguments are on shaky ground and when will this “conditional truth” be determined, before the November 5 deadline or when?

(3) On page 8 the extract from the Education Act of 1990 (Section 17) states:-

“Schools are to provide appropriate care and supervision at school for students 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. (Section A 11.)”

It is quite clear from these words that the ‘ethics’ course is not a “complement” but is in opposition and competing with the long established SRE courses and therefore is in breach of legislation and should not be implemented.

After reading the recommendations from the recently released report on the ethics trial, I can only agree that this has been a highly successful trial, and should be rolled out to a greater range of schools.

Our local school was very keen to participate in the trial, and is now very excited about the prospect of the student being able to participate in ethics classes in the (hopefully) near future.

As parents of two primary school aged children, we are crying out for a reasonable and meaningful alternative to SRE. Currently our children do not attend SRE, and do little useful activity in its place.

We would actually like to see the course expanded, and the curriculum greater in scope, as would happen if it was a permanent course run through all school terms.

I did not agree with the idea of Ethics classes but did think it would be better than "nothing" for those children (parents) who did not attend Scripture. Now that I have read the article, "Decision time for ethic", I still do not agree but not because they are not religious.

The examples of lessons discussed are issues for debate with no tangible right or wrong answer. In fact, I might not agree with the teachers ideas and then take my child out of the Ethics classes. I believe they are also issues which should be left to the parents (if only they would take responsibility), although I do admit there is a standard of ethical behaviour.
All responses are unedited

within our society which, I presume, is what these classes are trying to "teach". If Ethics classes are to be offered as an alternative to Scripture then the issues dealt with should be more defined, eg. our laws, rules and regulations and not breaking them, as well as such issues as taking responsibility and acceptable behaviour in our society. I also find it odd that at my son’s school there is time for these ethical dilemmas and matters of behaviour to be discussed in "peer support" and "PD/H" without the need for separate Ethics classes. When are teachers going to spend time teaching Geography, Science, Maths, English, History, etc. and stop trying to influence (brain wash) the children with ideologies and beliefs which may not be those of the child’s family. Where is the line going to be drawn? Is the next step going to be indoctrination?

I would like my children who are at a state school be given every opportunity to learn about subjects that will help them in life. I do not believe that sitting in the playground under a COLA in all seasons is helping them in any way.

If other people choose for their children to have religious education at school so be it but what choice do my family and I have. None.

Say yes to ethic classes and get them started as soon as possible.

I don’t support the introduction of ethics classes in opposition to scripture.

I think if the report proves that they are beneficial then all children should gain from them. Contrary to claims, many children who now attend scripture would be pulled out in favour of ethics.
I believe this would just further create a spiritual vacuum in our society.

I would prefer teaching about all world religions than ‘ethics’. Surely this would encourage greater understanding of other cultures and beliefs as well as well as christianity?

Thanks for the open invitation made to members of the public to give feedback concerning the recent public schools trial of an ethics course and the trial’s final report.

The report covers many areas, but I would like to comment on just one: the issue of competition between ethics and SRE.

The report, more than once, notes that activities for non-SRE students ‘should neither compete with SRE nor be alternative lessons in the subjects within the curriculum or other areas’ (see pages 2, 27). The report then finds no competition obtained in this case, despite the trial being conducted specifically at the time of SRE in the schools involved.

I obviously have no access to the intentions of those involved, nor do I wish to imply poor motives, but the effect of such a placement is plainly competition. The two consequences of
this are compromise of the stated policy (quoted above) and exclusion of many students from the teaching of philosophical ethics.

My representation, therefore, is that any such course, if it be implemented in NSW schools, be conducted as a core component of the syllabus and not in competition with SRE. This would be a parallel to the existing conceptual distinction made in NSW schools between special and general religious education.

In reading the news article, we got this email address as a feedback mechanism.

Coming from Christian background, and having spent time working with marginalised people who lived on the streets, it is paramount that our education system to reinforce ethics as well as Biblical teachings.

As parents with kids going to Scripture classes currently, I would like your help to ensure the Scripture classes continue into the future plus providing the option for kids to take up ethics.

As a Grandmother of 4, please bring in Ethics classes. I would love my grandchildren to learn about Ethics rather than having to be brainwashed about religion which is all based on lies. Religion in my mind is the root of all evils. Countless millions have been murdered in the name of religion.

Ethics Class is long overdue. Australia is lagging behind other countries in providing meaningful ethics education to children for students opt out religious indoctrinating classes.

I would like to express my support for ethics classes to be made available in all schools as an alternative to Special Religious Education,

As a former teacher and parent and grandparent of children who have or are attending NSW public schools, I strongly support the option of ethics classes for those children whose parents wish them to attend ethics classes rather than religious classes. Children whose parents do not wish them to attend religious classes have often been undesirably discriminated against. All children at school should be using their time profitably. There is no doubt that any challenge to children to think through issues is educationally advantageous.

As the report indicates alternative instruction to specific religious instruction is practiced in a number of other countries.
I would like to voice my strongest support for the introduction of ethics classes as an alternative to religion based teaching in public schools. In the current Australian society it is no longer possible to cater for all of the different religious practices of our diverse society and a faith-free lesson on values, the difference between right and wrong and taking responsibility for one’s own actions would help to produce considerate and moral Australian children. Children who have belief systems that differ from the main stream should not be isolated from their peers and given menial tasks to occupy their time while scripture lessons take place.

Please take the positive results from the ethics trial and turn it into a state wide roll out across all schools.

I don’t agree with ethics classes replacing Religious Instruction. There is no room for students to opt out of other classes, so why something as important as the study of scripture.

In particular, the Bible is a history book, a prophetic book, a book of instruction and to many, the way of eternal salvation.

Its stories are colourful, dramatic and provide inspirational examples of good ethics.

Many will also testify its words open the way to a blessed life for both individuals and society as a whole.

I believe the aim of the Education Department should be to provide every opportunity and encouragement for students to know what the Bible has to offer – and not replace Religious Instruction with ethics classes.

I am not all opposed to the introduction of some type of ethics classes in schools, but I don’t want them on at the same time as Scripture classes.

The notion that these classes are equivalents is a nonsense. I know many people have the idea that Scripture classes are simply about learning to do the right thing but this is an error. Scripture classes is about learning about who God is and what he has done for us. Whilst appropriate behaviour may enter into some of it, it is far from the main focus and should never be presented as such.

I know that some members of the P & C wish to rid schools of religious education altogether, and see SRE as indoctrination. What in effect they are suggesting is that religious beliefs have no value; in effect, that their beliefs as secularists are superior and must take precedence. I’d like to see them argue that from the Constitution.

I taught SRE for a 6 months in the latter part of 1991, to a Year 6 class. The week after a lesson about sex and drugs - in which I did not preach but discussed why things are as they are - I came into the room to find that the teacher had written on the board "There is no
harm in any drug, the only harm is in the user”. The teacher, of course, had no right to express this view, which must rank as indoctrination. I asked the class if they believed this statement, and most yes. SRE takes place for 40 minutes a week, in an environment of secular education. Teachers are free to discuss ethics at any time, but not faith.

Keep it a level playing field.

I am totally in favour of ethics classes in schools. Not only should they be available for students, they should not take second place to scripture classes.

The State Government must not be bullied into discontinuation of the ethics classes by the big religious institutions who for some reason appear threatened by these new classes.

If rooms are available for scripture teaching, so should rooms be available for ethics classes. It is vital that children have access to classes which teach reasoning and questioning and that they learn to think critically.

I support the introduction of ethics classes as an alternative to scripture classes in NSW schools. I think many children would benefit from participation in these classes.

Please do not allow religion classes to be held at the same time as ethics classes at schools. We are losing our grip on life when we allow young children to make decisions about their future which should be made by adults. Of course a child will choose a course which does not require commitment. This life is not all there is. We need to prepare children for the future which should give them hope now.

I would like to register my very strong support for continuation of the ethics programs in NSW schools.

Not only are the classes very useful for children they provide a constructive alternative for parents who chose not to send their children to scripture classes.

They in no way detract from existing scripture classes but provide a very positive alternative to watching videos or sitting under the trees reading (however nice that may be) for children.

I would like to wholeheartedly support the continuation and expansion of ethics classes in both primary and secondary schools.
All responses are unedited

I think of all the things affecting education - I think ethics classes are of a low priority.

My daughters are all different religions and they have been accommodated in Catholic, Anglican and Uniting scripture classes - which is unbelievable.

I wish to express my disappointment for the proposal to provide ethics classes at the same time as Scripture Classes.

I am the Catholic Scripture Coordinator at my local Primary School and I have been teaching 2 classes a week for the last 5 years. As a volunteer, I leave my place of employment each week to teach scripture and I have to make up my lost work time in my own family time. I have nothing against ethics classes and I think that they are a good ideas but why have them at the same time as our scripture classes?

They should be held but not is opposition to Scripture Classes. There is no need for competition between 2 value based disciplines which through history and be nature are not mutually exclusive. That is. our civilised society is based upon and developed Christian Ethical and Moral disciplines.

The justification is according to Minister Firth is that according to the SMH dated 17th October, 2010 is that “parents who choose not to send their children to scripture classes have a right to see their children engaged in some type of meaningful activity”.

Where I teach extraordianarily meaningful activity for children in the school is carried out during Scripture on Wednesday afternoon and has been taking place for all the years I have been teaching there. That includes Student Representative Council is held every Wednesday afternoon. In addition gymnastic, sporting events, preparation for school plays and end of term class performances, special meetings between students and teachers, even feeding the chooks takes place during scripture. Often children are prevented from coming to scripture class because the class teacher required them to stay back because the class was doing a special lesson. Children often ask to skip scripture because something interesting is taking place in the class room. At times I have come to class and not a single pupil turns up for scripture.

I have found the above very sad and frustrating as I make a big effort to prepare my classes and attend each week. I have never complained because I believed that it was a great privilege to teach children Catholic Scripture in the school.

However it is disappointing to hear that the justification for ethics classes to be held at the same time as Scripture Classes is to provide meaningful activity when ‘extraordinarily meaningful activity’ is and has been carried out for many years during Scripture at my school. And I am sure that the school where I teach is not “Robinson Crusoe” in this matter at all. In all honesty, I believe that most public schools are already carrying out meaningful activity during scripture.
The introduction and legislating ethics classes to be held during Scripture time, justifies and entitles teachers, schools and interest groups to add more and more ‘meaningful activity’ and to pave the way of rendering scripture classes redundant in public schools. It also provide opportunity for certain interest groups to lobby for the justification of excluding Scripture classes from public schools.

Please stop ethics classes being held during scripture. Please leave Scripture Classes alone.

We Scripture teaches have endured enough as it is. The justification for ethics classes to be held at the same time as Scripture Classes in my opinion is incorrect and inconsistent with the current reality. There is no reason that ethics classes cannot be held at another time. There is no need for conflict and competition with Scripture Class providers.

While I am more than happy with my child attending his religious studies (SRE) at our local public school I do not see why parents and their children who do not have a particular religious faith should be discriminated against for wanting to teach their children ethics.

My view is the provision of ethics classes during the time allocated for SRE will help raise children to be good citizens displaying a good sense of ethical behaviour which will only enhance their potential to be future leaders. All children have the right to spend the time allocated to SRE in a meaningful way and if they do not want to attend the SRE classes they should be able to attend Ethics classes instead.

My view is based on the premise that the introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE but provide an alternative for the many parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The argument by religious groups that their students will be discriminated against is nebulous at best given they have argued previously that ethics is already incorporated into the SRE classes. They can't have it both ways. The other argument that parents should be teaching ethics is valid however that argument could also be applied to sport, music or even religious studies (e.g. via Sunday school).

I understand the recent evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. I therefore request the discriminatory DET policy be changed so that all NSW children can be fully engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE if they wish.

I personally strongly support the rollout of the ethics classes to all primary schools in our state by the start of the next school year.

I am quite puzzled as to why religious groups may object to the teaching of ethics in schools at the same time as the Scripture classes. Surely the parents and children can have a choice as to whether they want the children to go to

1. Scripture
2. Ethics
3. Neither
I remember having to sit outside the Principal’s office during Scripture classes as my Primary school only had Christian Scripture. What a waste of time!

To date we have just heard that the mainly Christian lobby groups object to the ethics classes but not why they object. If they are worried that children will leave their programmes to attend the ethics classes then they need to improve their 'product'. I could just imagine the outcry if a Muslim or Hindu group wanted to exert a similar pressure on public education.

I am a parent who supports the introduction of ethics classes for children who do not attend scripture classes. The time they now spend out of learning is such a waste and is often not supervised appropriately, leading to bullying, or inappropriate behaviour.

I’ve viewed the NSW Ethics Trial Final Report and fully support the recommendations made.

The current Department of Education policy that prevents meaningful study for those who opt out of scripture is discriminatory and wrong.

Offering an ethics complement to scripture in all NSW schools is long overdue and my expectation is that it will be implemented without any further delay. I will be closely monitoring the outcome.

Please ensure my comments are forwarded to Minister Firth for her consideration.

I was very impressed with the report and hope that all the recommendations listed in Section 7 be implemented. This course needs to be offered to children in all years of school.

I strongly oppose the "Ethics" course being considered for the SRE timeslot in NSW state primary education.

I believe the name of this course to be a misnomer that is misleading people. Ethics by definition must originate from a worldview. In the case of the "Ethics" course, it seems to be from "secular humanism".

I feel that those who promote this course should name it appropriately so that people can have a better informed understanding of the worldview behind it.

I write to express my support for the implementation of the recommendations of the final report of the NSW Ethics Course trial, which I have read.
All responses are unedited

The report seems comprehensive and considerate, given the complex issues and roles involved in prospective changes to the customary delivery of special religious instruction in NSW government schools.

I am glad that at long last the needs of those children whose parents do not wish them to attend classes supporting religious formation are being addressed. I am also glad that the course materials developed by the Ethics Course will be made available to those teaching SRI, should they wish to have them.

With all best wishes for the development and implementation of this course in NSW.

I am against Ethic education for Kids, I suppose we should decide what is good for our country and the kids, I am very worried that my kids will not have the religious education I got and would be far any from any religious education. I hope this is not a start of removing Christianity as a main religion from our schools.

We should be proud of our heritage and we should pass it to our children and children’s children if we have to stay a Christian county with and its belief, and I hope we will not divert slowly from our all our Christian beliefs and celebrations and become a country with no faith.

I oppose the Ethics education (we Christians are the majority in Australia) I wouldn't mind teaching other religions supported by there own communities and would urge you to think about our Kids and our country.

By all means have ethics classes at schools but not as an alternative to scripture.

By doing this the heat is taken out of any debate.

Please do not have it as an alternative to scripture but as a separate subject.

Do not lower the standards of our Christian country.

Yes please! As a parent of non-religious background, and perhaps inclined towards Buddhism (more of a philosophy than a religion, at least in this country), I would very much like my son to engage in a more meaningful activity (ie. Ethics) rather than just colouring in. In fact I would go so far as to suggest that all children should attend such a class. There are too many different religions in this country, and we can't possibly cater for all the types in one small school - so let parents teach their children religion on Sundays (in fact it should be an everyday experience...) and let the schools teach ethics to all children of all religions. ie. as a progressive society, we don't need to have scripture lessons at school - which don't actually teach the children much about how to be a respectful, thoughtful and responsible human being. Mostly, it involves learning how God created us, and children being concrete learners, take everything literally - as one child said, "guess what mum, we are made from
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mud". Perhaps the religious scripture classes need to be refined and monitored somewhat, to incorporate the ethical aspects of religion, rather than simply learning non-meaningful biblical stories. And if God created animals for humans to reign, and do with them what we like - what does that teach us about fox hunting? Maybe it'd be easier just to replace Scripture with Ethics for all children! It could also incorporate learning about different religions around the world. This would make children more tolerant of different religions. Without indoctrinating one religion, but simply teaching religion as a part of human existence, and how it has helped people to cope with difficulties. It should involve all religions; from ancient Greeks, to Muslim, Hinduism, Tao, Zen and Buddhism, to Cristianity, Catholism - and show children what happened (and still happens) when people were not tolerant, and killed those that refused to beleive - those that were 'different'.

I hope that the new Ethics class, will incorporate these aspects of human nature?!

In either case, I hope that my son at [redacted] public school will be able to attend the ethics class soon!

Well done.

I would have thought ethics should be taught to all students not just those not doing scripture.

Scripture teaches much more then ethics. Scripture teaches faith of which ethics is one of the byproducts. If the real aim is to teach ethics and not as an attack on Scripture then it should be taught at a non competing time to Scripture. Scripture may not always be as exciting as some classes just like math may not be as exciting as sport. If you give children a choice between vegetables and snack food they usually take snack food. If the ethics classes are more exciting then Scripture then naturally children will want to go to these classes.

So I say lets teach ethics but don’t let it compete with Scripture.

Congratulations on the extension of the ethics programme into all NSW Public Schools. It is certainly about time there was an alternative to monotheist indoctrination. As the 68yo grandfather of students in our great state high schools (yeah [redacted] High [redacted]!) I only wish such alternatives had been available for my grandkids in the early 2000's and my daughters in the late 1960's early 70's.

On a further supportive note could I draw your attention to a comments from the Gosford Uniting Church pastor Greg Woolnough quoted in the Central Coast Express Advocate of Wednesday 3rd November 2010 where he not only weighs in supporting the ethics programme but also directs comment to other critical members of the religious fraternity. His suggestion that it is time to "re-evaluate what place the church has in society" is well founded.

Again my congratulations on an excellent programme - don't let the vocal minority beat you down.
The introduction of Ethics as a subject to students at school would be a giant leap forward for Australian society. As a parent I feel keenly the void of regular ethical and philosophical discussion - in the public sphere, and particularly in the formative years of our children's upbringing.

I believe that ethics and philosophy classes should be made available to all students, regardless of their religious affiliations. This can only enrich a young person's ability to assess and respond to situations they are exposed to. And the younger these ideas and ways of thinking are introduced, the more natural it will be for them to incorporate into their values and actions. These young people will be sure of themselves and how they act, knowing that they can apply rigorous and critical thinking to challenging situations and come up with the ethical way forward.

I imagine that if introduced State or nation-wide, this could have profoundly positive effects on society in a few years, that will benefit society at all levels.

Having read the report, I would like to register my whole-hearted support for a roll out of a form of ethics or ‘moral philosophy’ in NSW public schools as soon as feasibly possible. I have two children attending primary school in NSW and I would greatly value the opportunity for them to engage in these classes and be taught how to think about these issues. The trial has been a success, so now can we work on the practicalities of a roll out, as recommended by the authors of the report.

This is long overdue and I look forward to hearing that you have righted this neglect of the children who choose not to attend scripture.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the recommendations relating to the teaching of ethics in schools. I am strongly in favour of ethics classes as an alternative to special education classes for families such as mine that do not share the religious beliefs of some in our community. I appreciate this is not a debate about tax payer funded secular schools, theoretically a place of academic honesty, allowing beliefs to be taught as facts within school hours.

RECOMMENDATION 1
I strongly support this recommendation

RECOMMENDATION 2
I agree, provided the courses are designed for the range of age groups involved.

RECOMMENDATION 3
I agree, and would add the cultural diversity within Australia means that exploring moral relativism and its links to ethical decision making is essential.
All responses are unedited

RECOMMENDATION 4
I agree.

RECOMMENDATION 5
I agree to the extent that the course has a focus on practical decision making processes and does not become a course in philosophy beyond the comprehension of many students and without any practical application.

RECOMMENDATION 6
I agree

The ethics class sounds like a structured class with a syllabus that requires training to teach, not something that anyone can volunteer for. You would have to screen each person first and I would like to know where all the resources, volunteers and money would come from to do all of this.

I’m just wondering who is going to be teaching this course? Will it be volunteers or will it be a paid position? Will the volunteers have paid training and if so, who will be paying for the training?

The answers to the above questions raise further questions such as will SRE be provided with the same funding for training and the position, or, if it isn’t a paid position, what will happen to an ethics class if there is no volunteer? Will it not be run until one appears or will an untrained teacher be forced to take over until one is found?

The tenor of the report is based on the premise that ethics has no absolute fundamental basis for establishing itself. It relies heavily on an arbitrary principle that actions can best be judged as inherently moral or ethical on the basis of “how much suffering the action causes or how much good it brings”. This immediately presupposes that suffering is to be avoided and good is promoted. A fatal flaw in such a premise is that the judgement as to what constitutes both suffering and good is entirely subjective as is evidenced in the attitude and actions of so many people. The very fact we have laws to control people proves what is seen as suffering by some people (eg. victims) is seen by others (eg. criminals) as good. Are we obliged to consider good and suffering from other people’s perspective or from our own perspective? If so, who and what is the basis for such an assertion.

Reference is made to the “circumstances in which an act is performed”. This situational ethics approach again relies on the subjective opinion of an individual for evaluating the circumstances. One only has to consider how arguments are simultaneously affected by the same circumstantial factors which can then lead to a variety of totally different and contrary actions by those involved, each believing they have acted appropriately in the circumstances.
All responses are unedited

The issue of “whether the lie is necessary to save a life” not only relies on the subjective assessment of the necessary aspect, but also lends support to the concept that the end justifies the means. This concept opens up a Pandora’s Box since it necessitates a subjective judgement by an individual of the relative merit of the end which can then permit us to adopt any means.

The issue “deciding whether it is morally right to hunt and kill whales for food will involve coming to grips with scientific facts about both whale intelligence and the risk of endangering the survival of distinct whale species” attempts to establish that science is a critical factor in morality in this instance; however we currently ignore science when it suits us eg. the breast cancer and abortion link, the inherent difference in the male and female physiology. There is also the implication that the extinction of a species is morally wrong yet we support Darwin’s theory of the survival of those who adapt and act to maintain and improve their own survival. Scientists are continually finding examples of extinct species as examples of our continually changing world. We also see the continually extinction of stars in our universe without any apparent justification or intervention.

The concept of groups making a decision and then giving their reasons for their decisions fails to provide for individual responses. Dominant members in a group will adversely affect those who are less outgoing but who may have very meritorious contributions to make. Group reporting fails to represent all those in the group and hinders a comprehensive coverage of the views expressed.

The notion of ‘equal human worth’ is certainly not widely accepted, especially in the secular society. Not only are female babies destroyed while in the womb but are killed after birth. Further, any hint that a baby in the womb is not perfectly normal automatically generates the right for it to be considered of less human worth while simultaneously those who are actually born in such a state or become that way as a result of injury or illness, are automatically considered to be of such particular worth to required special consideration and facilities.

An ethics course with so much subjectivity needs to encourage children to recognise that their attitude is strongly influenced by others who may not be unbiased. Further, what you do see and hear is frequently very selective on the part of those providing the information, alternatives may never be given the opportunity to come to the fore. Examples chosen for discussion should reflect the issues that predominate in the community and which are familiar with the children. These include, activities which the community has seen fit to address by the introduction of laws and prohibitions. Examples include, violence, theft, untruthfulness, vandalism, aggression, drug taking, cheating, fraud, greed. Saving water is not a moral issue, we use water and it returns to the earth eventually, we do not destroy it. Issues such as this are not moral since both saving and using/wasting water are subjective. Topics such as whale hunting, climate change, the environment lack the degree of specificity necessary to make valid and irrefutable judgements and do not reflect the situations children regularly face in their lives. The fact that bullying is so prevalent indicates that fundamentals need to be addressed but they are ignored while popular issues are given prominence.
Recommendation 6 does not specifically mention that the content of the Ethics course should be made available in the same way as it specifies that SRE programs should be made available!

This is the first time I have ever commented on a government policy, and I would like to applaud the Govt. for having presented this option for parents. I myself remember sitting in the school library for what felt like hours learning nothing and feeling isolated because I did not attend Religious education at my parents request- the idea that there would be a structured option to the "scripture classes" is very encouraging to a parent of 2 primary age children.

I have read the NSW Ethics Course Trial Report by Dr Sue Knight, I agree with and support the recommendations in Section 7.

Personal comment:

I am a retired Cinematographer and Teacher.

During my schooling in the late forties and fifties along with my two daughters’ schooling in the seventies and eighties the option of any constructive alternative to SRE (scripture) in NSW Government schools was not available.

This situation was not acceptable then, it is certainly unacceptable now.

The recent successful trial of an ethics/philosophical course gives me hope that my grandchildren may at last have that option available to them to provide them with a sound ethical and moral start in life that could only improve our future society.

I strongly support the introduction of an ethics subject as a compliment to SRE in NSW Government Schools.

I am writing to advise you that I strongly support the recommendations of the report and the ultimate introduction of ethics classes to all primary classrooms in NSW. This is a genuine contribution to "values in education", unlike the rhetoric practiced by the previous federal government.

The outrageous provision in the NSW Education Act which prevents any meaningful instruction for students whose parents chose not to place them under the tutelage of (largely unqualified) proselytisers from the mostly Christian churches is archaic and discriminatory. It is a vestige from our colonial past which is at odds with any 21st century notion of the separation of church and State.

How wonderful then, to see an initiative that not only claws back that wasted curriculum time for children doing "non-scripture," but provides a valuable space for children to discuss
the kinds of issues and values that will help them to be truly human and to become responsible global citizens - surely the ultimate goal of education in any society.

I would urge the Minister and the Department to reject the churches' response in trying to demand that ethics classes be timetabled outside of "non-scripture" periods. That proposition is seeking nothing short of protection from the competition mounted by a genuine alternative to SRE. That would only perpetuate the discrimination that currently exists for children like mine who are forced to spend periods doing nothing of value, often in an environment akin to a detention room. To timetable ethics classes outside of "non-scripture" periods simply re-states the discrimination.

If parents who hold religious convictions choose to have their children educated in that faith, surely they may do so at their own time and expense, not at the educational expense of those who do not share their faith, and at the financial expense of NSW taxpayers. They cannot logically reject ethics classes for the children of non-religious families, since the curriculum content outlined in the Committee’s Report must surely complement the skills and understandings they say they are trying to impart through SRE.

I urge the Department to proceed with the implementation of ethics classes, and ultimately to make that curriculum content available to non-Government schools, to afford as many children as possible the benefits of this exciting educational and social justice initiative.

I think offering ethics classes to children is a good idea.

I think making it an “either/or” choice between ethics classes and scripture classes is quite inappropriate.

Both should be offered and not conflict.

In senior schools, for example, you are not offered “either/or” for biology or physics. Nor for business studies or economics.

Ethics classes are highly valid and useful classes for those who attend scripture.

Scripture classes are highly valid and useful classes for all Christian students and those who wish to better understand Christianity. Whilst not compulsory (and nor should they be) these classes should be retained as an important part of public education in this Christian country.

Hi, I’m all in favour of having ethic classes because it gives a alternative teaching of ethics if you do not want scripture teachings as well ( my children do have scripture lessons) , I do try and teach my children to be good members of the community and making decisions in life that they may encounter from time to time. I do believe that school education should be about preparing our children for society and not just math, english etc.
As a parent and teacher, I am writing to express my support for Ethics being taught during the SRE time slot in public schools. I have just finished reading the comprehensive report by Dr Sue Knight, and it is obvious that as a respected professional in her field, she has done an exemplary job of analyzing the Ethics Trial and making recommendations. In particular I am pleased with her recommendations 2a, 5a, and 6.

Please do everything in your power to pass a law that will enshrine Ethics into the SRE time slot so that for generations to come our children will not be discriminated against for their religious and personal beliefs.

Thank you for all that you have done for this cause until now - it is much appreciated.

I write to give support to the ethics / moral philosophy programme as described in the October 2010 report.

All students should have the opportunity to learn a reasoned approach to thinking about life, regardless of whether or not their parents are religious (ie the children are enrolled in SRE). My children do not attend a faith based scripture class, so I welcome the chance for them to learn the basics of moral reasoning - but I think that other children should also have this opportunity. I do try to encourage this in my own children myself - but they often take more notice of what their teacher says than what their mother says!

My child attends Public School and I wish to express my support for continuation of your Ethics classes trials

As a member of the community - mother of 2 and grandmother of 2. I think the introduction of Ethics into schools is a wonderful idea. Ends the years of discrimination against students who were not able to attend scripture. Education, especially in ethics is long overdue and should seed a culture amongst our children of care and consideration for others, and also one of self-responsibility. It may also help reduce incidences of bullying in schools and should create a better future for all Australians. I think this idea should be implemented Australia wide.

I support the teaching of ethics in schools as an alternative to religious education.
I am an industry professional with no formal teaching qualifications. I am interested to know how I can find out what qualifications will be required to be able to assist in teaching the ethics course once it is offered.

I take this opportunity to write to oppose the wider implementation of an ‘ethics’ course held at the same time as SRE classes within schools of NSW.

The basis for SRE in schools lies in the understanding of the importance of religion in the ongoing education of children. As a community member and Christian, this, in my mind, continues to be an important part of education, as also is the decision for families to not engage in SRE. I value that the Minister for Education and Training’s has confirmed that the government has no intention to replace SRE in NSW public schools.

However, I have concerns regarding the validity of the recent ‘school ethics trial’, and the manner in which this has been completed.

It has been widely stated that the ‘ethics’ course has always been intended as an option only for students who have already opted out of SRE. However, in the recent trial, this was directly contradicted – letters detailing the course was sent to parents of all students, not just those who had already opted out of SRE. As such, it immediately competed with SRE, and I feel concerned of similar occurrences in a wider outlay of such a program.

The recent report from Dr. Sue Knight states one of the key arguments for an ‘ethics’ course as an alternative to SRE is to offer such students a ‘meaningful option’ and to not ‘discriminate against or deny non-SRE children the right to examine what it means to lead a morally good life, a right which SRE students are granted through participation in their SRE courses’ (p.3). As a retired protestant SRE teacher, the indication that SRE curriculum teaches students how to live a morally good live is not true. Rather, curriculum content focuses on the teaching of the Bible, which does not primarily focus on teaching one how to lead a morally good life. As such, if this is the content of the ethics course, I feel this leads to discrimination against SRE participants, and I feel that if indeed such material is valuable for learning, it should be presented at other times, whereby SRE participants also have the opportunity to attend and learn such material.

As Dr Sue Knights recommended, I support that such coursework would be more helpfully and accurately defined by a different name, such as a course in 'moral philosophy' or 'philosophical ethics'.

Use of the word ‘trial’ invokes a reader to assume ‘randomized controlled trial’, being of course the highest form of evaluation. However, such was not the case of the recent ‘trial’. There were no control groups; the schools chosen were not necessarily indicative of wider NSW (my region being the [illegible word] was excluded among other major regions); the coursework implemented, was only for Year 5 & 6 students (not students from Kindergarten to Year 6 as which implementation of the ‘ethics’ course is proposed) and there was a lack
All responses are unedited

of clearly identifiable measures by which the success/non-success of the ‘trial’ could be objectively measured.

Thus, I feel ‘rolling out’ a wider implementation of the ‘ethics’ course, based predominantly on the results of the recent ‘trial’ would be flawed and inaccurate.

There remains much information to be provided as to how the ‘ethics’ program is to be implemented. In the instance that it is offered at the same time as SRE, I urge that the same requirements as current SRE providers be implements – which would include

- A clear statement of doctrine and accredited authorities who undergo the same high standards as SRE providers in terms of probity and application process
- Costs not met by the school, but by the provider
- School teachers not be allowed to volunteer to teach the material unless this is allowed for SRE curriculum

Thank you for taking the time to read through these concerns. I hope that they will be appropriately considered, and I welcome communication from the Department.

I agree all children should have a firm grounding in ethics but it should not come at the cost of our children and their relationship with Jesus. For some children SRE classes are the only time they experience Christian teachings and for some it is when they choose the narrow path to life. Jesus, when He walked on earth didn’t go round chasing people to come to Him, he waited till people came to Him, in 2000 years nothing has changed, He is the way the truth and the life (John 14:6), for those who seek Him and this certainly includes our children. I pray you give this careful consideration as it is a life and death decision.

I would like express my concern about the possible introduction of "Ethics" classes into the timeslot currently preserved for SRE. I feel that SRE will be adversely affected by this and that the loud minority of people supporting "Ethics" are undermining the quiet but very large number of people who find SRE of huge benefit to their children.

Ethics is already taught in other forums in state primary education and should not be allowed to attract students away from meaningful faith based studies. It is likely to do just this, as shown by the pilot, where students already in SRE classes were invited to move into "Ethics" classes.

I very much hope that "Ethics" will not be allowed into the SRE timeslot

I would like to register my support for the introduction of Ethics as an alternative to Special Religious Education (Scripture) in schools.
After having reviewed the report it is my view that the Ethics course as trialled has a legitimate place in NSW public schools for students who opt out of SRE. The current situation where these children are left idle while their classmates attend SRE is unacceptable.

If SRE is bound to remain part of the NSW public school curriculum then it is my view that the inclusion of Ethics as an option for these students is essential.

I am a current Primary school teacher doing casual teaching in NSW DET schools and also a Christian who teaches SRE in a local primary school. I am also a parent of a primary school child. I have a number of concerns about the recommendations being made.

I understand that parents want children to have some instruction in making choices and being able to chose right from wrong. I want that for my child as well. I believe this kind of instruction is most meaningfully done in the context of ongoing relationships. So, the home and the context of family relationships is one such context. The context of a school class where there is a year spent with a group of students and a teacher is another ideal and appropriate setting. As a teacher, I know that close relationships are formed within the class and with the teacher and (parents may not be aware) ethical decision making is already taught and discussed in subjects such as PDHPE and HSIE and when specialist programs are followed such as the Happy Harold Drug education program. Ethics being explored in this context is more appropriate because of the greater knowledge and awareness the teacher has for each child and for the group dynamic as well. The teacher has also formally trained in methodology that is age and stage appropriate and so would be more adept at facilitating this sensitive area of learning. I am concerned about the effect and possible damage that could be done by well meaning but ill equipped volunteers teaching ethics outside this ongoing context. I think philosophical ethics is not something that most people would be sufficiently conversant in to be able to adequately teach it. The teaching of Special Religious education is different in that parents choose an SRE class that is in accordance with their own family beliefs. So SRE can be seen as an extension of what is taught at home. SRE teachers are part of a faith community where they themselves are being instructed in their faith in an ongoing way and so are personally equipped (as well as having SRE teaching training) to give religious instruction. Added to this is the extra safeguard that SRE teachers need to be approved by a Minister in order to teach. Because they are members of a faith community there has been ongoing opportunity for them to be known and their character to be attested. So the Minister gives them a character reference. To what extent are the people who are volunteering to teach ethics 'known' by the school community? To ensure the safety of our children I would think they would need a similar level of character reference. Is this possible in the context of school community? No doubt there is a core group of parents who are well known as they work and volunteer in the school community but what about others who may chose to volunteer to teach ethics? What safeguards will be put in place to ensure our children are in good hands?

Given that ethics is already explored in the school curriculum, in the context of meaningful relationships, I do not think it necessary or advisable to add extra ethics classes. Does the introduction of Ethics classes truly solve the problem of "non scripture"? Some parents may still opt for their children to not be involved in either SRE or Ethics (or will parents be forced
Ethics and Religion are essentially different areas of exploration. My concern is that if they are placed alongside one another and parents are forced to choose between them, that faith instruction will get marginalised because parents will feel that their children are missing out on the important learning of making choices and being able to choose right from wrong if they don’t enrol them in Ethics classes. I think this would be a loss for our children. It is increasingly acknowledged that the area of spiritually is an essential part of what it is to be ‘human’ and our children already receive such a small amount of time given to the exploration of it in the school curriculum. Let’s acknowledge the job already done by classroom teachers in the instruction of ethics and allow Special religious education to continue to have an exclusive time slot in the curriculum. Surely we can solve the problem of gainful occupation of non-scripture children in another way that does not jeopardize the SRE program.

Re The NSW Government for public comment on a proposal to allow students who do not attend Special Religious Education (SRE) classes to be taught ethics.

This trial is a clear breach of legislation and the Department of Education and Training’s own policies regarding SRE, which states that no course, including ethics or civics style courses, should run during time set aside for SRE.

I wish to lodge my opposition to this proposal, if the Department wishes to run ethics classes in its school, it should be at a time when all students are available to attend and not have to choose between SRE classes and ethics.

It is a great idea to bring all students together to learn about good ethics and fair morals.

I would like to provide my feedback on the ethics classes report. The term ethics would imply to me, as an accounting professional who has undertaken ethics classes as part of my training, that children are being taught a framework for behaviour that society deems to be desirable or responsible.

This appears to be a misleading term in relation to these classes as rather than a framework of behaviour, it is a course in philosophical questions, or discussions of what children might do in different scenarios. The term ethics is a wonderful tool to encourage parents into the classes, as who would stand up and say they do not want ethical behaviour from their children?

I see a number of issues with this in regard to primary school children:

1. There is no framework for behaviour shown in these classes and young primary children, as well as their parents, are still looking for instruction in how to form their character.
2. All behaviour frameworks, whether we like it or not, are contextual to the society we live in. This context has usually arisen based on the dominate religious background of the society. What parents are looking for is for their children to be taught morals. Unfortunately, it is impossible to separate morals out from religious, or lack of religious beliefs. As a Christian, certain behaviour is moral based on the framework of belief I follow. This is true for those who are Jewish, Islamic or even Humanist. It is misleading to say that you are teaching ethics without stating the moral position taken. If no moral position is being taken, then it is not ethics that are being taught. If a moral position is taken, then chances are you are simply receiving the position of the person running the class, without them ever having to disclose their belief system.

3. The trial was conducted with the oldest of the primary years, being 5 and 6. At this age, they begin to be old enough to have the sorts of discussions taking place in the trial. I believe this is of benefit to all children, not just those who chose to opt out of SRE. It seems to me that this is something that should be considered as part of the curriculum for all children. To include it for all children would also provide a far more balanced feedback opportunity as children from all cultures and religions would come together to discuss the scenarios. This would mean that the children would see the different world views in action and why other children behave differently to them. I teach foreign, mainly Chinese, first year university students. I find that learning about the approaches of different cultures and religions goes a long way towards bridging understanding between individuals. We often take for granted the framework in which we are raised and this would give an opportunity to challenge this thinking.

4. I agree that many religious groups have not put in the effort required to explain their scripture classes to parents. Rather than taking the children out, could not the religious groups be asked to provide parents with further information about the content of the course? If the ethics classes are required to provide the same, then there is a level playing field for parent choice.

5. Finally, is it not fair that all students have the opportunity to learn about religion and the moral framework it provides without setting up a competitive course? I know numerous parents who are strong atheists, but who will be sending their children to exclusive private schools for the sake of a “good” education, but who are not bothered by the weekly religious education that comes with most private schools. Religion is a part of this world and is it not fair that public school students, like their private school counterparts, should be allowed a full education? These classes as they stand are setting up more division between public/private as well as division within the school.

As a parents of a 5 year old daughter about to start school in the NSW public school system we are holding our breaths for the Minister’s decision.
Neither my husband nor I are religious and will not be sending our children to scripture/SRE classes as they currently stand. Were they classes based on teaching world religions that would be a different matter as we want them to learn about and respect the beliefs of people from all religious backgrounds.

Having read the report in detail it seems a thorough and fair evaluation of the pilot and leaves no doubt that subject to the 6 recommendations (of which we agree on all of them), the ethics course should go ahead as a meaningful alternative.

We thoroughly support and encourage the introduction of a philosophical ethics class into NSW public schools. Indeed our personal view is that children across the world would benefit from these general teachings on “how one ought to live one’s life” and the world may be a more peaceful place. This of course is well beyond the scope of this pilot!!

Our ultimate hope is that the ethics program will become part of the general curriculum so that all students will learn these very valuable concepts and reasoning skills that can be applied every day throughout their lives. Failing this we would at least like to see it introduced as a meaningful alternative to SRE so that parents (and children) do have a choice.

We hope the Minister looks beyond the strong opposition from the various religious groups. It is not acceptable for them to oppose a meaningful alternative for children not attending scripture on the basis of concern that some parents may have their children cease attending SRE to attend the ethics program. That is a parent’s right. Recommendation 6 seeks to provide parents with all options side by side in a comparable format which seems extremely fair. All providers of SRE and alternative classes should then happily abide by their decisions.

Let us move forward and embrace something that has been successfully achieved in other countries some time ago.

I Don't have a problem with ethics being offered to students who opt out of SRE, that is those who would be in non scripture. During the trial period it was offered to everyone so in effect there were 3 options; ethics, SRE and non scripture. If it is to be offered next year, it should be offered as a replacement to non scripture not an alternative option.

I would like to see the name ethics replaced as many parents believe their children are learning about morals and values. Even the Professor who wrote the ethics program says they are actually learning the philosophy of thinking or secular humanism, not ethics. This new course does not teach children right from wrong, it encourages them to think.

I have read the NSW Ethics Course Trial Final report. I have followed this issue closely as I have a school aged daughter.
I hope that the recommendations included in the report are followed through to full implementation.

Also, I'd like to congratulate the minister and the department on their foresight and courage in proceeding with this trial despite the opposition of vested interest groups.

I have just read an article in the Wentworth Courier about the Ethics Classes and that this is my opportunity to provide feedback. So here it is.

While daunted about reading the 107 page report, I found the common thread through the report is that Ethic’s will be taught to students who do not attend Special Religious Education. As a parent whose children attend SRE Classes I find that this option is unsatisfactory and discriminatory. Subjects as “fairness, honesty and responsibility” (as quoted in the article Wentworth Courier 27 Oct 2010) are not taught in SRE and this will lead to children attending SRE feeling excluded especially if things taught in ethics class are then discussed on the playground. In all honesty is this decision fair and responsible?

I would like my children to attend ethics classes with their friends and peers. While my husband and I discuss such subjects as “fairness, honesty and responsibility at home, to have it discussed at school again would be great. Let’s be honest, children don’t often listen to their parents and lessons learnt at school help to reinforce our discussions from home especially if the discussion of the day spills out into conversation on the playground. You could even send the information home with the children for the parents to use as further points of discussion.

I know that children who do not attend SRE do not have any other structured class while SRE is on but there must be some other subject that can be taught without excluding the children attending SRE. We are talking public school maybe we should consider not having SRE.

I write to provide some feedback on the ethics trial evaluation.

**Context: **Public School

By way of context, our school recently ran a survey of all families, finding among other things, 60% supportive of ethics classes being made available during SRE time. Just 10% said they would not support it (30% expressed neutrality).

Pleasing to me was the evidence of no material difference in proportions for / against when comparing the responses of those who identified as having religious affiliations with those without; nor those who currently attend scripture with those who don’t. It would appear that much of the apparent contentiousness of this issue is attributable to the leadership of some church groups, rather than being reflective of the community or faith communities they purport to represent.

**Feedback: Ethics trial review recommendations evaluation**
Comments received as part of our school's survey and the content of much media reporting suggest a need for improved community understanding of the nature, purpose, curricula and delivery methods of existing SRE classes. For instance, there appear to be conflicting (public) positions in relation to the ethics course on the basis of:

- whether or not SRE classes include ethical formation objectives (e.g. "[God says] you should not tell lies...") or not (e.g. retelling of bible stories) - this is particularly important in light of conflicting claims made by church leaders.
- whether or not SRE classes involve instruction that takes as given a religious framework "When Jesus rose..." versus providing instruction about the relevant religious beliefs "As Catholics we believe that when Jesus rose..."
- what (if any) requirements the DET imposes on approved faith groups to monitor content and volunteers’ delivery.

In light of this need, I welcome, in particular, recommendation 6, that info be provided to parents / carers about the aims and processes of different SRE offerings, in a standardised format that allows comparability for parents selecting among options (including non-scripture).

I read from the Hills Shire Times about the ethics class trial. After reading the article, I am very concerned about the sample size of the trial and the quality of the program layout.

Without a basic ethical foundation, where the future building upon? Everyone ethics standard can be different, not to mention cultural differences as well, where the yardstick to determine right or wrong? I am afraid that we end up with even more confusing generations to come.

Only implementing the trial class in 10 public schools could be a hasty decision to make such a permanent "fixture" in the education system as whole. Do we really spend sufficient time to think through the syllabus? What about the quality of the teachers (i.e. anyone who think they have an ethics view point can volunteer to teach and to influence our generations to come?)

What role does our education system has to govern this body?
1. The claim that the current system is discriminatory is not correct. (p3). This is a time-slot set aside in the Education Act for SRE. The religious choices of all parents are currently respected. Those who wish for their children to receive SRE can do so. Those who do not wish their children to receive religious instruction are able to opt out. Children are not being denied anything except access to religious instruction which is at the request of their parents.

2. Confusion over who this course should be for (p4). Minister Firth has claimed that the course will only be offered to students who have already opted out of SRE. Premier Kennelly has stated on Stateline ABC that it is ok for the SRE providers to have to compete for students. Invitation to participate in the trial was extended to all stage 3 students. One justification for this is given that “parents are informed annually about all religious persuasions offering SRE”. However ethics is not SRE but seems to be wanting to be afforded the same protection without meeting the same criteria.

3. The good will of the St James Ethics Centre is not enough ensure that this ethics course does not act in competition with SRE (p5). The movement from SRE to ethics is described as “a by-product of respecting parents rights”. However placing ethics at the same time-slot as SRE undermines parents rights for their children to receive religious instruction without them missing out on other lessons.

4. The assumption that the provision of the ethics materials to the SRE providers is a solution to many of the concerns raised is misguided for the following reasons (p5).

(a) The DET has stated that SRE is to be the default position. The suggestion that the SRE providers can adapt and teach the ethics material to their students now makes ethics the default position.

(b) It seriously oversteps the nature of ethics as a “complement” for those who “opt-out”. As a complement to the ethical component of SRE the St James ethics centre should have worked to find out what ethical material (if any) was being taught by some of the major SRE providers and tailored its course accordingly. I can find no evidence that any such attempt to make the course a truer complement has taken place.

(c) It shows a lack of understanding of what SRE actually is. SRE is not ethics. SRE providers who have been teaching SRE in public schools for up to 160 years have access to world class ethicists if they had wished to be teaching ethics. SRE is the “education in the beliefs and practices of an approved religious persuasion.” (Act 1990) This is different from ethics.

When I spoke to [redacted] on this issue I was concerned by her lack of clarity and incorrect assumptions. She tried to suggest that SRE taught ethics because it asks the question “what would Jesus do”. As a christian, “following Jesus” does not mean following his example or his moral code. Rather it means to trust that he is who he says he is and to trust in his death and resurrection. Her lack of understanding on this issue as an example of
the content of SRE is a reflection of the misrepresentation of SRE in general throughout this process, which continues in this report.

5. That “the philosophical framework within which the course is situated is argued to be appropriate for a course that is to serve as a complement to the ethical component of SRE” (p10) is merely asserted and not proven. I can find no evidence that any attempt has been made to assert what actually is the ethical component of SRE.

6. The terms of reference are too narrow to determine whether this course is appropriately placed within the SRE timeslot as there is no serious engagement with what SRE actually is.

7. The P&C’s concern over “the obvious emptiness of these non-SRE activities” (p27) is not resolved by the introduction of this course. “One third of non SRE students chose not to enrol in ethics” (p40). The logic that has been taken by the proponents of the ethics course means we must say that these children are being discriminated against as they are being denied an opportunity to have their thinking in ethics extended in the way that children who are enrolled in SRE or moral philosophy are. Thus this course is not a solution to the “problem” of non SRE.

The minister has repeatedly attempted to provide assurances by stating her support for SRE. This support must be practical support. Current policy states that schools are “to support SRE by ensuring that no formal lessons …..occur during the time set aside for SRE. Such activities may create conflict of choice for some parents”. What has changed so that now ethics can be taught in this time slot without this conflict of choice occurring for the overwhelming majority of NSW parents who choose to send their children to scripture? Many of these parents do not engage in formal worship services or religious practices outside of the school environment and rely on SRE for their children to be exposed to their beliefs and practices. By its nature this ethics course is designed to be suitable for all students. This sets it apart from SRE where it would be expected that parents chose to send their children to the SRE provider of their own faith. This automatically puts ethics in a different category from SRE as its appeal is much broader. This makes it a poor complement for SRE.

If this course is introduced in the SRE time-slot it will undermine SRE by forcing religious parents to choose if their children will miss out on SRE, even though the Education Act states that time must be set aside for SRE, or to miss out on this moral philosophy course. If Minister Firth is serious about supporting scripture then she must not change the policy that provides that support.

[Omitted information: name, having responsibility for SRE in the Church, opposes the roll out of ethics in first term next year. We suggest that there needs to be greater consultation about any proposed roll out. There needs to be a discussion around how to best cater for kids in non-SRE instead of a solution being imposed that hasn’t been fully thought through.]
Lack of scientific integrity in methods

- Sample size and diversity – only ten schools took part and only one of these was deemed ‘rural’. To provide significant results, schools selected should have reflected the diversity of socio-economics, geography, and cultural seen in NSW schools.
- All schools were ‘self selected’ with schools and volunteer teachers nominating themselves. This would obviously lead to an inherent bias in results regarding reporting from teachers, as they would have been behind the trial from the beginning.
- Response to surveys was poor, ranging from 53% to 68% (ref. pgs 68, 72, 73), and the responses from some schools were omitted altogether (pg 65). Of the 530 students who participated in the trial, data was only obtained from at most, 370 students. When compared to the total number of students in State Government schools of over 430,000 pupils, this sample size is hardly adequate.

Organisation, management and funding for a future course

- Dr Sue Knight raises the issue of organisation, management and funding (pg 42) noting the significant cost of the trial on the SJEC, and doubts have emerged (DET Briefing note to the Minister MT 10/774) about the capacity of the P7C Federation and the SJEC to expand the course. Who will pay for the roll out?
- 33 volunteers were found for schools in Sydney, and only one just outside Canberra. This included DET teachers who had to be brought in to make up numbers, a practice the DET will not allow again. Where will the volunteer teachers come from for the approx 1700 DET Primary schools in NSW?
- What of the pragmatic problems highlighted by school Principals such as lack of space and the need to set up rooms (pg 80)?

Other issues

- Dr Knight mentions the problem of ‘moral relativism’ (pg 12) and the need to resolve this issue. How can the course be ready to roll out for 2011 with this issue satisfactorily resolved?
- The process has been rushed, SRE providers still haven’t seen course material. Overall, there has been a lack of consultation with SRE providers.
- There has been controversy surrounding some lessons, such as the lesson dealing with graffiti with some schools electing not to teach it.
- Too many issues have not been addressed such as; How many students are there not in SRE classes across the state (not just the inner city)? What are those students doing during that time? Are their parents unhappy? What options would their parents like? Are the school groups calling for the introduction of Ethics in the SRE timeslot? Are there other options to resolve the issue of meaningful discussion tie for those students/ Are all schools properly implementing the current opt-out system? Are all school encouraging their non-SRE students to use the SRE timeslot well? Is there a widespread call for these Ethics classes right across the state (2,000 signature petition to Parliament in support of Ethics, compared to 52,000 in support of SRE)? Will the government be looking to other providers or putting out a tender for an Ethics course alternative to SRE?

The Ethics course does not cater for all children in non-SRE across the entire state. The Ethics proposal has not been costed and questions have been raised as to the feasibility of rolling out the course across the state. The report was based on a sample size that was too...
All responses are unedited

small and not representative of the whole of NSW, and therefore the study results cannot be taken as an accurate indicator of NSW as a whole. It is an expensive option that doesn’t solve the entire problem.

Although the trial was not conducted at our school, I welcome the chance to give feedback on the trial ethics classes.

My children do not attend scripture and I believe that religion should no longer have a place in public education.

As an alternative to sitting watching a movie or drawing pictures for an hour, I would welcome the chance for my children to attend ethics classes.

We have come a long way from religious classes being the only option and children who opt out being made to sit alone on a chair in the corridor. I think it’s time we took it further to give something meaningful to those children who opt out of religious classes.

Thank you for your time. I really hope to see ethics classes rolled out to all schools.

What a wonderful idea, would support it in a heartbeat.....

Religion should at most be a private matter. It should be a choice and should be equated with other choices to do with political interests and voting, enlisting in the Defence Force or pursuing alcohol at the legal age - all other decisions that our society have put a regulatory age barrier upon. Pursuing religion should be in the same category as these choices. Children should not be indoctrinated into or labeled as a single religion. At best they should be educated on all their various religions of the world - "Some people believe this, others believe this, some people don't believe in anything - and that is OK". Of course there are practical issues, but if the eradication of "Special Religious Education" in primary (and in turn secondary) education is not possible, a productive and worthwhile alternative must be offered to students who do not wish to participate in scripture. It is interesting to note that the religious may claim that scripture covers and teaches students morals and the values that an Ethics class would develop, yet they are nothing but opposed to students learning or developing such rational abilities outside scripture. If there was a God and what God wanted was for children and people to learn to be moral and ethical, and good human beings (is this not what God wants?), I'm sure God would not have a problem with young minds being exposed to the material included in an Ethics class. A child, or a person, does not need irrational faith to be a good person, and it is critically important that this reality is shared with the young and old. I give my complete support to the implementation of Ethics Classes in schools.

1) General feedback
Having read the 101 page report, which has an extraordinary amount of repetition, I see that its brief was to look at the scope of the course content and its effectiveness and other
internal matters, but not to examine any of the assumptions, however fashionable, of the introduction of such classes in competition with SRE. I find it disappointing that the academics for the report were not asked to look at any of the wider implications.

2) Lack of scientific methodology in the basis of the trial – the choice of schools
Given that this report was to provide a critical analysis of the ethics teaching trial, the very foundation of the trial – the choice of participating schools - should have been made according to scientific statistical methodology and should have reflected the socio-economic, cultural and geographic variety of NSW state schools.

Page 3 admits that the schools were “self-selected” – that is, the selection was just up to volunteer teachers and schools who nominated themselves. Of course, the volunteer teachers were going to make favourable comments. They had been promoters of the course from the beginning.

Experimental schemes and social projects to be analysed have to be based on more than a “self-selected” group of volunteers if they are to yield any representative information.

This explains of course the bias of the 10 schools in the trial - half of them were in the inner-city or inner-west of Sydney. One was in the country – Bungendore – but all readers of the Herald letter columns would know that this school had had a similar previous course, so were bound to nominate themselves. Randwick school also was no surprise to the alert reader of the Herald which had hosted a whole Opinion piece from David Hill, who had volunteered to teach the course at Randwick school. And so on... The whole basis of the course was not only self-selected but self-interested and self-involved.

This is not the stuff of disinterested research.

3) Invitation to comment
I note that the public are invited to comment on the recommendations in Section 7, but there appears to be no avenue for any more general comments on matters such as:

- whether the course should be introduced for the same timeslot as SRE, when the only public survey on the topic (Sydney Morning Herald poll results June 12) showed that 64.8 % of people thought that children should be able to attend both (not one of) SRE and ethics – that public opinion should be the guiding principle for a state government

- the likely long-term consequences of public schools appearing to be no longer sympathetic to this half-an-hour a week religious education (ie further flight to small church schools and weakening of the inclusive nature of state schools)

- the assumption that all children who don’t go to SRE classes will go to this new ethics class (see point 4 below)

- the assumption that there will be enough volunteers to staff the classes state-wide
All responses are unedited

- an acknowledgement that schools will always have to cater for children whose parents don’t choose an activity – whether it’s optional swimming or SRE – and that supervised reading for half-an-hour is not necessarily a purposeless exercise

- whether ethics or philosophy should find a place in the main school curriculum, perhaps appropriately associated with the debating program

the whole assumption that prompted the course in the first place – that is the number of children not going to scripture classes – was never properly assessed or researched; anecdotal evidence was framed in vague terms such as “in some schools as many as x % don’t go to SRE”.

4) Three particular pages:
Page 40 tells us that “approximately one third of non SRE students chose not to enrol in ethics” – a fact that should have been made much more of – it challenges the underlying assumptions of this whole program

Page 42 gives some details of St James Ethics Centre plans, if the government decides to offer the course more widely, such plans include “administration... (including payment)” – which prompts the question of who is to pay whom?

It would of course be completely improper for any public money to be used to offer an alternative to SRE, which is not funded by state money but relies on church support and the voluntary effort of thousands.

Page 44 has another alarming mention – that “the DET be adequately resourced to provide support” to all concerned, should there be a decision to offer the ethics course across the state. This again would be a quite unprincipled and unethical use of public money to advance an alternative to SRE, which does not receive DET resourcing.

5) Section 8 (Report Conclusion) bases a whole argument on a non-too-ethically reported statistic.

Page 85 (repeating the figures on page 20) reports that the 2006 census showed that 31% of Australians indicated “no religion” or failed to adequately describe religious affiliation.

Let’s be quite clear about the figures. The ABS website shows that in the 2006 census 15.5% of Australians described themselves as having “no religion”. New South Wales had the smallest number of people in any state with “no religion” - 14%. The suggestion that it was somehow 31% in another guise is misleading. I understand the wording about “failing to adequately describe” etc but nevertheless people should be very careful about “suggestio falsae”.

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6) My conclusion

The scope of the report was limited to an internal review of the course and not concerned with the harder and wider questions involved. There has been no full report on the issue as a whole, neither the likely consequences of its introduction nor the unexamined assumptions on which its whole existence is based - unexamined, unsubstantiated and at times inviting the, perhaps obvious, criticism of being none-too-ethical themselves.

I am writing to offer support for the ethics course in NSW and I think the report bears out that students can only benefit from a course of this type. We should remember that this course would be offered as an alternative to children doing nothing for the period that other students have religious education. I become frustrated by the churches positioning of this course as an alternative to religious education - NO - it is to offer those children whose parents have already opted them out of SRE an alternative to doing nothing. I hope that you will consider the recommendations of the report and move ahead swiftly with this initiative.

It is with great interest that I have been following the Ethics Trial in NSW. I have read much of the Sue Knight’s Final Report on the NSW Ethics Course Trial and I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback.

I encountered Philosophy for the first time at Buranda State School (Brisbane) where the Principal had lead a whole school initiative and subsequently achieved outstanding school-wide literacy and numeracy results over a period of a few years. These results continue to be achieved at that school.

I am not a teacher in NSW, but have taught Philosophy for many years in Qld, to entire classes of 7, 8 and 9 year old children. While Philosophy is not (yet) a specific discipline in primary schools it has been a powerful tool with which I have taught many students to improve their higher order thinking skills. I would like to contribute my thoughts to some of the recommendations of the report.

RECOMMENDATION 2

(a) That each topic be taught over two or more consecutive weeks.

I find that each topic does require at least two sessions, and often more. I spend the first half hour introducing students to the stimulus material/s, having an initial generalised discussion about the materials, gathering and sorting student questions and then labelling the concept being explored e.g. *What are we actually talking about here? Is it ‘extinct animals’ or is it ‘real or imagined animals’?* Children can take a long time to make these decisions. At that point students have often had enough. They use a lot of energy with their thinking! Much more energy than an adult would use. I generally stop the discussion at that point and return to the topic later in the week, when we usually become involved in a very good discussion about it.

Students enjoy distinguishing between all the ‘shades of grey’ of topics. At the beginning of one week I had a (low achieving) student ask if a balsa wood dinosaur model was ‘real’. The class talked about how we’d know if something was real; and established criteria for determining if something was real, unreal, imagined, alive, dead or extinct. At the end of the
second/follow up discussion I asked him: “So – what do you think now? Do you think it’s real?” His response was: “It’s a real model of a pre-historic dinosaur that is now extinct.” He was 7. The students’ capacity to use concept words accurately and to clearly articulate their thoughts develops amazingly over the course of a year.

It is critical to give time to what we say is important. If we say that higher order thinking skills are important, we must give them adequate instruction and learning time. The majority of students will not develop good thinking skills without adequate time apportioned to them. However, it is amazing what can be achieved in a relatively short period of time if good thinking is truly valued by the school community, well taught and scheduled into weekly timetables.

(b) ... that curriculum materials be modified to include specific guidance in teaching for a process of reason evaluation

Students quickly pick up that their thinking is valued and all students will, in a short space of time, feel that the group environment is ‘safe’ enough to take the personal/emotional risk of speaking their opinion and putting their reasons forward. The protocols (including no put-downs) support this. However, the problem then becomes an issue of how the facilitator sensitively responds to examples of poor reasoning. The facilitator’s response must move students forward in their thinking so that they can develop good quality reasons and distinguish them from poor reasons. Although there is no one correct answer, some responses are clearly going to be better than others. This may require students to examine their own thinking and change their mind and ‘let go’ of a previously held belief in a public forum. This is something that most people (particularly adults) find hard to do and requires that facilitators have skills to handle this sensitively. This can take much practice to develop. It also requires that the facilitator has a good understanding of the conceptual terrain themselves.

This recommendation would be supported by the uptake of RECOMMENDATION 3: Opportunities for facilitators/volunteers themselves to facilitate ethical inquiry lessons within the training sessions ... prior to running them with students.

RECOMMENDATION 3

(c) A greater focus on behaviour management techniques

Managing student behaviour is something that all teachers must learn, as do all volunteers. Even with the most engaging discussion, some students, for a range of reasons, will be difficult to manage. Strategies must be simple to enact so that the facilitator does not interrupt the flow of the lesson. It is also important that classroom teachers support the volunteers in behaviour management issues.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Provision of facts sheets to parents/carers

This is an excellent idea. In my experience, parents will provide support to initiatives that are explained and that they understand. At different times while I was teaching philosophy to my classes, parents were unhappy with the idea. I responded to this by talking with them to explain what the lessons involved and inviting parents/carers to watch lessons. Often, at the conclusion of a lesson, students would summarise their thoughts on a topic and I collated them all and sent the collection home as part of a class newsletter. This was always well received. Parents were very happy and often very surprised at the well articulated thinking that students demonstrated in their writing.
Could I suggest that some ‘quotes’ from students are included in the facts sheets? I do a lot of talks to university groups about teaching philosophy in schools. I always start with some student quotes i.e things my students have said or written after discussing a concept, and it invariably starts some animated discussion amongst the tertiary students. Many are in disbelief that primary students could be so articulate. Quotes from students send a powerful message about the power of this pedagogy.

To conclude:
I understand why this trial has been run with volunteers, and I absolutely applaud the work that has gone into organising and running the trial. I also fully appreciate the reasons for the trial being run in the SRE timeslot. I would sincerely hope, however, that sometime in the near future, Ethics/Philosophy is taught to all students in all schools by qualified teachers. Queensland University of Technology has recently taken the initiative of mandating that all pre-service teachers complete a 6 month a Philosophy in Schools subject. To this end all the Education Faculty lecturers have been trained to teach it. I am absolutely delighted that this University has had the foresight and the courage to take this step forward. Teachers, students and society of the future will gain enormously if this initiative is supported by schools.

In the meantime my hope is that, at the very least, the Ethics Trial will be replicated across classrooms in NSW. Queensland teachers are watching this development with great interest.

I have read with interest the report on the Ethics Course Trial in schools.

I have concerns about the course being offered in opposition and as a replacement for SRE (Special Religious Education) in school for non-SRE students, as well as whether it is ready to be "rolled out" in its current form.

The Ethics course is being offered as a profitable alternative to SRE to non-SRE students. It has been argued on p.2-3 of the NSW Ethics Course Trial Report, that by not allowing non-SRE students a chance to learn about ethics and reflect on the purpose of life, they are being discriminated against and deprived of something which would be beneficial to their mental health. It is true that the moral code that is taught as part of religions is beneficial to mental health. What the St James Ethics Centre does NOT say is that religion in itself, aside from values, is beneficial to mental health and is associated with increased happiness in life, better marriages, less depression, more resilience, more charity in society etc. This is well studied and documented. (There is an excellent presentation on this with many references in a discussion by David Myers "On Religion and Human Flourishing ", Chapter 16 in "The Science of Subjective Well-Being," by Micheal Eid and Randy Larson).

So to be true to the desire to improve the mental health of young people more students should be encouraged to study SRE. Certainly they should not be enticed away from it by offering Ethics classes as an alternative, which provides only half the factors associated with better mental health and happiness in life. This was seen at schools that offered the Ethics trial, as the invitation went to all students in stage 3, and many children left SRE to go to the Ethics classes. The Report itself acknowledges "the lack of metaphysics for non-SRE
students" p.31, but does not suggest the obvious, that this would be best served by having more students attend SRE, as this conflicts with their atheistic worldview.

I work as a General Practitioner and see many young people with mental health problems. A teenage girl told me recently that she had a lot of worries and no hope in life. When asked to specify her fears her main one was concerning what would happen when she dies. Young people do have a desire to find meaning in life and do have questions about God and the after life. The Ethics course would not shed any light on these issues for her. Let us not woo students away from the opportunity of learning about God; they can do this as well as developing ethical reasoning skills if they are allowed to take both SRE and Ethical Philosophy at school.

The Central Coast Express Advocate last week announced triumphantly that the Ethics course will be made available to local schools. It outlined that it would help students to learn values and the difference between right and wrong. This is a common misconception which is acknowledged in the Report, but I feel parents are mislead into thinking their children will be taught right from wrong, and be given ethical guidelines on how to live. This idea is attractive to parents who do not see much value in learning about God but do want their children to learn ethics. So they may mistakenly transfer their children to the Ethics classes.

This is not to say that a moral philosophy-based course is not beneficial. The objectives of the trial to help students develop ways of thinking and weighing up ethical issues is of great value, no matter what religion you are from. I would suggest it be better offered as a course for all students at the school. This would also allow valuable input and perspectives from students with a faith background to add to the discussion as well.

The Report from the St James Ethics Centre suggests that their material could be made available for SRE classes to use in their lessons. However this is totally unsuitable as it takes away valuable time from learning about religion, which is challenging to cover presently in only a 1/2 hour lesson per week. Having all students study Ethical Philosophy would thus enable non-SRE students to improve their skills at forming and evaluating ethical decisions, which fulfills the goal of the proponents of the Ethics course, without SRE children missing out on either their religion or development of philosophical reasoning skills.

This would also be more equitable, which is a goal of the proponents of the Ethics course on p.4 of the Report. However they only see equality in offering the ethics course to non-SRE students, which does not seem equitable to me!

This may also help overcome one of the obvious difficulties of the Ethics course, which is where the funding is to come from. SRE is funded by the religious organisations who provide trained volunteers and materials free of charge to students. It would not be fair for the government to pay for the Ethics course, unless it was offered to all students who would all benefit. And if the funding does not come from the government who would fund it on such a large scale if it is to be rolled out? The Report does not say where funding would come from.

When I read the evaluation of the Ethics trial there are some shortcomings, which are acknowledged by the authors. There has been the danger of moral relativism, the "anything goes" principle. The students had not completed the process of reflection and reasoning,
and not engaged in the community enquiry method, which is necessary to develop ethical reasoning skills (p.16). These were shown to have not been developed when measured before and then after the trial classes. The Report attributes this to lack of time in the lessons, and lack of skill of the volunteer leaders of the group. Therefore I feel before any major roll out of the Ethics classes there should be another trial to implement the recommendations for longer time spent on a topic (two 30 minutes sessions was suggested) and better training of the leaders. Then the outcomes should again be evaluated to see if the students are able to develop these reasoning skills that are being aimed at. It is premature to roll out the program until this is established.

As a parent I think that time non-SRE students spend when SRE is on done in reading is of great benefit, and is undervalued by the proponents of the Ethics classes to be held in opposition to SRE. Students these days have many competing interests for their time, such as TV and computers, and are reading less. Doing other homework is also beneficial if they would like to free up after school time for other activities or reading at home. So I do not think that there needs to be another lesson for the non-SRE students, and it should not add to the teaching burden at the school either.

Let us offer our children the best chance for happiness and resilience in life by allowing them to develop their moral philosophy reasoning skills without depriving them of religion. The two should be side-by-side, not in opposition. Let's continue to encourage all who want SRE at school to be able to go, and all our students to develop the capacity to make reasoned ethical decisions by offering the Ethics Course (once improved and proven) to all students.

I fully support the teaching of ethics with the school system.
- And I cannot believe there is eveny any debate on its place over RE within the public school system

Further - on Chaplains in schools (1stly they have no place in the public school system)

But - Maybe schools should also have a choice on whether they accept a school chaplain or a philosophy teacher ?
- Along the same lines as the choice between RE and ethics.

Thats my two bobs worth.

My son was involved in the Ethics trial at his school - Public School in . He enjoyed the class and would often discuss the problems that were examined in class with us during dinner that night. This level of engagement is a great result.

I wholehearted approve of the ethics program continuing in schools.
I’d like to voice my support for the teaching of Ethics in schools. As a parent of two children at a [Redacted] Primary School who don’t do the ‘scripture classes’ I’ve been frustrated by the alternative offered (colouring in, kids DVDs, free time) to the non-scripture kids. I had been considering giving my kids a term of each of the religions offered so that they could get exposed to the varied beliefs in the community, but this is not encouraged by the school (for admin reasons I think). The Ethics classes will give my kids an opportunity to have a valuable learning experience.

I do not agree that there should be an ethics programme in the school. The Maths and English programmes are too short as it is, so the time will have to come from somewhere. Those of us who go to church have an ethics programme within the home and our social network and those that don't also have ethics programme in their homes.

May I suggest:

1. that if parents do not have an ethics programme in their home then there can be parent classes during or after school hours,

Teachers have enough to do without more social engineering by the government and those who are not in teaching have no idea of the amount of teaching and paper work that teachers have to do.

Ms. Firth, live the life of a year 9 teacher....then you will know.

our family is definitely in support of the ethics classes!!

The Church is right to have strongly opposed the teachings of ethics during Scripture lessons. The teaching of Protestant Christianity in state public schools today is sometimes the only opportunity children have to hear the Bible’s teachings on relationships, the environment, and how to go to Heaven.

Ethics are man’s opinions, in contrast to the authority of the Bible. It is God’s Word that is being contested by pro-ethics teachers, but it is God’s Word that is the core to the solution of every problem that can arise in the human race.

The last six of the Ten Commandments provide the basis for the solution to every human social relationship:

“Honour thy father and thy mother”, “Thou shalt not kill”, “Thou shalt not steal”, “Thou shalt not bear false witness (lie) against thy neighbour”, “Thou shalt not covet…” (Exodus 20:3-7), “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 19:19), etc.

With regard to environmental issues, the Bible clearly teaches us to look after the earth and to rule it. (Genesis 1:28) God’s abhorrence of animal cruelty is also clear: - “A righteous man regards the life of his beast.” (Proverbs 12:10) We are to care for the animals.
Finally, the Bible answers the most fundamental questions of life – “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” and “Where am I going?” It answers the ultimate question of: “Where will you spend eternity – in Heaven or in Hell?” Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

No doubt many, if not all, volunteer ethics teachers would see themselves as good people, but the Bible teaches the error of “do-gooders” – of the self-righteous who reject and replace God’s teachings with their own ideas and standards about what is right and wrong.

It is a serious error to replace Scripture teaching with Ethics classes. It would benefit NSW public schools should the Education and Training Minister Verity Firth oppose the teaching of ethics during scripture lessons.

A more comprehensive report fully supporting the introduction of the ethics course could not be found!
and I applaud the professionalism and meticulous report of the independent assessor.

For too long opt-out children from 'scripture' have been and are discriminated against in our public school system.
You have the means to stop this injustice now.

Here is a wonderful course, designed by the most accredited academics in the field - put through a thorough and rigorous trial and then assessed by independent academics.

And it has passed with flying recommendations!

We want to see this course introduced for our children and the 100,000 or more like them as quickly as possible.

I am writing to add my strong support for Ethics to be introduced in our Public Schools. I have a child currently in Year 2 who is discriminated against as she does not attend scripture classes, but is currently not allowed to participate in any other meaningful learning during these times. I also have another child who will be attending school in the near future who will be similarly discriminated against. The introduction of Ethics classes is a wonderful initiative that is long overdue to right the injustice of the current DET policy.

The independent assessment of the Ethics trial highlighted the benefits of the classes and fully supported the trial being extended to all state run primary schools. For too long our children have been discriminated against and I am writing in the hope that the course will be introduced as quickly as possible.

I hereby express my full support for all recommendations made in Section 7 of the Report of the Independent Evaluation of the NSW Ethics Course Trial prepared by Dr Sue Knight. The course clearly met the aim of introducing students to the language and nature of ethics and ethical decision making and enabled participants to engage with the principles of ethical
decision making – all very valuable skills for their future as positive, responsible citizens. The course is a valuable addition to the activities in NSW schools and a credit to the St James Ethics Centre and the volunteers who participated in the trial. Please convey my support for the continuation of this course to the Minister.

As a parent of a child at [blank] Public School, I am writing to express my support for the programme to teach ethics in primary schools.

I consider this programme to be a most suitable alternative to scripture classes, particularly for the significant proportion of students who do not participate in religious education during these sessions.

I strongly support the introduction of ethics or moral philosophy classes for children not attending scripture class.

My child who is attending a secular, public primary school is forced to spend one hour a week effectively doing nothing. Having children watching Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is not a productive use of their time. I do not understand why my child should lose education time in a public school because others want religious instruction provided. There are denominational schools that offer this or it should be dealt with outside school time.

Providing a course that encourages children to internalise moral decisions would be a worthy use of this time. This recommendation seems to offer a legitimate choice that is currently being denied anyone who does not want religious education in the small number of denominations offered. It is not something that people will be forced to take up, those parents who want to continue religious classes for their children will be able to.

I support the recommendation 1 provided in Section 7. As for recommendation 5, I agree that a consultative committee would be of value to assess the ongoing course, it should be made clear who the stakeholders are - it would obviously be useful to have representatives from relevant parent groups.

I hope that this course is rolled out across all public schools, primary and secondary.

I am writing to give my support to the introduction of a non-religious ethics course. I would like the opportunity for my child to develop morals without the suggestion that a belief in religion is a requirement for acting on principle. As the aim of this ethics course is to "develop an understanding of socially important moral values and norms and to enable students to think critically and act reasonably and responsibly" I would like to see the widespread introduction of this course as an alternative to religious-based ethics.
Please register my absolute support for the introduction of the ethics classes option into all and any school that receives public funding.

It is with great pleasure that I read the recommendations in your report on the potential of ethics classes in NSW Primary Schools.

I have a daughter from a mixed cultural background who began Kindergarten this year. I never had any intention of sending her to Scripture class as nothing seemed appropriate for her and like many parents I know, I believe religion is best kept out of public primary schools.

I have great respect for my daughter's teachers and all the hard work which takes place there. I have however been deeply concerned and disappointed that for two sessions per week my daughter has effectively had 'dead time' in her day while other children have been engaged in a thoughtful and well resourced manner through Scripture classes. How can anyone believe this to be fair or wise?

Last Term for 7-8 weeks my daughter spent her 'dead time' watching - much to mine and other parents' horror - the movie Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, split into episodes! The parents of non-scripture children have no say in what happens in this time, no voice whatsoever. It is therefore only right that an appropriate and meaningful option for thousands of children who deserve their time to be well spent be found.

My hope is that the Recommendations stated on pages 82-83 are passed and that those religious groups who currently oppose Ethics classes realise that in doing so, are letting down the rest of the children in our schools.

I wish to strongly express my support for the state-wide roll of out of ethics classes. The current system – which offers no meaningful activities to children who opt out of scripture – is grossly unsatisfactory.

I also note that the existing system, which allows untrained scripture teachers to instruct children with little or no supervision, seems totally out of step with contemporary expectations of schools. I add that I have memories of being instructed by scripture teachers who were purveyors of highly inflammatory ideas and misinformation; their unauthorised screening of the anti-abortion film ‘The Silent Scream’ to a group of 12 year olds should stand as a good example of what I’m referring to. The school principal at that time had no capacity to prevent this; nor could a current principal.

As a parent of two children attending public school I support the introduction of ethics classes as an alternative to scripture. I believe that people benefit greatly from instruction that enables them to think critically about their values, actions and choices, and that the St James Ethics Centre is extremely well placed to have devised an appropriate teaching framework.
Support for an Ethics Complement to Scripture

I urge you to change Education Department policy to allow the teaching of ethics as a complement to scripture in New South Wales primary schools.

As the mother of two young children, and a solicitor with a background in human rights law, I am greatly concerned by the fact that, in Australia in 2010, public school students whose parents elect not to send them to scripture continue to be prohibited from receiving any other form of instruction. When my daughter commenced kindergarten at [redacted], my husband and I decided not to enrol her in scripture, genuinely expecting that she would be engaged in some form of educational activity while her peers studied their parent’s respective faiths. We were surprised and somewhat angry to learn that, on the contrary, at five years of age [redacted] was required to entertain herself for up to an hour per week every week of the school year. Within a very short time, ‘non-scripture’ was causing her considerable anxiety, notwithstanding our attempts to entertain her with colouring-in books and other activities brought from home.

In term three of her kindergarten year, my husband and I reluctantly enrolled [redacted] in scripture, where she remained until the middle of year two. We were forced to move [redacted] out of scripture when she complained that she felt uncomfortable about being asked to stand up and tell the rest of the class why she loved God. We were also influenced by the fact that her scripture homework included ‘games’ that required her to teach her parents religious verses.

Once again, our daughter now spends up to an hour every week entertaining herself at school, along with two class rooms full of other junior primary children. Our son faces the same prospect when he commences school in 2012.

Although we share a deep respect for the right of all persons to freedom of religion, my husband I are not religious, and we believe strongly that it is possible to be ethical without having religious convictions. We consider the current policy to be unfair and unacceptable in a modern secular society. We strongly believe that it is time to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of our community by introducing an educational option for those children who do not attend scripture.

I speak on behalf of many parents when I say that I welcome the positive evaluation of the ethics pilot by Dr Sue Knight, and hope that you will act in the best interests of our children by allowing the teaching of ethics as a complement to scripture in NSW primary schools.

Please register my support for the introduction of the ethics classes option into all schools that receive public funding.
We wish to convey our support for the introduction of ethics classes in our schools. It is important that for children's all round development that they are given the opportunity to be exposed to various ideas and are taught values and responsibilities to assist them in their personal development and their role as informed citizens in society.

The Report argues that Ethics be smaller but deeper. Smaller, in the sense that it should be re-branded as ‘Philosophical Ethics’ (recommendation 5). But also deeper, to overcome philosophical naivete about moral relativism and place the course on a sounder metaphysical footing (see for instance the comments on page 31 para 1 about the need for a broader philosophical sweep).

There are considerable problems with both of these suggestions.

While Ethics is distinguishable from Religion they are not separable. Asking any hard ethical questions about what the good life might look like will quickly trip up against religious questions - what does it mean to be human? what is good? is there a divine Creator and Judge? How could they possibly be domesticated?

It is no surprise then that the course has proved to be naive in relation to moral relativism. The Report decries moral relativism however, and suggests any rollout of the program will need to address this issue.

How might that be done? The Report rejects using a commonly agreed set of moral principles as a cure to relativism (p55). Instead it confidently claims that secular ethics are compatible with religious ethics and may be studied on the basis of widely agreed basic tenets of Moral Philosophy (p45). The examples given are: rationality, sentience, equal human worth, and a rejection of moral relativism. How can these deeper philosophical questions possibly be tackled within a strictly secular framework? Take suffering for example: is suffering real (Buddhists may take issue with that), or the outworking of karma, or simultaneously evil and a means of redemption? They might all be wrong, one might be right, they can't all be right. Would the Ethics course blinker itself to these considerations?

Asking the course to go smaller and deeper is really asking it to commit more strongly to certain metaphysical positions. We don't yet know what they might be. If they are atheist or agnostic positions then they should be SRE providers for Atheism or Agnosticism. Until we understand what stance it might take, or how limited it would be, the pilot scheme should not be rolled out. Much more work needs to be done.
I support the following recommendations of the ‘Knight Review’ regarding any wider roll out of an ethics-based complement to Special Religious Education, namely that:

- ‘Ethics’ would be better described as a course in ‘moral philosophy’ or similar.
- Proper ‘fact-sheet’ information should be made available to all parents about the contents of all SRE options, as well as any ethics-based option.
- Clarity should be obtained about whether or not an ‘Ethics’ course assumes a stance (implied or explicit) of ‘moral relativism’ or is merely values clarification;
- Providers of any such ‘secular Ethics’ courses should have to meet the same high standards (e.g. in terms of probity and application process) as SRE providers.

In addition, I point out that the Ethics trial did not solve the perceived problem of children not attending SRE. This is because parents of many children also chose not to send their children to the Ethics classes. Further, I suspect it will be hard to fund and staff any state-wide roll-out of an Ethics course, especially if it is year-long and K-6 (like SRE).

Undoubtedly there will still be significant numbers of children not in SRE or any future Ethics classes. Therefore the Department must continue to ensure children not attending classes in the SRE time-slot are properly supervised with suitable non-competitive activities. Further local school management should be instructed to ensure that reading, homework, or other private study is never viewed as a waste of time.

I would prefer that any course in Ethical reasoning be offered to all students, not as a rival to SRE. If ‘Ethics’ is to be offered as an alternative to SRE, then it should occur on a level playing field. For example,

- Costs of ‘Ethics’ courses should not be met by the school, but by the provider, in the same way that SRE costs are currently met by the various providers;
- School teachers should not be allowed to teach ‘Ethics’ unless they are also allowed freedom to volunteer to teach SRE;
- Ideally the philosophical basis of the provider(s) of any ‘Ethics’ courses should be clearly labelled (e.g. secular humanism, atheism, utilitarianism, scientific materialism), just as SRE is labelled (e.g. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Buddhist, Muslim, Bahai), so parents can make truly informed choices.

In the interests of full disclosure, I should say that all three of my children have attended local public schools, with two of them now at a local state high school. In addition, the church I serve is involved in the provision of SRE at local schools, and values this privilege.

I strongly oppose the establishment of secular Ethics classes within the school during the time reserved for Special Religious Education. Special Religious Education must be strengthened and protected as a vital part of our children’s education ... one we cannot afford to lose.
I’d like to share the impact that SRE has had in my own life, or on those I know, that demonstrates why we can’t afford to lose it ...
I, and many of my friends have benefited in untold ways from attending SRE classes during our primary schooling. The benefits received continue to have a vital impact on the way our lives are lived today, some 40 years later. I also know of a current Kindergarten child (attending Banksmeadow PS), who protested greatly when one of his parents suggested that he not attend SRE. His mother reports he is now attending SRE and is very enthusiastic about it, often returning home to tell what he has learned.

I also draw your attention to the following:

The Implementation of Religious Education Policy states that it is the responsibility of the schools “... 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.” (3.A.3)

For students not attending SRE, schools are to provide “... appropriate care and supervision at school. 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.” (3.A.11)

If Ethics classes are to be introduced at all, they should NOT be held in the same time-slot as SRE, just as the DET Policy states. SRE must remain as it is. If the very small section of the school community (obviously indicated by the selective sample of the 10 primary schools used for the Trial), which is agitating for the introduction of Ethics classes, is keen for all primary children to be given the opportunity to take part in Ethics classes, then they ought to be advocating that the classes be run at a different time to SRE, so that SRE children also have the opportunity of attending the Ethics classes. Isn’t that fair and equitable? Why should SRE children not have the option to attend the Ethics classes also?

Lastly, at a purely practical level, the implementation of Ethics classes will put more strain on the already stressed financial and organisational resources of our schools. As an ex primary school teacher, I am aware of the many issues involved in school life and know that we can ill-afford to place further burdens on teachers and principals, let alone the monetary cost of implementing any proposed changes in regards to introducing Ethics classes.

I urge all levels of Government to maintain the dedicated time-slot for SRE in our primary schools without offering alternative education in the same time-slot.

I wish to strongly oppose the teaching of ethics during Scripture lessons
In my opinion, many children are never exposed to any sort of religious education Other than what they receive at school
As to ethics – one would hope that ethical standards would be learnt from parents, and other family members at home or indeed through interaction with other students and teachers during the normal learning process as children grow older and become more aware of the correct way of doing things and behaving

Many thanks for all you are doing to resolve this problem
Congratulations to the Education Minister, Verity Firth on making the decision to go ahead with Ethics Classes in state schools. I fully appreciate the pressure that was placed on Ms Firth and the Government by various religious bodies to not go ahead with the classes. I am delighted she withstood the pressure.

I am a firm believer that these classes should be implemented across the board in all the schools regardless whether they are state or private. To teach children ethics and philosophy in primary school is to teach them the ability to think and reason. Something that should stand them in good stead in their teenage years.

Thank you for the opportunity of responding to your Department regarding some concerns and feedback with reference to the TRIAL ETHICS COURSE in schools. I understand that submissions close on Friday, November 5, 2010. With your goodwill I submit the following comments to Dr. Sue Knight and her Committee.

1. The Report into the School Ethics Trial dated October 20, 2010 appears to lack substance. For example, how "high" is the "high level of support for the Course"? and the "high level of engagement"?

2. The subject of ethics requires a common basis for its moral teaching. That base I submit is found in the Book that is the foundation of our Western civilization. It is the Bible that instructs us about ethics and truth etc.

3. The title "St James Ethics Centre" implies a Biblical origin. If the Centre claims that origin it should listen to the words of St James! For example, chapter 1, verse 5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him, (v,6) but when he asks he must believe and not doubt...." (NEW version).

4. With respect to the Minister for Education and Training and the NSW State Government I believe they should give whole-hearted support for Special Religious Education (SRE) and not merely token support. Parents should be encouraged to support their children attending SRE. Encouraging alternatives only implies that SRE is of dubious benefit. As the late C.S.Lewis once said, "Christianity if false is of no importance and if true is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important."

Thank you for the opportunity of addressing these issues.

I would like to be counted as fully supporting all six recommendations of the report and congratulate the Department on commencing a long over due initiative.
I urge you to reject all arguments by Christian religious groups that ethics classes be conducted in addition to SRE classes on the basis that it would not overcome the problem of meaningfully occupying students’ time when they do not want to attend SRE. Christian religious groups have always had the opportunity, and have taken it, to conduct their own version of ethics as part of their SRE classes.

I would like to commend DET and the St. James Centre for this pilot project and excellent report. I hope that this will be the beginning of the option for all children to be allowed to attend a moral philosophy course in state schools, should they choose this in preference to an SRE course. I wish this program had been available whilst my children were attending school. Essential life skills are being taught, and what better way to do it than in a non-discriminatory, non-religious way. Thanks for an excellent project, and keep up the great work.

I am thrilled that the evaluation of the ethics trial was positive & am confident you will take heed of the recommendations to implement the ethics classes into NSW schools. We have been fighting to have some meaningful instruction for those children opting out of SRE for years now & finally it seems common sense can prevail!

Please ensure that the religious bodies do not hijack this

I have four children and was a school teacher. I still do a lot of work with school aged children. The ethics course concerns me in many ways. It is not clear what the underlying moral framework of the course will be. Cultural values are diverse and change over time. At best, such a course will only enforce the cultural rules of the day (written and unwritten), which will outdate within a generation or two. At worst, it will give children the license to be a law to themselves by teaching them that it is virtuous to make up your own mind about any given matter. That is alarming!

There’s much more I could say and has been said by others. For example:
- Parents should not be forced to choose between the Government’s ethics course and religious education (this was part of the petition signed by 50,000 people in May).
- The course doesn’t solve the problem for those who opt for neither SRE or Ethics, and therefore is not a complete solution for non-SRE children.
- The whole process has been rushed and SRE providers still haven’t seen the course material.
- The trial was performed on a small scale (10 schools) with the schools participating not representative of the whole of NSW.
- The proposal hasn’t been costed and questions have been raised as to the feasibility of rolling out the course across NSW. It is an expensive option that doesn’t solve the entire problem.
- The report found issues with the course itself that need to be resolved before it could possibly be rolled out on a wider scale, such as controversy surrounding a lesson on Graffiti.
All responses are unedited

- The issue of moral relativism – children receive no guidance and are left to make up their own mind.
- Other simpler solutions have not been investigated, just as ensuring schools are encouraging non-SRE students to use the SRE timeslot well.

In short, please reconsider. Don't rush into a regretful and costly implementation.

I hope this helps.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Evaluation Report prepared by Dr Sue Knight.

We note that the report recommends that the course “be described as ‘Philosophical Ethics’ or a ‘Moral Philosophy based’ course … to make clear the boundaries of its content” (pages 6-7 & 43). While these titles would serve this purpose, they are terminology specific to the discipline of Philosophy and not easily understood by the general public.

All religious persuasions teaching SRE include ethical teaching as part of their course. Ethics flow from a worldview and each religious persuasion promotes ethics based on that worldview. Similarly, Philosophical Ethics is based on a worldview. If the course is going to proceed, the title of that worldview (Secular Humanism) would be the appropriate title for the course.

Such a title would clarify the basis of the course and address the criticism that the title “Ethics” is confusing. It should also address the criticism that the trial course created an atmosphere of competition with other SRE providers by setting up “Ethics” as giving the perception that other SRE courses do not teach ethics.

From my wife’s experience teaching Years 5 & 6 and raising 3 children, we question how the majority of 10 and 11 year olds can reach adequate ethical conclusions without prior instruction in moral standards. Children need clear boundaries to provide security and promote good mental health.

I am HUGELY in favour of Ethics classes for school students.

It is an EXTREMELY positive development that is long overdue.

Fantastic news, I look forward to the roll out of ethics classes across NSW. I have a totally bored non-scripture class primary school child attending [redacted] Public School.
I was delighted to hear on the news this morning that Ethics classes will commence in 2011. May I congratulate all those involved in this decision and I hope it does indeed become a reality.

I live in [REDACTED] in Sydney and have a two year old daughter. I would choose a school which ran ethics classes for her over one which does not. I think it’s a very good idea and would support a rollout in NSW school.

Thank you for endorsing firstly the trial and now the introduction of the Ethics/Philosophy programme for pupils not attending SRE.

Please ensure a smooth start to the introduction of the course by:

1. an early survey of parents to find out how many children will be attending ethics classes.

2. advising teachers/presenters of SRE as soon as possible of any changes to the number of children attending their classes so they can make any necessary adjustments.

3. allowing sufficient time before the course starts so that staffing and accommodation issues can be addressed and resolved.

4. providing good, uniform training for teachers/facilitators in all schools across the state who will be responsible for delivering this programme.

5. making sure sufficient resources/workbooks, etc. available for students and teachers/facilitators in all schools before that starting date.

Please do all in your power to make this initiative a success.

I would like to express my delight at finally having a viable alternative to religious education in schools.

I have 2 children (aged 24 and 21) and it has always puzzled me that some religions are allowed to proselytise in public schools. I have nothing against people having religion in their lives; I just don’t see that it has a place in school.

Ethics, however, (the skills in evaluating and making moral judgements) is something that is needed throughout life and is of benefit not only to the individual, but to the community.

I therefore applaud your initiative and wish you all the best in its implementation.
I wanted to record my support for the teaching of ethics as an alternative to scripture in our schools.

I have two sons at school, [redacted] and [redacted]. They have tended to prefer to not take scripture at school (though one did attend Buddhist teaching when it was offered for a short time). As a result they have been left with nothing to do but amuse themselves during the scripture period. I well remember the time [redacted] told me that he was made to sit in the class store-room during scripture period because, I was told, room had to be made for all religions wishing to attend the school and there was no where else for him to be put.

Anyway, I welcome the chance for my children to try ethics instead. Well done!

I'd like to voice my strong support for the ethics classes that are proposed to be offered as an alternative to special religious education (SRE) classes in NSW public schools from 2011 onwards.

Both my wife and I are non-religious, and we have no desire for our son, Ethan, to be provided with any religious instruction when he starts kindergarten at [redacted] Public School next year (2011). However, we do not want [redacted] to feel that he is being "left to his own devices" while some of his classmates participate in SRE classes. The offering of ethics classes as an alternative to SRE is (of course!) the ideal solution to our concerns.

Beyond the benefit to my own family, I feel that the proposed ethics classes address a significant shortfall in the NSW public school system. Australia has over the last 50 years become increasingly multicultural, with a significant proportion of our population now coming from non-Christian backgrounds. Surely in light of this, it becomes a matter of basic fairness and decency to not impose the beliefs of one religious group on impressionable young minds? Offering the "option" of allowing parents to exclude their children from SRE classes while not providing any meaningful classroom alternative instead is, quite frankly, no option at all.

I hope that you will ignore the inevitable clamouring of religious groups with a vested interest in maintaining the shameful status quo, and fully implement all six recommendations from the "NSW Ethics Course Trial Final Report".

We write in support of the proposed Ethics Course, having observed some of the trial classes shown on television (which were very impressive) and perused the report. For those children who do not participate in Religious Instruction, I believe that an Ethics Course which aims to "develop an understanding of socially important moral values and norms and to enable students to think critically and act reasonably and responsibly" would be an important adjunct to their education and, indeed, their whole life.

I support all the recommendations described in Section 7 of the Ethics Report, and encourage the government to act upon these recommendations.
We have read the Executive Summary of your Report and the Recommendations. We agree with the direction this project in teaching Ethics classes to Stage 3 students is taking. Congratulations to everyone involved, especially the St James Ethics Centre.

In particular, we endorse the thoughtful way this program has been planned, developed, implemented and evaluated. We can see there are many issues, involving an expansion of the program for two full years, and the assemblage of additional staff to offer the course throughout NSW Primary Schools, but this is worth undertaking. The Ethics course offers a much-needed innovative boost to Primary School education, which may well offer productive stimulus to student learning in Stages 4 and 5.

I am a part-time, casual High School English teacher, and my wife is a retired Child Care teacher. We would both be willing to undertake the training necessary to deliver the Ethics course in Stage 3.

The Ethics Course Trial is a project that we enthusiastically support and would like to see implemented in a much more expanded way in Stage 3 in 2011.

I have read the Report and its Recommendations and Conclusion.

My 2 sons attended State School and, as an Atheist (as are my now-adult sons), I did not allow them to attend SRE lessons. Instead they were sent to the library to occupy themselves with reading or other work. Then and now, I object to the teaching of religion in State Schools.

This Ethics Course trial is long overdue and an Ethics course should be implemented in State Schools, irrespective of the SRE lessons. Given the longevity of SRE in schools and the absence of ethical conduct that is readily apparent in so many aspects of daily life, the SRE lessons have clearly failed in this respect. Unless the SRE programme is biased, I assume all religions are candidates for SRE including those in which, for example, women are held in inferior status to men.

There is a self-evident need for much-improved education in Ethics throughout the Australian community despite objections of religious groups who may see its teaching in schools as a threat to their vested interests and activities. Tragic instances over the long-term of various forms of dominance and abuse by religious appointees of those in their care, and the tacit sanctioning within religious hierarchies, appear to be commonplace and demonstrate a very diminished concept of ethical behaviour.

The level of scrutiny, in the report, of the aims, methods, teacher-selection, name of the course, etc is proper, but should equally and usefully be applied to the SRE courses. Without going into detail, I was dismayed by arguments put by various SRE teachers to persuade me to allow my sons to attend SRE classes, varying from "your son will feel isolated from his friends" to 'the importance of fairy-tales in children's learning'.

I have read the Report and its Recommendations and Conclusion.
I strongly support the inclusion of Ethics lessons in school education as an alternative to SRE lessons.

I’d like to say that it is tremendously important that ethics be taught at schools, and that it is a shame that religious education has a monopoly on it.

Personally, I am an agnostic, but I send my school-age children to religious education for its ethical content.

(For the record, my daughter is and my son is , and they attend Public School in , NSW.)

I would be happier for them to get ethical instruction as part of the school’s normal secular educational content.

There is a mistaken belief that ethical imperatives can only be based on some religious authority, which is entirely untrue. It is a mistake for secular education to shrink back from a vital part of being person in society - ethics.

Thank you for seeking community feedback. That is one way to make sure whatever happens does not flop. Well done.

However, just as it was a milestone to put religion classes into public schools all those years ago...I think it would be a step backward, to heed the request of one group of parents (primarily from Public School)...who seem to feel neutral about religion....who would like to push for an alternative to SRE classes.

It is a privilege in Australia, for children to learn about God.

Ethics is something that is good....perhaps it could be integrated into something else in the K-6 curriculum. Posing it as an alternative to Scripture is not a good step for any faith teachers out there.

When I went to Public School (as an intern student last year)....I notice that people of many religions have a opportunity to educate children who may not have a chance to learn about religion on weekends or from family.

By posing Ethics classes as an alternative, all volunteer faith teachers will lose their students in the future.

It will discourage SRE volunteers.

It will discourage attendance.
And it is a step backward from the privilege to learn about God in Australian public schools.

This will be a fundamentally different experience for public/private primary school children.

We should not expect attendance at SRE to be maintained if this is introduced. It is a threat.

Ethics can be taught by teachers to all students in HSIE or English, or integrated into Sport, PE, anything....

It does not need to be an alternative to Scripture which has been one of the founding stones of Australia, even if our church attendance and living faith is not strong.

Please hear the opinion and voice of a 22-year old university student. It is not good to listen to one interest group at the expense of another. Ethics is fine....put it in another part of the syllabus. Change your syllabus, but don't take away the audience for religion in schools. Doing so....would make us like China (I'm an Australian born Chinese)........where it is a proud thing to declare 'there is no God, and I believe in nothing'....

believing in ethics will never replace...believing in God. Do not rob our future generations of children, who may have wanted an opportunity to learn about the Bible and interact with a faith volunteer.

Our child attends We raised with the previous principal the waste of key learning time impacting large amounts of non-scripture attending students. We believe that an ethics program would be an invaluable assistance to these children.

If the Scripture class providers object to this on the grounds that Scripture attendees are missing out then they should consider restructuring their scripture classes to provide a professional faith-based ethics program. Or look to providing the faith-based elements outside school hours and utilise the secular ethics program during school hours.

I congratulate the NSW State Government on the decision to introduce ethics classes into NSW State Primary Schools next year and I would like to register my support for this important initiative and for the recommendations set out in Section 7 of the NSW Ethics Course Trial: Final Report.

My wife and I have one primary school age child and we choose to not have him attend the regular scripture classes at our local state primary school. Being relatively new residents to NSW (coming from interstate), we were surprised to find that there was nothing offered as an alternative to the scripture classes. Currently my son knows that on scripture days, he needs to take crayons along as they will just be spending the time drawing and colouring during this class time slot. I have heard it argued that the intention of the current arrangement for scripture classes was that parents were not forced to make a choice between two “important” learning activities. However, many children opt out of scripture instruction and I believe that this policy is actually forcing a large number of children into an effectively useless activity during normal school class time.
I understand that there has been a long-standing agreement between the State Education Department and the Churches that asserts that there will not be any significant or useful learning activity offered by state primary schools in the same time period as scripture classes. However, in our present society, composed of a rich mix of families from many different cultures and religious backgrounds, a move to a secular approach to this most important subject of ethics is well overdue. One of the most important facets of our society in Australia is the fact that there is *not* a strong coupling between Church and State as there is in many other countries; and I believe that this is one of the factors that promotes a tolerant society and makes our democracy such a strong and effective one.

Coming from a fairly moderate Christian upbringing but having an interest in ethics and philosophy, I was very impressed by the new class content that I saw in the media and by the way that the ethics classes are being delivered. I believe that by far the best way to understanding complex issues such as these is through experiencing, questioning and discovering for yourself, and this certainly appeared to be the approach taken in the trail ethics classes that were covered in the media.

I am a SRE teacher and would like the SRE to continue at a time slot when Ethics is not being taught.
I have no objection to Ethics, but at a different time to SRE please

My 2 sons both attend Public School

I would welcome the opportunity to provide them with an alternative to the usual scripture classes

Instilling being a good kind respectful person is part of life and would be an excellent idea

I hope that moving forward we get the opportunity to have the choice of ethics in our school

It is vital that the ethics trial translates to a permanent ethics class alternative in schools for students who do not attend scripture classes.

We have 4 children – none of them attended or does attend scripture. They were/ are supervised at school – but that’s all.
To enable them to use this time span in a productive manner would – in my view – only mean that they are treated equally and fairly.
To do so, is long overdue.
We are very much in favour of these ethic’s classes!!!
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

The idea that the children of non-religious parents should not be able to learn something, during the time when children of religious parents are getting a supposed benefit from religious instruction, strikes me as a form of discrimination. One of the great erroneous cries from the private schools sector, many of them religious, has been that they taught "values". How ironic that it seems to be the same religious leaders who would seek to deprive public schools of the opportunity to provide "values" to all students. The idea that "values" can only come through religious institutions is wrong: demonstrably wrong.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I request that DET policy be changed so that all NSW children can learn in the time allocated to SRE.

Public School P+C strongly endorses the introduction of Ethics Classes. A letter and a petition with over 100 signatures of people supporting this Program, has just been sent to the Minister for Education and Training (cc Hon ). In 2 weeks the P+C will vote on the motion "That the NSW Minister for Education changes DET's policy to allow secular ethics classes to operate as a compliment to scripture/SRE classes in NSW primary schools". It is expected that this motion will also be strongly supported.

Thank you for having the vision to trial the Ethics program. I would like to hope you have the determination to introduce it across the state in the light of the evaluators recommendations and despite the vehement but illogical opposition of the conservative religious right whose motives are purely self intersted.

It is only fair and equitable that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. If teh program is seen as having value for the SRE programmers the St James Ethics Center has generously offered to make it available.

The conservatives argument that it is unfair on SRE students to deprive them of participation in an ethics program because it takes place at the same time as SRE is ludicrous and does not make it right for students not participating in SRE to continue to waste this time.
I accept wholeheartedly that the introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it is intended to simply provide a worthwhile alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

This is a live political issue and will be a factor in the next election. The party with the moral courage and vision to role the ethics program out state wide, despite entrenched opposition from powerful opponents, will get my vote.

My son attends a public school and in time my daughter will join him when she is old enough.

My partner and I will never enroll our children in religious education classes as we do not support the values taught by religious institutions, particularly as we are a same sex family which is not recognised by the majority of religious educators. It disturbs my partner and I that in a public school our son is forced to have time out from structured learning while SRE is underway.

My partner and I whole heartedly support the provision of ethics education to our son and eventually our daughter as we believe it important to have a philosophical framework with which to understand the society we live in and to be able to contribute to it in a positive and humane way.

It is up to the family to choose what form of instruction their child receives and it is the State’s role to facilitate that choice in public schools without being dictated to by the Church. To us this means that SRE and ethics education should be offered in parallel and that families have the final say over which activity their children will attend.

We encourage our children to be rationale individuals making considered choices aligned with the values we teach at home and that we know are reinforced by our public school community. We have confidence in our public school managers and staff to be able to provide both SRE and ethics education in a way that meets the needs of all children attending the school, and not only those involved in SRE as is the present case.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all NSW students who opt out of Special Religious Education (ie. SRE, Scripture). All children should have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way that respects diversity of belief and creates equality of opportunity.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE. It will provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently - officially - learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report shows that students who choose to attend these classes will benefit greatly.

It is not the rightful place of the state to privilege and promote some religious views and practices over others; nor to privilege and promote religious views over non-religious views. Yet this is the undesirable consequence of current DET policy.

I ask that the outdated discriminatory DET policy privileging Scripture be changed now so that all NSW children, regardless of their beliefs, have the opportunity of being equally engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

My son participated in the Ethics Pilot program. My wife and I were surprised, and pleased, by how much my son gained from this experience. He relished the opportunity to reflect on, and discuss, ethical questions. I have noticed he now has much more interest in current events, such as whether Australian troops should serve in Afghanistan: whereas before the trial, he 'switched off' (like a typical 11 year old) whenever these issues came up on TV or elsewhere. This sort of engagement and ability to reason around complex moral issues, is essential for the ongoing health of Australian democracy.

Therefore I ask that you make these classes in philosophical ethics available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way, and these classes can co-exist with SRE.

I support the recommendations of the trial. I would add a some more points for consideration (apologies if I have missed anything in the report):

1. An alternative should still be offered for children whose parents do not wish them to undertake SRE or ethics instruction. (This might have to be simple supervision as it is now.)

2. Volunteers to teach ethics should have some background in teaching - one of the reasons I will not send my child to SRE is that there is no guarantee that the volunteer has any training in education. I don't believe this can be addressed in a short course as is evidenced in the comments from volunteers in the report.

3. Class sizes should be limited. Our school survey indicated that there would be a shift from SRE to ethics if it was offered, so class sizes could be large. A recommendation from the ethics centre on class sizes should be adhered to so that full value is gained for all students.

4. If ethics teaching relies on community volunteers, what back up does DET provide if a suitable volunteer can not be found? If local churches are unable to find a teacher, that faith does not provide SRE in the school. If this is a state supported service, then there must be a guarantee of provision.
5. As an alternative model, state schooling could remove SRE from its curriculum and not introduce ethics. This would level the playing field and leave the issue to be addressed by parents and the community.

As a grandmother whose own children were forced to waste their time during the time set aside for Special Religion classes in NSW, I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. The evaluation report makes a sound case for continuing this program with some useful modification such as changing the name of the program to clarify what it is and what it is not about. To deny children any meaningful educational program during this time is a scandalous state of affairs.

I hope the Department, the Minister and the government will act to ensure all children receive what is their due - meaningful education during school hours.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

The people who oppose this by suggesting that kids who attend SRE are "missing out" on ethics classes should be asked what then is the point of SRE, and why is SRE held during school time?

I applaud the NSW Government for enabling this issue to progress this far, especially given the extent and nature of some of the opposition.

I am truly hoping that the Government will have the courage to take the next and final step, and change DET policy to enable the ethics classes to proceed.

I have read the independent assessor’s report. As one of the volunteer ethics teachers for the pilot classes, I think the report gives a very well-informed and balanced picture of the pilot. I also agree with all of the six recommendations made by the assessor.

I quote from the conclusion to the report:

* "The findings of [this] evaluation demonstrate the effectiveness of the course in relation to improving students' understanding and skills in ethical decision-making, and the overall
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I have two children enrolled at [redacted] Public School. They attend Scripture Classes (Catholic) and I in no way feel that ethics classes are a threat or challenge to their status quo. I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

Religion is a choice. It can be taught either by parents or family not by school. There are so many different religions and beliefs that our children are exposed to and I want my child to respect them all and not believe her religious beliefs are more superior to others. The only
region that is taught at school is Christianity. What about those children who are Hindi, Muslim, Jewish do they have a choice? Ethics is what I want my child to be taught. This is going to impact her every day life and take her into the adult world.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I am writing in response to the evaluation of the Ethics as an Option to Scripture trial.

Two of my three children took part in the pilot at [REDACTED]. The program received unanimous support from our Principal, P&C and school community. I have yet to talk to anyone about the initiative, among friends and family living in Sydney, who are not:
(a) amazed that the backward policy still exists
(b) impressed at the pilot.

The kids were really stimulated by the well-thought through program and, of course, found it much more fulfilling than doing Zip during normal scripture time.

It is extremely inequitable, particularly in an increasingly secular area like the Inner West, that children who elect not to do scripture are denied the opportunity to undertake some other kind of formal learning.

I urge you to not only change the current Department policy, but take the bigger step of legislating the change. This would surely be a vote winner - evidenced by the amount of support expressed through online campaigns and by the ballistic media received everytime the issue has been raised.

We know that the Coalition may well reverse the policy if it takes government in March 2011. Why give them that opportunity?

If you do not legislate I urge you to quickly change the policy and get ethics course implemented from when NSW primary schools return in January 2011. It will then be harder for a newly elected Coalition government to axe the program.

I appreciate your support for this initiative and listening to the views of the community. It would be very disappointing if NSW Labor failed to do everything necessary to entrench this option across the state and I will happily keep lobbying and writing letters if this was to occur.

Changing this policy is a no-brainer. To do so would indicate that your government is progressive, receptive to community opinion, believes in equity and is not beholden to certain Church leaders.
Please, introduce this programme as part of the public school system. I sat in a couple of classes and was amazed to see how much the kids enjoyed debating on real life situations involving ethical issues. My son loved it and missed it.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

To quote from Ms Firth who said "the government had no plans to replace special religious education in NSW public schools but parents who chose not to send their children to scripture classes had a right to see their children engaged in some type of meaningful activity."

I would really like to know just what meaningful activity is to be considered, would not the ethics program be appropriate, meaningful activity for children? The DET need to comply with Recommendation 6 in the report and document specifically what children will be doing if they are not involved in SRE. The current behaviours of some schools who give students busy work or let them sit outside the office during SRE will no longer be tolerated, it has been going on too long.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

When I left the government [redacted] public high school in 1954; when at school my family or myself I did not have any desire or need to attend the weekly scripture classes. What I was forced to do instead of attending those scripture classes was to sort out the garbage and clean the bins. I was somewhat surprised to find that there is still no meaningfull lessons available for students who wish not to attend the religious classes.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Many are the challenges that we all encounter in today’s world and one of the areas I have been immersed in broadly touches on the challenges associated with outsiders homeless jobless powerless and unwellness (especially the mentally afflicted) and the stigmas that arise. Justice fairness and integrity are vital to assist in the resolution of situations wherein ethics enables discourse – thus it is imperative that opportunities to enhance and inform students gives rise to hopefully far more than the three basic “R”s and paves the way for the other “R”s that have long ago gone AWOL from the school curriculum - Respect and Responsibility

Quote from the report:
"It is intended that through such processes of ethical inquiry, students will come to develop the abilities and dispositions to engage in ethical reflection and to formulate well founded ethical judgments. The emphasis on dialogue-based ethical inquiry is directed towards meeting the remaining aims set out for the ethics pilot course, viz.:
• offer[ing] a secure, non-judgemental space to explore the question, "What ought one to do?"; • encourag[ing] an openness towards important personal and public issues and • introduc[ing] dialogue as a means of resolving ethical issues."

Let’s see ethics flow to all individuals and enable everyone to further explore and extended enlightened encounters

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

We have two kids and it would be very positive to allow them to have an option rather than be not allowed to learn anything when attending school (how bizzare and medieval)

It is time that we now had ethics classes in our NSW schools.

All children - regardless of religious belief - should be learning at all times whilst they are school.It is the role of the Department of Education to educate all students in every hour whilst they are school.

To punish those students that opt out of scripture by not allowing them to use this time in a meaningful way only promotes disengagement. This current situation which greatly favours
Public submissions in response to the Ethics Course Trial final report
November 2010

All responses are unedited

and rewards those that learn scripture - does not demonstrate care for all students or represent the secular nature of our society.

We ask that you introduce ethics classes so that all children from kindergarten to year 6 can spend the time learning.

My daughter is in first grade. She goes to [Redacted]. The principals imparted through religious education should be available to children who's parents prefer a more non-denominational approach to learning these principals. I am disappointed that in this day and age the state would prefer to see these kids doing nothing, than engaging in an ethics class. There is a real ethical issue here.

I am writing to lend my support to the introduction of ethics classes for all children who opt out of scripture classes so that all children will be able to spend this time in a meaningful way.
I have read the evaluator's report and it suggests that the St James Ethics Centre has designed a suitable program that can provide a real alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
I urge you to take on board the findings of the independent evaluation and change DET policy so that all NSW children can be engaged in learning during the time allocated to SRE.

We urge the continuation of the Ethics option in NSW public schools as a genuine alternative to enable our youngsters to develop strong life skills and a sense of justice that adds to the sound and strong social capital we need for Australia’s healthy future

My child attended the trial ethics class at [Redacted] Public School and I believe that these classes were worthwhile and very well run. I think that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

It’s time to move forward with our education and not stand still.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I find it astonishing that there is not currently an alternative to SRE in the NSW state public school system, and am disappointed that the christian churches hold such strong sway over the NSW government.

I don’t support the introduction of ethics classes in opposition to scripture.

I think if the report proves that they are beneficial then all children should gain from them. Contrary to claims, many children who now attend scripture would be pulled out in favour of ethics. I believe this would just further create a spiritual vacuum in our society.

I would prefer teaching about all world religions than 'ethics'. Surely this would encourage greater understanding of other cultures and beliefs as well as well as christianity?

As a paediatrician who manages children with behaviour problems, I have many dealings with local primary schools. In our city of [redacted] there is a good choice of religious based private schools, some offering very reasonable fee rates to families. These schools do a fine job catering to the religious needs of those families.
Students of public schools are also offered special religious instruction if that is what their parents wish but there is currently no option for children whose parents do not want this for their children. All parents have a right to choice and the Ethics Classes offer that choice for those children who opt out of scripture. Ethics does not need to replace scripture but offer the option to families who want their children to spend that time in a constructive manner.

The NSW DET policy should be changed so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes as a minimum should be made available for all children who do not attend scripture either by choice or because there is no suitable class. All children have the right to spend this valuable time in a meaningful way; the Principles and Objects of the Education Act are VERY clear on this. The current DET policy is at odds with the Act and discriminates against some 25% of school children; this number is growing every year.

I have reviewed the Education Acts and Policies of all states and territories in regard to SRE. It is quite ironic that while NSW’s Act is superior to them all with commendable and well expressed Principles and Objects, its Policy is deplorable. Your policy goes to extraordinary lengths to ensure that children not attending SRE classes are denied anything remotely resembling an educational experience; to make matters worse this policy makes it acceptable for the school to provide the absolute minimum level of supervisions that it can get away with.

Neither the Acts nor the Policies of the other 5 states and the NT contain any such draconian restrictions. The legislation in the ACT in fact requires that "the principal must ensure that the educational program continues for students at the school not attending religious education."

The introduction of ethics classes will not replace SRE; however, it will provide a useful alternative for children who are currently learning nothing during this period which accounts for about 5% of their effective learning time. The trial evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending such classes. There is absolutely no legal, moral or ethical basis for them not being held.

The only reason that the Policy is the way it is now is because of the once all powerful church lobby group. They now represent a minority of the population and many among them actually support the introduction of meaningful classes for non SRE students - ethics or otherwise. I request that you stand up to this selfish vocal minority and change your discriminatory DET policy.

I am hereby putting you and your government on notice that if this is not done, we will be mounting a very public court action against your government over what is a blatantly discriminatory Policy that prevents the Principles and Objects of the Act being fully achieved; work has already started. This court action and material uncovered under FOI as
part of the due process will undoubtedly shine a light on the duplicitous actions of politicians, public servants and leaders of the Church of England and the Catholic Church. While all of this may not have happened on the Labor Party’s watch, you have a chance to take the moral high ground and right the wrongs done for so long to so many children; if you fail to do so then you become one of the conspirators and no better than the rest.

I am writing on behalf of the Parents and Citizens’ Association at Taverners Hill Infants School, in [insert location]. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the final report into the NSW Ethics Course Trial.

The independent evaluation by Dr Sue Knight of the University of South Australia has clearly highlighted the success of the pilot.

The evaluation found that students were engaged and excited by the issues raised by the curriculum. Class discussion helped students identify ethical issues, and formulate, articulate and justify views about ethical behaviour. Following the pilot, students were more willing to approach collaborative discussions of ethical issues, and less likely to avoid such discussions – an important outcome for young citizens in a fast-moving and complex world.

The success of the pilot also highlights – by comparison – the fundamentally unrewarding and time-wasteful nature of ‘non-Scripture’, where colouring in obviously cannot substitute for sustained, collaborative ethical inquiry.

The pilot has highlighted the question of equity within NSW education. The evidence from the evaluation is clear – there is now available to NSW a high quality ethics curriculum, which could be improved even further in a fuller implementation. To deny children not participating in Special Religious Education the opportunity to consider deeply how we ought to live – and why, is religious discrimination in reverse.

As Taverners Hill is an infants school, the ethics curriculum trialled would not be immediately implementable within our school. However, if the curriculum were more slowly paced – as recommended by the evaluation – and appropriately adjusted, there is no reason why an ethics-based course of instruction could not be developed for younger age groups.

The School Parents and Citizens’ Association strongly endorses the findings of the report on the NSW Ethics Course Trial. Moreover, it strongly supports the inclusion of an ethics-based curriculum from 2011 as a meaningful complement to existing, faith-based Special Religious Education.

Public education in NSW has a long and proud history of offering all children access to a quality curriculum underpinned by values such as honesty, integrity, tolerance, compassion and fairness. Allowing secular ethics classes to operate alongside scripture classes would be no more – and no less – than the logical reaffirmation of this heritage.
In support of my belief that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of special religious education classes in NSW primary schools, I am writing to let you know of why I support ethics classes as an alternative to these classes.

I can appreciate the worry some people may have with ethics classes as an alternative to special religious classes, since they may think that if children are encouraged to make up their own minds about ethical values, there will be little agreement about core values, and so children will adopt a MORAL RELATIVIST position on values, according to which all choices for action are equally 'good' and all immune from criticism.

I can also appreciate the appeal to metaphysics as a way of avoiding the slide into moral relativism that seems to follow from leaving ethical problems open to discussion. Ethics has traditionally been closely related to the subject of metaphysics, which might explain why ethical matters have traditionally been associated with religions, since religions ground their ethical claims in metaphysical claims.

However history shows us that the appeal to metaphysics, be it in the form of Race, Tribe, Nation, or God, and thus the appeal to MORAL ABSOLUTISM, has not been without oppression of human freedom. Yet ironically human freedom is invariably that for the sake of which racism, tribalism, nationalism, and religion often justify themselves.

I believe that the ultimate value of ethics classes for children lies not so much in the opportunity they provide them for engaging theoretically with the subject of ethics, but moreover in the way their practical engagement with the DIALOGICAL process of learning within a COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY can cultivate skills that help avoid the problems of both moral absolutism and relativism.

My experience as a student of philosophy - a discipline which engages with the most ethically, politically, and religiously sensitive of topics - has lead me to the view that 'ethics' is as much a part of the dialogical process itself as it is a topic for discussion.

Indeed I would consider this very process to be presupposed by traditional metaphysics, and thus the only light in which such claims can acquire any significance and force. Firstly, given that humans naturally ask ethical and existential questions, it would seem less fitting to this questioning to approach it from the perspective of providing answers, than of providing a space in which such questions themselves are welcomed, indeed encouraged. Secondly, it would seem that it is only when answers are subject to further questions that they can even be in a position to acquire any force. The passage of time is not necessarily a measure of this force, but may well be a result of political power. A community of inquiry into philosophical or ethical problems would not only provide a diversity of answers to any given question, but more importantly through this a better opportunity for any answer to gain or lose force according to the degree to which it can endure further questions.

For this reason I believe the only thing we can coherently speak of as having 'faith' in is the 'dialogical learning' process, the 'community of inquiry'. When we are willing to subject everything to this procedure, which is really an ethos, we can feel confident that the
outcome will more robustly approximate a harmonious community of free selves working together to keep one another free.

This is a view also adopted by the United Nations Education, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), expressed in detail in a 300 page document entitled Philosophy: A School of Freedom. I advise you to glance through the contents page of the publication: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001541/154173e.pdf.


The COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY model adopted by 'P4C' classes (Philosophy for Children) integrates an ethic into its procedure that arguably can avoid the problem of moral absolutism and relativism. The ethos of the community of inquiry both requires and develops a range of ethical values that are essential to participation in a society in which there exists a plurality of values. These 'democratic' values include tolerance, respect for others, taking all ideas seriously, caring for the procedures that govern collaborative inquiry, and a willingness to listen to alternative viewpoints. Through engaging in such a learning environment, students would become accustomed to asking each other for reasons and opinions, to listening carefully to each other, and to building on each other's ideas. In other words students would be developing skills in thinking critically, creatively, caringly and collaboratively. In this way, exploring ethical questions in the community of inquiry does require students to make up their own minds, through dialogue with others, but the rigorous nature of the inquiry, and the emphasis on assessing reasons for positions means that, in practice, a community is very unlikely to come to the conclusion that 'anything goes'. In fact, students in the community of inquiry typically recreate for themselves - and own - a stable set of core ethical values which have withstood the test of careful evaluation.

For further information on the benefits of P4C style classes on learning skills please see the following links:

http://cehs.montclair.edu/academic/iapc/whatis.shtml
http://www.sapere.org.uk/
http://www.philosophypress.co.uk/?p=1186
http://www.teachingthinking.net/thinking/
http://www.thinkingeducation.co.uk/index.htm
http://www.childrenthinking.co.uk/

I ask you to please consider ethics classes from the practical angle of the dialogical skills and associated ethics they can cultivate. Such classes aim not to teach children what to think but how to think.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
All responses are unedited

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents of the children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. In fact Ethics classes will be invaluable for all children to take part in and is applicable to future life in business and in our children's adult lives.

I briefly met you once at club when you first became premiere. You took a little time to say hello to us. I felt that you were a warm, honest and a fair person.

I am writing as a parent after reading articles from the parents4ethics.org website. Instead of the standard template letter parents4ethics, I have chosen to write the letter myself as am a strong supporter in this subject matter.

I firmly believe that ethics class is a great alternative to SRE. It is the fairest way to allow our children to receive the same education time as those who choose to have religious instruction.

The only other fair alternative, is to remove all religious instructions from all schools and put it on, on Sunday mornings.

I do not understand the objection from the religious groups. They are allowed to have special time for their agenda, but the rest have to do nothing? How is that fair?

Should we suggest an origami class to run as an alternate class? Would the religious groups object to that as much, or is it not a threat to their agenda?

The introduction of Ethics as a subject to students at school would be a giant leap forward for Australian society. As a parent I feel keenly the void of regular ethical and philosophical discussion - in the public sphere, and particularly in the formative years of our children's upbringing.

I believe that ethics and philosophy classes should be made available to all students, regardless of their religious affiliations. This can only enrich a young person's ability to assess and respond to situations they are exposed to. And the younger these ideas and ways of thinking are introduced, the more natural it will be for them to incorporate into their values and actions. These young people will be sure of themselves and how they act, knowing that they can apply rigorous and critical thinking to challenging situations and come up with the ethical way forward.

I imagine that if introduced State or nation-wide, this could have profoundly positive effects on society in a few years, that will benefit society at all levels.
All responses are unedited

I strongly encourage the introduction of ethics classes from Kindergarten through to year ten (the ten years are time when we face some of our most challenging dilemmas and must make decisions for ourselves), and to be made available to all students, in addition to any religious education that some may receive.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children. All children should engage in discussion and debate regarding moral/ethical issues and be encouraged to think about consequences of actions.
I believe that scripture classes should not be held at public schools as public schools should be a non denominational environment. Religious doctrine should only be taught at religious institutions.

I am a parent of a child at [Redacted] Public School which has been part of the the Ethics trial and like a lot of parents have found this trial a great success.

To me this is about choice in a multi-cultural, multi-faith and ultimately secular country.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Parents should be free to chose how their children are exposed to different moral philosophies and the ethics class alternative is a great way for this to happen.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
All responses are unedited

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. I also have a problem with Religious leaders being able to comment on the Ethics classes when there is no oversight of what is taught in the religious classes. Who comments on those lessons? I know that children at [redacted] school were offered lollies by the scripture teacher - highly unethical I would have thought. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

On a personal level, I have a daughter in Kindergarten at our local school. We would greatly appreciate having an alternative to SRE for her, as we are not religious and would like her to spend the allocated time in a productive way. Given that [redacted]'s non religious population is significantly higher than the national average I feel it is only natural that Ethics be introduced as a viable and worthwhile alternative for these parents and children.

Dr Sue Knight's recent report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending ethics classes. All NSW parents and students should have a choice, and the opportunity to be engaged in a meaningful, complementary activity during the time allocated to SRE. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now!

I would also like to raise concerns about some of the comments and issues raised in the evaluation, and to express my support for the roll-out of ethics classes in NSW public primary schools in 2011.

With reference to the concern “that approved providers (of ethics classes) meet the same high standards of probity required of providers of Special Religious Education” (p43), I would question this in the current NSW public school context, in relation to the quality and content of SRE programs delivered. This is based on my experience as a parent of primary aged children in the 1990s, and further anecdotal evidence from parents and their children through to the present - you only need to read a few of the stories posted on the parents4ethics web site to gauge the level of concern. If the standards of SRE provision are so high, why is it that so many parents choose to withdraw their children from these classes, leaving them with no meaningful alternative? And what is the registration process for SRE providers? This needs to be made more transparent for parents and the wider community.

A key imperative is that the same rigorous standards and approval process is applied to SRE and to ethics-based program content and delivery. This would require a review of SRE in
NSW schools, which may considered an “impost” for the DET, but is also part of its responsibility in providing quality assurance, and its role as an independent assessor in setting a benchmark and ensuring that specific approval criteria are met by all providers. Recommendation 5 of the Dr Knight’s report appears to support this process.

I do not support the supposition that, “Over time, a wider roll-out of an ethics-based complement to SRE is likely to attract applications from any number of providers” (p43). The assessor asserts that the St James Ethics Centre (SJEC) is “well placed to manage a wider and gradual roll-out of ethics as a complement to scripture”, and recommends that the DET engage in “dialogue” with the SJEC regarding the management of the roll-out. This suggests that the SJEC will coordinate the course provision and the training of volunteer course facilitators to deliver the ethics program in schools; a focused, centralised approach that is consistent with the management of the pilot ethics trial earlier this year. The provision of a “consultative committee” will provide an opportunity for a wider range of stakeholders to have input and ensure continuous improvement of the program. There is also a need for content to evolve and change, to maintain currency with ethical issues and dilemmas.

Finally, I fully support the report recommendations (and Recommendation 6 especially, in providing access and equity to parents and students, through promoting understanding and helping them to make an informed choice about the SRE and Ethics curricula), and endorse the findings: “... the strong and principled arguments for ethics as a complement to SRE would seem to necessitate that such changes be made and that the DET be adequately resourced to provide support to all parties, should a decision be made on the part of government to offer the ethics course more widely.”

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important project. I have worked as a primary school teacher, and have expressed interest with SJEC in training as an volunteer ethics facilitator.

I strongly support ethics classes for all children who opt out of scripture.

My three children have attended a non scripture class each week for 21 years collectively at their public schools. What an extraordinary waste of time for those bright, inquiring minds.

When my daughter commenced primary school she was enrolled in scripture classes. After one term we chose to move her to non-scripture. She was one of only three children who attended non-scripture at her school.

My daughter had to spend her non-scripture class time sitting in the sick bay area adjacent to the school office with two other children. They were asked to bring a book, and were supervised by the admin staff or anyone who popped in to use the photocpier or the sick bay. You can imagine how appalled I was that my five year old daughter, who went on to become the school captain and dux of that school, was treated in this way.

Shortly after this incident a formal non-scripture class was formed and held in our art room with supervision by a teacher. The class readily attracted another fifteen children. My three
academically gifted children have made hundreds of quality gift cards, origami figurines and bookmarks during their many years in non-scripture.

You can understand why I am thrilled by the prospect that children in NSW schools could now access ethics classes as an alternative to non-scripture. I have reviewed the program and it looks excellent. I ask you to support it so that children no longer have to suffer the lost opportunities that my children have experienced in non-scripture classes.

Please let me know your position on ethics classes.

I strongly support the proposal for an ethics-based complement to Scripture (Special Religious Education) in NSW primary schools.

My children attend [redacted] School. They have opted out of SRE since Kindergarten and so far they have had to spend 440 hours of their time at school not being taught anything. Their childhood is too short for that! I think the ethics complement is a fantastic idea.

Our P&C association voted last term to support the proposal put forward by the St James Ethics Centre, and for this program to be made available at [redacted] School. [redacted] is a rural community with a majority of parents who choose for their children to attend SRE. Christian Scripture is the only option currently available during the SRE period. Yet the [redacted] P&C decision to support the ethics program was unanimous. During our discussion on the issue, not one parent raised an objection to the program, or suggested that it would pose any threat to the continued teaching of SRE at our school.

The evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I urge you to ensure that the views of NSW parents are respected and the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

My two children have never attended SRE at their school as my husband and I did not feel comfortable with the philosophy and approach being undertaken in these classes. When the opportunity arose for our remaining primary school child to attend an ethics class trial we were very keen to participate. Our son really enjoyed the sessions and talked freely with us about the ethical questions the classes members were exploring. We felt this approach suited our child and aligned much closer to our family’s ideas regarding morality and the open exploration and questioning of human values.

Not only did my child appear to benefit from these classes but also the evaluator’s report demonstrates that students generally will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
On this basis, we believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. We request that the current DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

It is time a meaningful alternative was offered to those students who do not take part in scripture. It is a completely outdated idea that non-scripture children receive no formal instruction during this time. Most schools quite rightly go out of their way to cater for as many religions as possible. Meanwhile children who are not from a religious background are completely overlooked. This is a form of discrimination in itself. If a particular religious group were being treated in the same way it would not be deemed acceptable. But why is it acceptable for a non-religious group? Ethics should not be viewed as a threat to existing scripture classes. Scripture classes can cover the same types of issues dealt with in ethics using a context that the teacher feels is appropriate.

Our school has been part of the pilot and it has been very well received by students and parents. The demand for ethics is real. Our school system must change to reflect a changing population.

Ethics classes are a fantastic way to stimulate young minds that are already trying to grapple with the moral issues of our day. I have been saddened for several years that my children have been given nothing more than colouring in to do while the scripture classes are on - and then very surprised to hear that the 'colouring in' session is attended by the majority of students since most don't go to scripture classes in my daughter's schools. It is frankly beyond me to understand why scripture is given a uniquely privileged educational position in a non-denominational state school.

Please change the discriminatory DET policy so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I wish to add my voice to the many who, like me, expect that an option be provided to our children as a sensible alternative to scripture classes. I am personally of the belief that there is no place whatsoever for religious indoctrination within our state school system, however I accept that for some people this type of instruction remains important. As I am willing to accept their point of view I expect my own point of view to be respected by the education system by having it provide ethics classes to children such as mine as an alternative.

I look forward to seeing the government of which you are part implement such classes in the immediate future.

I still, in 2010, can't believe that basic ethics (and morals) are not taught as a part of the entire school curriculum. However, more so, that this important part of raising socially conscious children is not even offered as an option where other scripture studies are.
A large part of scripture studies covers the important area of ethical/moral behaviour. Many parents would like to offer this knowledge to their children without the religious obligations that are often attached.

Not choosing to attend a particular scripture class does not mean we are without ethical fibre, it merely means we are yet to be offered a suitable option with which to enhance the standards that we already encode in our children from home (as do parents of all the other religious/scripture groups I'm sure).

I urge you to encourage the state government on our behalf to enable all school parents and their children to have this choice.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I have spoken to several families who attend church but are not happy with the scripture program - seeing it as in conflict with their own beliefs. Even these parents are supportive of alternatives to traditional scripture classes.

Consider public schools in the Hunter region where only Christian education is provided during scripture time. Shouldn't even the Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish student be given a secular option rather than another religion during that time period rather than 'nothing' time?

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

In regard to recommendation 5c, I would like to see clarification of who would constitute stakeholders. While I would welcome the involvement of parents, principals or P&Cs, I would reject that other SRE providers constitute stakeholders in the provision of an ethics class.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I recently listened to an argument against this class being offered, along the lines of, because a small group of students can't attend, this puts them at a disadvantage and therefore no one should be able to attend. This seems to be saying that if a winter flu has put 10% of the school population out of school for the day, then no one in the school should have english, maths or any other lessons that day. A small population should not be able to disadvantage the majority of children.

I have read the ethics assessment report done by Sue Knight and am delighted with the report’s recommendations.

In particular I am pleased that the report confirmed that the ethics classes are not in competition to the current scripture classes offered but are a complement to scripture classes. The report identified that providing the option of ethics is consistent with the Education Act. What needs to change is DET’s policy about schools providing ethics classes.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

The evaluator's report also demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

It is time to stop the discrimination against the children who currently are forced to do nothing while children who attend scripture learn something.

Most of us want to improve the community in which we live. Having an ethics program offered to children so that they can learn about real life situations, ‘what one ought to do’ by distinguishing what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ will improve our society. An ethics program will encourage a process of enquiry, the right to think for yourself!

It is time to stop the discrimination against children who are currently not allowed to learn anything for an hour a week and give them something meaningful to do.

Please ensure that social justice prevails on this issue.
I volunteered as a teacher in the Pilot for the Ethics programme because I believe that children who opt out of scripture should be allowed to do something constructive while religion is taught. Certainly, in a tax-payer funded state school, there is no role for the Church to venture an opinion let alone stipulate what children do outside of scripture classes. It would be indefensible to allow the Church to continue to prevent children from using their time productively.

I saw the discussion of ethics contribute to the confidence and knowledge of several young people that participated at Darlington Primary where I was facilitating classes. In some cases I saw that it also provided a forum for reconsidering personal views in the light of new information and problem-solving through facilitated discussion of everyday situations that 5th and 6th graders inevitably encounter.

The evaluator's report also demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

As an ex-teacher, I have seen too many children sitting through scripture classes which their parents have chosen rather than have their children sit and colour in. This situation was not a satisfactory one for parents or for the children. A viable alternative to scripture should have been available.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture according to the report by Sue Knight. It appears to be a well-considered and objective report.

I was one of the volunteer ethics teachers at [Redacted]. It was a wonderful experience. The parent and student feedback was very encouraging, the students were responsive and interested in the discussions, and even the quiet students were actively participating toward the end.

If we can facilitate discussions on:

What are the consequences of this action?
What alternatives are there?

Is this fair? Why? Why not?

Is that acceptable? Why? Why not?

Who is affected by this action?

etc etc

ten then we will be actively building a better society.

I'd like to congratulate the department for taking the time and effort to undertake this trial and look forward to seeing Ethics classes introduced in schools as an alternative to scripture classes.

As a parent of two primary school children I wish this course was available when they first started in kindergarten. To encourage them to think about problems, reasoning and develop their ability to express themselves in a productive environment.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Teaching children how to think is very important!

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Ethics classes do not compete with scripture classes, neither do they threaten nor diminish them. Those children being brought up in a religion catered for by scripture classes will continue to go to them regardless of whether ethics classes are started. There can be no
good reason for ethics classes to be disallowed, as they’re to the advantage of children who are currently not and will not be attending scripture classes.

Ethics classes are an important part of our children’s education, providing the social responsibility and sensitivity without the religious dogma many nonscripture families object to. This should be deemed of vital importance to any outward looking, caring, responsible and tolerant nation.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. When I was in a public state highschool I was expected to run errands for office staff while other students were in christian religious classes.

I think ethics classes should be provided instead of SRE as religion has no place in a secular public education system. At the least ethics classes should be provided as an alternative for students to scripture. The evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Before we can be a tolerant and accepting nation, we need to teach our kids about it. By introducing an ethics option in the school system, it redresses the imbalance to those that do not attend religious education.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

For those engaged in scripture that wish to benefit from the ethics curriculum, it could be incorporated into the SRE curriculum at their discretion.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I look forward to our children being able to benefit from such a forward thinking approach to broadening the education of future generations.

O for heaven's sake (yes, I am a person of faith), it is well past time that our children are meaningfully engaged during the SRE time slot. I want ethics classes made available at all public schools, right now.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I am a parent of a student who participated in the Ethics Trial. I am also a trainee teacher with experience in various public schools.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

The Marrickville Public School P&C believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe the discrimination that my child has at present needs to stop by allowing the study of ethics for children that opt out of SRE. I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. This is a important issue for our family.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who prefer not to attend scripture classes in primary school. All children have the right to use their time at
school in a meaningful way. My son who is now in Year 8 wasted 280 hours of his primary school education time watching DVDs in the school library. My other son who is nearly finished Year 4 has so far wasted over 190 hours in this way. I feel like they are being penalised for coming from an atheist family. The introduction of ethics classes provides an educational alternative for children who are currently learning nothing during the weekly scripture hour. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have the opportunity to be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. I also request also that the Department of Education appoint two new positions in its religious advisory panel for an agnostic and for an atheist to ensure that the interests of children who come from such families are represented in these issues.

I am certain that it comes as no surprise that the independent evaluation of the ethics trial carried out in NSW schools has recommended that the program be expanded & made available to all NSW schools. The evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

I ask you to do all in your power to change the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that my children, who have opted out of SRE, be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. Currently this time for children opting out of SRE is a bit of a void or an uncertain time with uncertain activities. Ethics classes will eliminate this uncertainty and provide a known and positive event for students at these times.

I strongly support the roll-out of ethics classes to all primary schools in our state. This initiative is long-overdue and will right the injustice of the current Department of Education policy that prevents meaningful study for those who opt out of scripture.

When my son began kindergarten in 2007, there was a long list of faiths to choose from on the SRE Registration form, and I was strongly encouraged to select one, ANY ONE, rather than the "non-scripture" option I preferred. When I enquired as to whether I could
volunteer to provide the non-scripture children with a secular alternative, I was told it was not possible due to the wording of the Department of Education Policy requiring volunteers to be approved/associated with their respective church. Now that the trial of Ethics Classes has been successfully completed, and the report by Dr Sue Knight indicates that Ethics Classes SHOULD be introduced, it is time to CHANGE this policy wording to reflect these changes.

I do not believe that children whose parents wish them to continue to receive SRE would be disadvantaged in any way. All material developed for an ongoing program will be made freely available to SRE providers so that they can match or exceed what is offered in secular ethics classes. All children deserve the right to learn about the principles of moral behaviour, and it should not be available solely within the context of theological indoctrination. As noted in the report, the study of ethical behaviour pre-dates the rise of Christianity, and there are many other examples of how moral behaviour need not be determined by religious principles. If all children are formally educated in ethical principles, including those of “The Golden Rule”, I can foresee that, over time, our society will benefit greatly. Indeed, as the Ethics Trial Report indicates, these benefits are already observable within the schools involved. I was particularly delighted to read that some Principals had noted an increased participation by some special needs students. Any study area that can foster such interaction, equality and inclusion should be strongly encouraged.

Under the current arrangement, non-scripture children are not receiving instruction of equivalent worth during SRE time, simply because a secular curriculum has not been approved as an alternative to religious indoctrination. It is these children suffering needless disadvantage. It is a waste of valuable education time to have children dumped in a library, watching videos or colouring in. Parents4Ethics is just one of several organisations prepared to provide volunteers, of all faiths, and no particular faith, to support a permanent program of Ethics Classes in NSW Public Schools. I have listed myself as a volunteer in the hope that the program will be extended state-wide as soon as possible.

I have read the report prepared by Dr Knight, and while it was noted there were areas requiring some modification, the overwhelming conclusion is one of success. This is testament to the time and thought invested in developing the curriculum and training the volunteers. If the Pilot program was as successful as the analysis and data concluded, then imagine how valuable the course will become as the facilitators gain experience with delivering the content.

I respectfully request that you give this matter due consideration, and offer your support towards the introduction of a permanent Ethics Class as an option within the Special Religious Education provisions.

Sue Knight’s recommendations are both thorough and thoughtful and should be implemented in time for the new school year. We live in an increasingly secular society and parents and children must be offered a meaningful alternative to SRE classes. Certainly, those with religious convictions should retain the opportunity of continuing to attend such classes. However, there needs to be a viable alternative for other children.
I am writing to tell you what I think about the issue of ethics classes for children in NSW public schools. I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way, and ethics classes provide a valuable moral framework for our children.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way and the current DET policy is outdated and unacceptable. The fact that my children who attend a public secular school are prohibited from meaningful study during the time that other children elect to have scripture lessons is simply ridiculous.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I support the recommendations of the evaluator's report to implement the ethics course, whatever it is named.

It is important that we change Department of Education policy to remove the current discrimination against children who don't belong to a major world religion.

Public schools are supposed to be inclusive, embrace diversity and accept differences. This means we need to cater for all children. SRE time should be an opportunity for all children to receive instruction.

I believe that ethics classes should NOT be made available for all children who opt out of scripture.

Students who opt out of current SRE classes should instead be offered "Atheistic studies" as this conforms to a belief system which is in effect a type of SRE.
This way, children (and their parents who may in fact be making the decision) know exactly what their children are being taught, rather than atheism pretending to be "ethics".

All SRE classes teach ethics within a framework of a belief system. Ethics cannot be taught without an overarching belief system.

We request that the DET policy NOT be changed except to allow "Atheistic Studies" so that all NSW children can be educated properly without being confused about where their moral frame of reference should is.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

This is a long-overdue measure that can only benefit children, encouraging critical thinking and openmindedness.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

When I went to primary school we didn't study religion or ethics. I understand that scripture classes are available for all students in schools. However, children who opt out of scripture are not given any meaningful alternative and the time is essentially wasted.

My daughter will soon be going to school. I do not want her to attend scripture. I want her to be taught ethics. Such learning is invaluable.

Ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

This is an issue upon which I will base my vote in the upcoming election.

I am a strong supporter of the proposal to introduce ethics classes as an alternative for those children in NSW schools who choose not to attend SRE. The current arrangements are
anachronistic and discriminatory. I urge you too to support this sensible and reasonable proposal.

I have read the evaluator's report on the ethics trial and it is overwhelmingly positive.

Given your recent comments in the media about listening to the independent assessor's recommendations, and likewise Kristina Keneally's positive comments about implementing the ethics program if the report is positive, I look forward you taking up Sue Knight's recommendations.

I find the scrutinising of this course wonderful as it will make it even better than it already is. I find it equally perplexing and terrifying that the curriculum of what the various faiths teach to children has never been under scrutiny.

In our increasingly secular world it is only right that parents have a choice for their children to be taught morals, values and ethics without a faith, and it is every child's right to be educated when they are actually at school and to not be prohibited from learning, as is the current policy.

The St James Ethics Curriculum is a perfect fit in the time slot for SRE.

Please end this discrimination.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture.

All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

From my perspective the introduction of ethics classes is not intended to replace SRE, nor does it pose a threat to SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who choose not to participate in SRE are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

My feedback on the report is pure excitement that the estimated 100,000 kids who are currently prohibited from learning anything during SRE, will now have access to ethical discussion and reflection relevant to their world.

The vocal minority in the hierarchy of the Anglican and Catholic Churches clearly do not represent general public opinion.
This is evidenced by the 100 or so PandCs across NSW who have voted in favour of this initiative.

I urge you to listen to the parents. This is what parents want.

By changing the policy - SRE will continue under with the same rights. Nothing will change for them, and so I am at a loss as to what business this is of theirs?

I look forward to ethics being rolled out in 2011.

I was one of the volunteer Ethics Teachers at [Redacted] Public School. I had no previous primary teaching experience but wanted to get involved as the mother of two young children. Our family are not religious but we enrolled our son in Protestant scripture for his Kindergarten Year and this year, he is doing Bah’ai in Year 1. Our daughter will begin Kindy in 2011.

I volunteered because I believe that people should lead a thoughtful life and seek education about the world and not simply accept things at face value or parrot back ideals without self-analysis. The Ethics program really got the kids thinking about all sorts of situations that are very likely to come across in their young lives.

It was a tremendous benefit to have the open forum style of teaching set up as well because everyone had the opportunity to be heard, their opinion respected and sometimes the more insightful contributions came from the quieter students who may not be "heard" in a typical teaching arrangement.

I believe this "thinking" practice of analysising how the individual thinks about issues will put the kids in good stead when they have to decide or stand up for themselves about getting into a car with a drunk driver, taking something that isn't healthy for their bodies or going home with a stranger. There are no negative consequences that I can think of coming from the introduction of the Ethics Program.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Thank you for your consideration of improving the opportunity of our children's future,
Children have laboured for many years unjustifiably during RI classes for views which may not conform with establishment vies. I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Please introduce ethics classes as an alternative to scripture classes. Please do not allow religions to bully the State of NSW as we are not in the Dark Ages anymore. From reading media reports it looks like the children who participated in the trial did enjoy the ethics classes so there is no more to talk about. Also, please allow mathematics lessons for children that opt out of scripture classes. Finally, could you please tell me why you seem to be comfortable with allowing scripture classes provided by organisations that openly discriminate against women?

I am so pleased that the ethics classes will go ahead. Our society can only be better served by encouraging learning about this vital subject. It is not good enough that children who do not attend scripture are given nothing to do. Ours is an increasingly secular society and children who do not attend scripture should be given opportunity to learn about values and to consider moral dilemas in an intelligent fashion.

I know that this is a form letter that is being offered by parents4ethics and I had every intention of changing it to reflect my personal values. However it summarises perfectly the way I feel about the subject.

I am not one to get passionately swayed by things, but the old-fashioned idea of turning over a school for 30 minutes every week for religious instruction is just plain anachronistic. We live in a society today that respects people's right to choose and this means providing real alternatives for our children who choose not to attend scripture.

I have a great deal of respect for the St James Ethics Centre and believe that they are in a wonderful position to assist in the roll out of this program.

With 2 young children just at the start of the educational life, I do hope that you have the wonderful foresight to provide them with something that my make a positive difference and forge a lifelong love of debate and discussion about all matters ethical.

In summary, I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. I have read the evaluator's report which in my mind demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

My children attend Primary, which has participated in the Ethics trial. My own children attend scripture, and will continue to do so, but I believe their peers whose parents choose to not send them to scripture, should absolutely have the opportunity to use that 1 hour per week for teachings that can only help them navigate and make sense of the world they live in. It is of benefit to those students and to my children also, whose peers are expanding on the ethics learning already included in school curriculum.

We have 2 children at Primary School. We no longer want them wasting their school time doing nothing useful during the weekly non-scripture times.

The ethics course trial has been positively evaluated and we are very supportive of it being introduced as soon as possible at our school.

We also request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Please listen to us parents not vested religious interests who should mind their own business about what is done for non-scripture kids.

My child does not attend scripture classes but is not currently able to engage in any meaningful learning during this period. This is poor use of her time in school.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes can provide an alternative for children who are currently learning nothing during scripture time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that the ethics classes result in an improvement in students' understanding and skills in ethical decision making. These are surely desirable skills for all of our citizens.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged in meaningful and useful learning during the time allocated to SRE.
I have three children who will be attending Public Schools beginning next year. I feel strongly that Public Education is important and do not believe religious education as it is currently delivered is relevant for my children. While my children will choose for themselves whether or not to opt out of religious education, I expect their decision will be driven more by social pressure than any desire to attend SRE classes, and that ethics classes would provide a more useful forum for them to develop their understanding of the world and how to function effectively in it.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. All of the recommendations in the recently released evaluation report should be acted upon forthwith.

In addition, my son participated in the 10 week trial and came home buzzing with thoughts and information every Thursday. Most importantly the ethics trial classes began to teach him to think about issues from different angles and other people's perspectives. Not bad for a 12 year old boy!

My husband and I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. In the past we have even considered removing our children from school during this time to allow them the chance to learn something worthwhile with us. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
Public submissions in response to the Ethics Course Trial final report
November 2010

All responses are unedited

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

at the school my child attends I know that a group of over 15 students spend the lesson drawing pictures. They are not even allowed to read a book or do work on one of the many expensive computers in the school. Please ensure that the ethics program can begin next year.

I spent my whole junior school years telling teachers lies -namely that I was CofE, as instructed by my mother when it came to religion. The truth is I come from the most atheist family and we never spent a day in church, yet my mother felt pressure for us to not say so.

It has been 30 years since that time, yet still we have nonsense around school scripture, and in State schools - we clearly are not in France.

I support the introduction of ethics classes in lieu of scripture, for those people who do not choose a spiritual path, just as we now have various scriptures we can be taught.

All of my friends and family also would agree with this, and just see it as a ploy by the priests.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

It’s great that the report has come out in support of Ethics Classes. Now we parents are looking to the State Government to implement the program so that our children can have a constructive alternative to religious instruction that only caters for one faith and point of view to the exclusion of others in our multicultural society.

I expect that you will soon be sitting on the government benches, so I would be grateful if you could make the soon-to-be Premier aware of the strong support that the Ethics Program has in the community. He also should be made aware of the electoral risk of continuing his stated opposition to the program (a lot of independents will be standing). Opposition to the
program in the community is a small but highly vocal group who would prefer non-scripture students to be wasting their time.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

The ethics classes as an alternative to scripture is an absolute necessity. Discrimination against children who are not placed in scriptural classes through forced in activity is reprehensible.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

From my experience in schools as parent, teacher and school counsellor I would like to heartily endorse the importance of offering ethics classes for parents who choose not to send their children to religious instruction in a secular system.

I strongly believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful and productive way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

There are religious groups who are against the ethics classes being offered at the same time as SRE. They believe children doing SRE should not miss out on the opportunity to study
ethics as well. Maybe they don’t realise that the St James Ethics Centre will be offering religious groups access to the very same material as the ethics classes will be using - free of charge! Of course, they will not have to use it, but it will be an option they can take up if they wish to.

The evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. How can anyone argue that children should be doing nothing, rather than something? It goes against every educational model in existence.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

I would like to register my strong support of ethics classes in primary schools for children who opt out of scripture classes.

My son is only one but, when he goes to primary school I would like him to have this option. I believe exploration of notions of ethics is thoroughly worthwhile and absolutely preferable to not attending any class at that time.

I thoroughly resent the efforts by certain representatives of religious institutions to quash these classes, as far as I can see, primarily motivated by jealous territorialism.

I support the request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available as an option for children attending NSW state schools. I believe that children who do not attend scripture should get an opportunity to spend this time in a meaningful way. It is inequitable that children not attending scripture are currently learning nothing at this time. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide a worthwhile alternative.

The overwhelming support by our school parent body (Asquith Public School) in a survey for ethics classes is indicative that the government and opposition should bilaterally support this change and ensure that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for
parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that the recommendations of the NSW Ethics Course Trial Report should be accepted and implemented.

I am extremely concerned that a program with an enormous amount of community support risks being derailed by the noisy protests of a few.

The ethics classes are meaningful, challenging and - for those children who do not attend a scripture class - a much better use of time than sitting around colouring in.

Please act to end the discriminatory "non compete" clause that prevents my children accessing what I believe is an extremely worthwhile program.

I strongly support the introduction of ethics classes in our schools. I believe these classes will assist teaching children in:
- life skills,
- how to make and keep friends,
- kindness and compassion towards others,
- community mindedness,
- good manners and thoughtfulness to others,
- respect for your elders, police, teachers, nurses and other figures of authority,
- taking care in what they say about others (written or verbal), and understanding the consequences of their actions, and
- respect for the environment.

A strength of scripture lessons is often the teaching of an ethical code of behaviour, but this should not be the exclusive domain of religions. All children deserve the opportunity for the open discussion of ethics and ethical behaviour, regardless of their religious beliefs.

I believe that ethics lessons can teach our communities children some skills they can really relate to, understand and use in everyday life.

Maybe these type of lessons would reduce or prevent the sad problem we have with bullying in our schools. And by teaching these little ones early, may hopefully help prevent depression and the tragedy of teenage suicide.

Ethics classes should be made available for all children that opt out of scripture. The evaluators report clearly demonstrates the benefits of attending ethics class. It is time for the government to take a stand and ensure that children who opt out of scripture are not
relegated to useless activities but rather be engaged and learning. Hear our voices and take the important step so that all children are catered for in our schools.

Ethical decision making based on fairness, honesty and responsibility, sounds like an excellent preparation for resolving issues that arise in many facets of life. Scripture does not need to be disadvantaged in any way by students having the option to undertake ethics. The German model demonstrates that this system can work.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

My child is in year 5 and has asked me to advocate for the commencement of ethics classes in her school in 2011.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way and given the recent performance of the business community some form of ethics education is clearly needed. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report clearly demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes and it is a topic they wish to engage with. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can have the opportunity to gather at least the basics of an ethics education in the time allocated to SRE.

I support the introduction of ethics classes to the range of choices for children during scripture time in our state schools. I approve of the content and delivery of the St Johns ethics programme as described in the Ethics Trial report. The current system is inequitable in that my son wastes learning time during the scripture period. He has, in the past, watched disney videos, played web arcade computer games, or read a book. He has been denied any meaningful learning during this time.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. Access to ethics classes which have been evaluated to be of benefit, is an educational right all students in public education are entitled to, as an alternative to SRE. I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children, in both primary and high schools, can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

So...how about seeing another point of view?

State school education is for all students, regardless of religion. My 4 children are currently being discriminated against due to their 'non-religious' status. Ethics classes are essential to ensure that all students are engaged in meaningful learning during their school day. I am tired of my kids bringing home yet another drawing which is all they are currently allowed to do whilst other students are in scripture classes. Ethics classes MUST be allowed to run in our State schools.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. It is 'fairness' and 'honesty' (which are covered) that is so important for our kids to learn, so lacking in the adult society nowadays. Remember it is not replacing Religious education - merely complementing it.

I believe that ethics classes should be available to all children. If parents choose for their children to opt out of religious education then there should be something meaningful for them to do, other than colouring in.
All responses are unedited

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.
Let's make NSW a leader in education, by showing the other states and territories there is an alternative when it comes to religious education.
I know I would certainly like my children to be involved in ethics in schools.

When I was a NSW school student I attended Special Religious Education (SRE) classes. I understand the reason for these classes. My daughter, on the other hand, chose not to attend these classes and I supported her right to choose.

The way the system works now, children who don't attend these classes are not allowed to be educated during that time. It's not right to compel children to spend part of their week at school not learning.

Now some people have gone to some trouble to create an alternative learning opportunity for those children who aren't in SRE, and it turns out that some children like it. Giving them that opportunity in that time slot has to be better than requiring that they be taught nothing.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
I am an atheist, my husband is an atheist and we don't want our children to be indoctrinated into any religion, yet we do want our children to have an understanding of ethics to develop their own strong morality. We can't afford to send our kids to a private school where these needs may be catered for so we are hoping to see ethics included as an option for children who opt out of SRE classes by the time our kids are at school in 2012.
We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I was thoroughly impressed with the quality and evenness of Dr. Knight's report into the NSW Ethics Course Trial. As someone with an academic background, I can appreciate the research and analysis that has gone into the report, and the fair weighing of arguments on all sides of the debate. As a student teacher, I can understand the logistics arguments raised by the DET and agree with recommendations such as the importance of training volunteers in classroom behaviour management. As a parent, I believe strongly in the need for equity, namely, by providing meaningful ethics education opportunities for -all- students at SRE time, and not just for children whose parents want them taught the moral/ethical tenets of one of the popular religions. I believe it is (ironically) unethical for powerful religious movements to attempt to deny valuable learning to young children who are not of their faith, simply because that learning would occur while they conduct religious studies. ! Would it be reasonable for religious groups to force adults who don't go to church/temple/synagogue to do nothing of value with their lives while those services are
on? Of course not. Even if they wished to, their power does not extend that far. So then, why should they be allowed to impose such restrictions on innocent children?

Consequently, I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture, because it appears that a large proportion of those children's parents want them to have that instruction and because all children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I am a parent of two children at the beginning of their school careers. I don't believe it is fair that during Special Religious Education (SRE) time they should be made to do nothing just because our family does not belong to a faith. School time is precious - as a teacher I know that those morning hours are when children are at their most alert and most receptive to learning. At our school, public, SRE takes place on Wednesday morning, and I hate to think of my son colouring in for half an hour every week when he could be better engaged.

I strongly support the addition of an ethics-based option during the SRE time slot. The independent enquiry has found that the trial was positively received by both students and parents and has something of value to offer. Certain religious groups have expressed concern about the possibility of an ethics-based option however there is no challenge to them, only another choice for those who do not attend scripture anyway. The St James Ethics Centre, who designed the course, is more than happy to share any materials with other SRE groups if they feel they are missing out.

I hope you will give your support to the inclusion of an ethics-based option to SRE.

Many thanks for your support of this issue to date and I do hope that it will continue in light of the overwhelmingly positive outcome of the report into the teaching of ethics in public schools. As a parent I am excited that this meaningful alternative to SRE may be offered to my child in his school and I hope the opportunity will be extended to all parents who opt out of scripture classes.

Please lock in an end to my child be subjected to discrimination and enrich the scope of his education and the scope of his peers state wide.

Many thanks in advance for your support.

I have three children, two of whom attend school and one who will commence school in a years time.
My understanding of the history of public education is to ensure equality of access and information for all children, to help ensure children are assisted to achieve their potential as human beings and as citizens. As such ethics classes should be made available for all children.

The current move is to run the classes alongside religious instruction classes. I support this move as the minimum step. The report into the Ethic class trial demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

Thus I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be provided with the opportunity to develop further in their thinking and understanding of an important area of personal, private and public life.

Additionally, the education system in Australia has been slowly moving towards one in which artificial barriers and forms of segregation are removed. To this end, classes are not taught in a sexist or racist manner and classes are available to all children (ie. there is no longer a 'home economics stream only for girls', or a 'technical skills stream for boys').

The same philosophy should apply to all classes, including the removal of religious education from public schools.

These classes have little in the way of formal supervision, frequently utilise people with no formal qualifications in the area in which they are teaching, never mind having no qualifications to teach and are not suitable for children in general - that is they are not studies in comparative religion, rather classes in which the views of an individual hold sway (again, there is no formal supervision or system of assessment) -

I believe that the public educations system should not be the forum for the unsupervised, unqualified and untested views of any group or individual. This applies to any subject.

While my child attends and will continue to attend scripture classes in his school all children should have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. I strongly believe that ethics classes are a meaningful way to spend this time and should be made available for all children who decide to opt out of scripture.

My view is based on the fact that the introduction of ethics classes will not replace scripture classes but provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. I know that there are a number of unhappy parents at our school who resent being forced to have their children waste their time so that others are able to attend scripture classes.

I understand the evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these ethics classes. I request the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be productively engaged and learning in the time allocated to
my name is [REDACTED] and I am a mother of three children. We are a non religious family. My eldest daughter is ten years old and opts out of scripture classes. She is the only child who does this. She is unsupervised during this time and is expected to read.

I send my daughter to school to get an education, not be discriminated against, punished and made to feel that her beliefs do not matter. Please support the ethics program in NSW schools.

My children attend a local public school in [REDACTED]. They do not attend scripture classes. During this time they must instead sing songs they find faintly amusing.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I urge you to ensure that the ethics classes will be made available to all NSW children.

I'm writing to express my strong support for the ethics initiative in schools, and to assure you that the leadership of the Catholic and Sydney Anglican heirarchies do not speak for all Christians on this issue. We would welcome ethics classes in our daughter's primary school (Canterbury Public) and believe they should be made available to all students as an alternative to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture.

I'm a trained teacher ready to do a course so I can volunteer to teach an ethics class.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.
you have the results of the inquiry - what possible reason is there for further inquiry or comment? - we all know that the providers of religious instruction are concerned that there is any meaningful competition to their monopoly however it is time for some political courage and leadership - these are public schools and should not be the exclusive preserve of people wishing to mold young children to their own beliefs.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. In fact, children should not have to "opt out" of scripture but rather should be offered the opportunity to take part in an ethics program as an equal alternative.

Also, as Education Minister, are you not concerned that the content of religious instruction given in our public schools is not subject to any form of control or supervision by the education department. How about imposing the same type of oversight on religious instruction which is envisaged for the teaching of ethics?

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I also personally even as a parent feel like there is something wrong that I should be hiding from others when I walk into the school office at the beginning of the year to hand in the note asking for my child to be "excluded" from scripture.

I support the introduction of ethics classes as a complement to religious education. As an atheistic humanist, I find it regrettable that there is currently no option for my child to engage in meaningful discussion about philosophy, morals and ethics - important issues, such as how to live. Rather, he spends his time watching movies and engaged in "entertaining" activities. I have awaited a move such as this and applaud the government for trialling it and the evaluators for supporting the extension.

I call on the Government to support the recommendations leading to an extension of ethics classes, and removing what is currently effectively a discrimination against children of no religious background.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I am also shocked to learn that even now, in the 21st century, schools are not legally able to offer alternatives to scripture, leaving children in 'non-scripture' classes with no learning in these periods. As someone who grew up attending non-scripture classes I know I would have valued learning and discussion around concepts of ethics and morals, and working now with children as a counsellor, I am aware of the strong desire children have to explore issues such as fairness, goodness and human choice. Discussion of these and related issues contribute to the rounded development of individuals with an understanding of and desire to contribute to society. I find the current situation appalling and wholeheartedly support the introduction of ethics classes as an alternative to scripture.

As a parent I wish my children to be engaged in more meaningful studies than the current non-scripture supervision that occurs in our public school system. Currently students who come from a non-religious background are discriminated in our public schools. Public education should be secular and if this can't be granted then a proper alternative to non-scripture should be provided.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I would like to see Ethics classes introduced into all NSW state primary schools. My own children several years ago have experienced the boredom of doing nothing while scripture is held. They have also, at times, decided to attend scripture lessons - not because they or I believe in God, but just so they did not feel ostracised for not having a religion. They sometimes felt embarrassed that they were sent to another teacher's class to sit and draw. They still don't believe in God but they have some understanding why he is important to others.

Kids like to be included and I see the Ethics classes as a significant step in the right direction towards this. I think in a multicultural society, such as Aust., more should be done to help our kids gain meaningful understanding of all types of religion. I wish that we had religious studies included in primary school - not to convert kids but more as a history lesson of sorts. Understanding religious convictions and the rules or beliefs of a variety of religions would help kids understand why the Middle East is in turmoil and why refugees (due to religious persecution) want to come to our country. I think that religious teachers in our local areas should go to schools and talk about what they believe in - Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Mormons, Hindu, Humanists etc.
Public submissions in response to the Ethics Course Trial final report  
November 2010

All responses are unedited

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I would also ask that legislation be introduced to change the act so that future governments would be prevented from reversing these changes.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not proposed in an attempt to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for children who are currently learning nothing in this time. It recognises that not all parents want their children to attend a scripture class but nonetheless want to have them exposed to the importance of ethics and values. It recognises the secular nature of our society which we espouse that children should be free to choose not to attend scripture classes and still learn. Personally, it came as a shock to me that children were not allowed to be engaged in learning while their peers attended scripture. This appears to me to be extremely discriminatory against those who do not have religious beliefs, a position which I thought our society was educating our children against in that we say we are encouraging them to understand, respect and embrace different points of view. Our children are in government schools and the government should not be engaged in practices that support religions over learning. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

It's very pleasing to hear the recent ethics trial has been judged to be such a success. As a parent of children who do not attend SRE I am very keen for them to do meaningful activities in that time. The ethics class is a wonderful option.

I look forward to my children participating in ethics classes starting in 2011.
I strongly support a change to DET policy to allow children who do not attend SRE to engage in secular ethics classes. I regard this amendment to DET policy as righting a wrong. We live in a secular state and my children attend a state, secular school, yet the current DET policy specifically denies non-religious children the rights currently afforded to children who attend SRE. It is a blatantly discriminatory policy and needs amendment. The arguments put forward by church groups regarding the choice religious families must make between SRE and and secular ethics should be dismissed. A "dilemma" of choice for some is not a legitimate reason for denying any choice to others. The insistence by church groups that the content of proposed ethics classes is "unknown" to them is also irrelevant. The content of those classes is only the concern of those parents who intend to send their children to them. Catholics would be rightly outraged at the suggestion that Anglicans "vet" the content of their SRE sessions. It is similarly outrageous that church groups object to secular ethics classes because complete course content has not been provided to them.

Please put an end to this discriminatory practice and give my children the same rights at school as their religious peers.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Our children are very excited about starting ethics classes next year and look forward to the removal of the biased DET policy.

Our public education should be truly independent of religious interests.

That we are having this debate in 2010 is actually embarrassing. To impose scripture on families and children (in effect) is beyond logical belief.

However, when the change comes in next year it will have been worth the frustration.

Bring it on and get on with it.

As a mother of four children in your electorate, I am writing to request your consideration of, and support for, the introduction of ethics classes in NSW schools. I believe that ethics
classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. 

As such I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning at all times whilst they are at school, including the time allocated to SRE.

I just wanted to add my unconditional support for ethics classes in our schools. I believe strongly that religion should be a choice made at an appropriate age following reflection and belief, and is not an appropriate topic for children. Teaching scripture alongside math and science is tantamount to making the choice for them, which I think robs them of the choice.

However, that is not to say that I would like my child to sit by idly during school hours (he gets plenty of that outside of school!), and would prefer he spend the time profitably. And everything I have seen of the ethics course looks promising and exciting.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the matter.

I find it incredible it has taken this long to allow children the choice when you consider the law is over 100 years old.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

As a parent at one of trial schools, it is no surprise that the evaluation was positive. The majority of parents, ethics teachers and children at our school (BHNPS) found the ethics classes an enriching compliment to the many good SRE classes on offer. I am thrilled to hope that finally my 8 year old, will no longer be discriminated against. If the policy is changed he will finally have meaning educational engagement every week.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture.

I strongly believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture.

It is discriminatory in the extreme to deny children from non-religious backgrounds educational opportunities in moral philosophy and how they might go about developing their own ethical frameworks for living.

It is also negligent from the perspective of social good. Time spent considering questions such as How ought one to live? and How should we go about justifying our moral judgements? is an investment in the future of our society. The critical reasoning skills introduced will prepare our children well for the future.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that by not providing an alternative such as the proposed ethics program is discrimination based on religious beliefs (or in this case 'non' religious) beliefs. I'm happy for children to have the freedom to be taught about scripture but my children should have the freedom to attend ethics classes. Perhaps the critics should attend some 'ethics' classes on acceptance of those with different views or beliefs!

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I'm fed up.

There was a much nicer letter here from the goodly people at "parents for ethics" but it fails to capture my disgust at the notion at the way that the NSW government has succumbed to 'special interest capture' on this issue.
To my way of thinking, the 'ethics as an option' is feared because most parents don't have strong religious feelings and would desert SRE en masse if there was the remotest alternative that wasn't just 'warehousing' the kids.

The 'ethics option' is a comparatively gentle option that leaves the rather questionable provision of SRE in schools intact; as a compromise, it's pretty sensible. Just do it. There are alternatives...

An alternative that's getting a lot of interest is a mass boycott of these classes and the whole time slot; a number of parents that I know are taking their kids to the park during the whole timeslot, showing up late, and daring the school / DET to do anything about it. A critical mass of such parents could make quite a fun little party in the nearest park to any school, no?

In today's largely secular society, scripture classes at school are irrelevant to many. It is important that children be given an appreciation of what it is to live a good life, and I strongly endorse the introduction of a moral philosophy based course across all schools.

It is unfair to deprive children not attending SRE classes of a meaningful alternative - and the evaluation of the Ethics trial course shows its benefits very clearly.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. It is also important to have students realise that the virtues taught in scripture also exist outside of any religious attachment.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe ethics classes to be of extreme importance in our current social climate. Many families have become disenchanted with church and no longer attend services. This, in many cases, has left a gap in ethic and moral upbringing, which is potentially detrimental for the harmonious cooperation within our communities. I believe 'ethics education' will help educated people toward more tolerance and understanding for their fellow citizens; thus reducing conflict, criminal and general disfunctional behaviour. I see ethics education as an important tool towards creating a more functional society.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

From personal experience, my son has spent much of his SRE time in primary school learning nothing. I am not against religion per se, and would have been happy for him to be taught about a broad cross section of religions from an objective perspective in order to equip him to make an informed decisions about his own beliefs. As this was not available I opted him out of scripture. Had an Ethics Class been available, this would have been an excellent alternative, and would have had my support. It is a pity he will have missed out on this, but I would like other children to have this opportunity.

Having had 2 children go through public primary education and one still at public primary school, all of whom didn’t attend scripture class. I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. I firmly believe that all children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

One of my children has gone onto a private religious school and as expected he receives religious education there. My other high school aged child goes to a public school and doesn’t receive religious education. So you can see I’m not against religious education per say.

I see the introduction of ethics classes as providing an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing while others attend religious classes. Another choice that we as parents and families can make about our child’s education, much like drama, art, music etc - it is available just like religious classes and we make choices as to what is a priority in our family.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I am not a religious person, though I may describe myself as a person who agrees strongly with people like Jesus who advocated for the rights of people, and love of one’s fellow man.

I am sad that for an hour each week my child reads a random book from the library shelf, when the possible alternative is an education in moral values through the debate of ethical questions. I feel strongly that people in general should consider such issues.
I would love to see philosophical ethics offered to my child at school. I hope that you will support this initiative.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children. It is the choice of the child/carer if they wish to attend SRE or another meaningful learning session.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

If this conflicts with SRE - then make Ethics a proper class for all kids. Our society needs more ethics education.
Move the SRE classes to the start of school or end of school time each day so children who are not attending SRE are able to make their own meaningful choice on how they are going to use the time. Being forced to waste the time in SRE during the school day is non-productive.

As a mother to two year 6 boys who participated in the ethics trial I strongly believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children should have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The Evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes, and I definitely feel that my boys did benefit. They now have a keener awareness of issues, and a better language facility to express their opinions.

My boys really enjoyed the ethics lessons. Each week they would come home keen to discuss that week's issue as a family. I agree with the recommendation to discuss each topic over two lessons, however. Some of the topics were very challenging, and sometimes I felt that the boys did not have enough background knowledge to be able to have an informed discussion. Discussing over two weeks would allow for some research. It would also allow for more in-depth discussion, to ensure that expressed opinions are justified adequately and appropriately. This was noted as one of the limitations of the pilot study. Volunteer teachers will require special training to facilitate this, not only in the skill of evaluation of the content but also in eliciting the very complex language structures that are necessary. I feel that volunteers must be selected very carefully and given extensive training in both the elicitation of opinions and persuasive language structure. They would also need ongoing support.

The Ethics course is a wonderful complement to SRE. I strongly support the changing of DET policy to allow all NSW children to be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Verity, its the only chance you have any chance of retaining your seat, is to introduce this wonderful subject and stick it to the Churches. I am sick of them always holding society back. They should know that you just simply cannot wake a dead horse. Religious teachers everywhere are sticking this into our faces at both chapel and christian studies. Out of all subjects, Religion is the subject we should have the greatest flexibility in. It is unfair that in we have to do a course which many people simply do not want. If we pride ourselves on being a democratic nation and complain about persecution in countries like China and Saudi Arabia, well we are not if some schools enforce us to do both Christian Studies and Chapel every week. This should be a personal choice. If you introduce this Verity, then I will ask my parents and friends to ask to retain you at March as O'Farrell may oppose a wonderful course like this.

Please give all Australian children a fair go to use their time usefully and not be led or dissuaded by a noisy and strongly motivated group who wish to penalise those who do not follow their beliefs. This is a democracy we must give all parents and children the freedom to choose how to lead their lives.

Please ensure DET stops its discrimination against families because of their beliefs about religion who choose not to send their children to SRE.

My children need to and are required to attend school and have the right to spend their school time in a meaningful way. It is outrageous that under current DET policy they are denied this right.
Ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of SRE. The evaluation report concerning the recent ethics trial shows that secular ethics instruction can be delivered successfully in primary schools.

The P&C at our state school has also voted to support a policy allowing the provision of an ethics option as an additional alternative to SRE.

Please do not disregard the strongly held views of many NSW parents on this matter, and change the DET policy as a matter of urgency.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE. Those parents who do not agree with religious philosophies have the right to demand that their children have opportunities for philosophical discussions without religious bias. The ethics classes trial has been highly successful in providing such an opportunity, as the report clearly identifies. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time historically allocated to SRE.

Please do not allow religious leaders to influence this important decision. Those people have no mandate or background in education and have absolutely no right to influence what classes my children are able to attend at school.

Liberal opposition to this excellent initiative will irrevocably result in the loss of my vote in the next election - which I had believed would be a very easy win for the Liberals.

a huge number, possibly a majority of people, do not believe in God. Please give our children an education that does not rely on mysticism and educate them in a meaningful way that does not ask people to pretend to believe in what are in fact, silly archaic if not primitive concepts
I was discriminated against due to my religious teachers because I didn't want to attend indoctrination lessons at school.

There has to be an alternative.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I personally have the third generation of children in my family 'twiddling their thumbs' during religious education and can remember my time being extremely boring. In fact, in high school at one time I attended multiple denomination's classes simply for something to do - despite it being against my families, and my own, wishes.

I am very pleased to hear of the positive results of the assessment of the SRE program. Making this available to NSW children can only be positive for the future of our state as citizens and individuals.

The evidence in the ethics report is overwhelmingly that ethics education in schools is highly beneficial. Surely there can be no argument that children not going to RE classes should be offered Ethics education. Our children have the right to educational experiences that equip them to think through moral dilemmas and consider in a careful and informed way the best course of action - this is not the sole province of religious organisations or religious education. These skills in ethical thinking provide young people with the tools to make moral decisions both personally and socially. It is without doubt, a moral obligation, to change the NSW DET policy to provide children who opt out of RE with ethics classes. It is discriminatory not to provide them.

I greatly support the Ethics class initiative and would like these classes to be a permanent feature of NSW schooling.

I don't believe religious organisations should be entitled to prevent the introduction of Ethics classes simply to protect their own vested interests. Religions are entitled to present their own scripture classes but should have no right to prevent and block valuable alternatives.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.  
I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

My son took part of the ethics trial and he enjoyed it and benefited from the experience. I think the ethics classes are a brilliant alternative for children who opt out of scripture and I cannot see any logical reason why they should be deprived of learning whilst others are attending scripture.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Mote: It seems the 'news' is that it will 'replace' religious classes - that is not the case

If the study of religion was studied from the whole of world religions perspective, inclusive of philosophers/ethical teaching then I think that would be wonderful. It should not be either/or, but a wholistic education about all religions and world history. I believe that these or ethics classes should be made available for all children. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - when my children have/had religious education classes they opted to go to the library as we firmly believe in the world view/history/ethics as I learnt in the UK rather than a specific religious view.

The discriminatory DET policy should be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning about the whole world view, historical perspective and ethical sustainability
I am a strong supporter of the ethics program and want my 3 children to be exposed to it. The idea of an ethics program for kids is brilliant and a great lateral exercise for young kids minds.

I do not want my children attending any religious instruction in their primary school years - such instruction for me is at best historically interesting at worst constitutes a form of abuse - when kids are told the tooth fairy is true they believe it, to be indoctrinated in primary school by any one shibboleth is an outrageously outmoded idea, not for one moment would I consider allowing my kindergarten children to be exposed to any religious evangelists. So I for one demand a fair and considered alternative - our kids school has a majority that opt out of religious instruction for these and different reasons.

I trust good sense will prevail and the ethics program will be rolled out in all primary schools

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. There is NOTHING negative about offering parents & children a choice. I find it astounding that in 2010 we are even debating this issue. I don't have children but I want our future leaders to be given every opportunity.

I would like to convey my support for the introduction of ethics classes. I feel that it is high time that our children who wish to opt out of scripture were given a meaningful alternative. I am extremely disappointed and frustrated that presently my children have no choice but to sit and colour in (as is the case of my primary school child) or sit in an area near the deputy's office (as is the case of my high school children). It is unfair that this time period is solely for religious education. Many parents do not wish their children to have religious education and this needs to be respected and an alternative provided.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

If ethics classes are not provided soon I will have no choice but to remove my children from school during this period and would be encouraging other parents to do so. To assist in this I would encourage schools via their P&C to move their SRE to either first or last period so children who do not wish to attend SRE could either start late or finish early. Hopefully though this discrimination towards our children can be resolved before I have to do this.
I am looking forward to your solid support, both vocally and within the parliament as required, to finally provide the children of NSW with an alternative to sitting around while the minority are provided with religious ‘education’.

Having been brought up a catholic, like you I believe, it is my considered opinion that the state school system is not the place for RE in any form but as stated above, the non religious students are entitled to an alternative.

This is not a states issue but a national one. Ethics classes are urgently needed in the education system:
1. to prevent discrimination against children who choose or whose parents choose not to impose compulsory training in religion; 2. to protect children from being left outside a classroom whilst compulsory religious teaching is imposed.

When we sent our girls to a state school in [redacted] during the early 1980’s and later to state schools in Queensland at [redacted] and then [redacted] Primary schools in [redacted] they were made to wait OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM without proper supervision. This left children of 6 years and older at risk.

All because of a mediaeval addiction to beliefs rather than knowledge by those trusted with educating our young.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator’s report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Ethics classes must be allowed as a choice alongside of SRE for parents in our multicultural society. As the adults of this society we must demonstrate to our children that true democracy is valued and encouraged in all aspects of our society. SRE is not being taken away. If choice is not allowed this shows to our children who believe that adults know all, that SRE must be the only right way and if I(the child) does not attend SRE then adults will dismiss me (the child) and put me (the child) in an area where I(the child) am not acknowledged or accepted for not wanting to attend SRE classes. I (the child) am inferior somehow? As the adults of society where we are responsible for ALL children, do we want to relay this message of non acceptance to our children? NO! It is our responsibility to show to our children that we are not afraid and that there are many different paths human beings can take in life which is respected by us all.

PLEASE............I implore you to lobby for the change to the DET policy now, so that all NSW children are treated in a valued, respectful and indiscriminantory manner which aids in the development of psychologically healthy human beings.
My two boys both attend Anglican scripture classes at our local public primary school. They will be attending an Anglican high school. Despite our individual family's choice, I strongly support the introduction of ethics classes for those who do not choose to attend scripture classes. It is, I would argue, unethical to expect these children to sit in a hall with no constructive activity awaiting the end of the allocated scripture period.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I strongly support and welcome the introduction of ethics classes in NSW Public Schools as I believe that it in no way interferes or takes away from the teaching of Special Religious Education (Scripture) classes.

Parents make the choice as to what their children will attend and ethics classes should be made available immediately for those children attending non-scripture classes.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

The churches have no right to interfere with our wishes.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.
Please do not bow to the pressure of the mighty churches but take a stand for those children who deserve to be treated in a Christian way.

As a high school teacher, I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Some background...

I do not attend church but I accept that most of my deeply held beliefs (my ethics if you will) have perhaps come from or are at least reflected in many of the parables found in the bible as interpreted by long term stable Christian religions.

I have a 7 year old son in Year 1 at our local school. We have a couple of illustrated children's bible stories at home. He has also enjoyed attending both Anglican and Catholic SRE in his time at the school and we have had some interesting, enjoyable and robust conversations as a result of this exposure. (Although, I do sometimes wonder exactly what he has been told - but that is perhaps another story - 7 year olds have a way of hearing things that are not exactly as was said.)

In order to provide him with even greater balance and perspective I believe that he should be provided with alternatives to a Christian presentation of concepts and philosophies, and I see the introduction of ethics classes as a useful adjunct to standard SRE.

I was heartened to hear and read the findings of the recent study into ethics classes in NSW. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students benefited from attending these classes.

I agree with the observation that spending more than just one time period on a given topic would be advantageous. It would allow students to discuss concepts (at home at least) and reflect on the ideas presented (yes, 7 year olds like mine do reflect on ideas, even though it appears they are behaving like chooks with their heads cut off most of the time).

To ensure a smooth transition and to open the door to alternatives, I request that the current DET policy be changed as soon as possible so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I was very encouraged today to read the positive comments in the evaluator’s report on ethics classes in NSW schools.
I sincerely hope you will now act as quickly as possible to amend DET policy so that ethics classes can be made available for all children who opt out of scripture.

By doing so your government will have made an important contribution by ensuring that currently unproductive time is finally spent in a valuable and meaningful way.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

As a child I suffered at the hands of religious representatives when my parents refused to allow me to attend scripture and I am very aware, and supportive, of the need for a credible and engaging alternative to SRE.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. I fully support all Recommendations in Section 7 of the independent evaluator's report and ask that you support all necessary actions to ensure that this vital program continues.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I strongly endorse the words below. As I couldn't say it better myself, I won't try. But DO PLEASE LISTEN and press with this admirable initiative.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I also believe that ethics classes will provide children with modern day examples and familiar situations showing the children how to work together in today's world.

I believe this DET policy is outdated, unjustified and unethical. People in today's society come from many cultures, backgrounds and religious viewpoints, but we all share the want and need for an ethical society.

Please do your bit to help the DET realise that people want to see change and progress.

My children attend the local public schools in [redacted], and I seek your support on this issue. I have chosen a public school not a church school for my children and I believe my children are discriminated against when they opt out of scripture and are provided with no meaningful alternative during this time. I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

We write again to explain our support of ethics classes being introduced in NSW as an option for our children, who do not attend SRE and do not enjoy doing colouring in for the equivalent of 1 school week per year.

We therefore urge you to follow the recommendations of the report and introduce ethics classes next year.

We beg that you do not bow to pressure from those opposed to the ethics classes - there are a lot of people like ourselves who simply want the discrimination against our children to end and for this we applaud you in allowing the trial in the first place.

Re Ethics Classes in schools: I have read the Report and Recommendations from the trial and I strongly support the provision of ethics classes for all children (but as an immediate step, for those who opt out of scripture). All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes provides an alternative for non-scripture parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I urge that DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Additionally, the introduction of form ethics classes can bring significant social benefits. Perhaps the most obvious of these is bullying in schools. There is ample evidence to suggest that every attempt should be made to stamp out this noxious and unintended outcome of going to school. Ethics classes could make an immediate and very positive contribution in this area. The introduction of ethics classes would also enable students to address issues such as kindness; respect (and even tolerance).

There are a number of issues confronting society generally that raise ethical issues. Consider:

- Alcohol and tobacco sales (and misuse)
- Use and sale of illicit drugs
- Corporate behaviour and greed (asbestos compensation; price gouging; exorbitant interest rates)

Let's seize this opportunity to equip tomorrow’s citizens with an understanding of ethics so they can deal with future challenges.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Ethics classes can do no harm but they can improve the quality time for our children.

Like many other parents, I was prepared to let my son attend the "SRE" class at his school, [Redacted] Public when he started Kindergarten this year.
My wife grew up with Catholicism, myself without a formal religious upbringing. I felt that it would be valuable to learn some of the ethical lessons and also in understanding the predominant religious faith in this country to some degree. I also expected that there would be some discussion of other faiths out there as well. We are not raising our children with any particular religious instruction and believe that it is each individuals to come to their own conclusions.

However, this was not the case. The SRE volunteers turned out to be largely of the Baptist version. I understand this reflects the religious persuasion of the head master, although I cannot confirm this. The class was more like an indoctrination, with the kids taking in the information presented as if it were as accepted as "jolly phonics", the reading system they started with. There was not discussion of any other religions, nor did there seem to be any ethical issues presented.

and I have as a result pulled him out of the class. This year he goes to the other class during that time, but in future years may be consigned to the library.

I do not think this is fair. I suspect many of the parents at our school consent to SRE for similar reasons to ours. I would prefer if there was a general ethics class instead of SRE. I would agree with the fear of the organised religions that many parents would choose the ethics class in the first place were it available, rather than SRE. I believe this should be a choice available to all parents.

Like many others, I believe that all children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

I also request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

My child is nearly 3. when he hits school I will not be sending him to SRE. in that time, I do not want him sitting in the back of the room, sitting in the photocopy room, doing 'jobs' or generally filling in valuable learning time with nothing. Our public school system is meant to be secular. These lessons and the lack of choice currently do not reflect that. its time to show some courage and leadership. It's time to provide genuine choice for ALL families.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.
I am a parent of 5 children, who attend or have attended NSW public schools. I strongly believe that ethics classes should be available to my children, whom are currently segregated from the rest of the school population with no meaningful activity allowed during scheduled SRE time, while the other children have the benefit of ethical instruction via their faith based classes.

As the secular ethics classes have now been positively evaluated, I would like to request that the current DET policy be changed so that all children in NSW public schools can participate in meaningful learning activities during scheduled SRE time.

We ought to upholding the great labor tradition of free universal secular education for all not least because my kids attend no scripture and I would like them to learn something meaningful in that time.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

You have my number if you would like to call me on this.

I understand that the present situation regarding SRE in public schools is a relic from the transition to state-funded schooling from the previous system of church-funded schooling. However, it is unequivocally a form of discrimination against children based on the religious beliefs of their parents. During the period allocated to SRE, our school is prohibited from offering to my children any meaningful learning activity, whilst those children attending SRE classes are engaged in what their parents (presumably) believe is an important learning activity. Whatever the historical reason, this situation is discriminatory. It is wrong.

Religion is a powerful and important force in our society, and religious freedom (including atheism) is an essential right for all people. To this end, I would be more than happy for my children to learn about religions during SRE - in the context of a General Religious Education rather than indoctrination into a faith - but I understand that this is one of the activities specifically prohibited by law under the 'non-compete' clause in NSW education policy.

Accordingly I request that that this discriminatory policy be changed so that all NSW children can be engaged in meaningful learning activities during the time allocated to SRE. If there is a rational, non-discriminatory argument as to why this should not be the case, please let me know - I have not yet seen a single proposition to this effect. Please make sure that
my children are not disadvantaged solely because of the religious beliefs of others or the politics of keeping religious institutions on side.

I have read the NSW Ethics course trial report and agree in most part with the recommendations therein. The report suggests that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes and illustrates, in a small way, the benefits that all school pupils would gain from them.

Although the introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide a meaningful alternative for parents and children who's time is currently wasted under the existing stream. The fact that the majority of students are attending school, but are currently learning nothing in this time, should have rung alarm bells many years ago.

All children have the right to spend their school time in a safe, educational and meaningful way, not being educated in superstitious beliefs.

I hereby request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed so that all NSW children can be engaged in Ethics classes that will benefit not only the pupils, but the schools and community as a whole. I also request that SRE be moved outside the main teaching stream or be dropped altogether. It serves no purpose for the majority, and parents who wish their child to undergo specialist religious learning should look to their church or community.

In the short-term, I believe that ethics classes should at least be made available for all children who opt out of religious classes, beginning Term 1, 2011.

I fully support the recent trial of ethics classes in NSW schools, and understand that the trial has been a success. On this basis, I am very keen for my children to have the opportunity to attend these classes, and urge the Government of NSW to support their introduction as soon as possible.

Currently my older daughter attends non-scripture. According to current DET policy, she is not permitted to be engaged in learning at this time. This policy, presumably formulated to appease the religious lobby, actively discriminates against children of non-religious families. Between 9 and 10 in the morning, the time when SRE classes are presented, is the time when children are most focussed and able to be engaged for learning. Accordingly, a significant chunk of my children's learning time is currently held to ransom by the religious lobby.

This initiative of the St James Ethics Centre is a fantastic and progressive initiative, and at its best, might deliver us a generation of thinking individuals, able to make decisions based on a reasoned analysis of the costs and benefits of their decisions for all stakeholders; a generation of kids who have a grasp of the complexities of life and relationships, and can see the shades of grey. This can only be good for the future of NSW.

I have a hard time believing what a circus this whole issue has turned into - how can it be so hard to see that the government has no right to force children into idleness because their parents opt out of having them in scripture classes?
I'm originally from Europe, and ethics classes are the norm there - even in such strongly Catholic areas as Bavaria. All I can say is that NSW is about 30 years behind the rest of the Western world on this issue which is nothing short of a disgrace.

In addition, the evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes - just as they do in other countries.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. It's time to arrive in the 21st century.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I am a very strong supporter of public education, although this is one very disappointing aspect of the system. I believe it is the responsibility of the public school system to be educating my child whilst he is at school, not leaving him idle during SRE classes. I do not think it is the responsibility of the public school system to provide religious education and it is about time this archaic practice is done away with. In the very least, my child, and all children at public schools should have an option of participating in some meaningful activity whilst SRE is taking place.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I have no problem with religious studies but do believe it is important for children to be at an age where they can decide for themselves what they wish to believe in.

At the moment I run a craft group with the kids that opt-out at our school & I know their parents are very interested in the Ethics program. I myself have volunteered to be trained.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. In fact we should not have SRE at all in Secular Schools...so how did they creep in and how is it now this diabolical minority are able to dictate what goes on. Stop the hypocrisy and give my child an alternative or stop all religious teachings in public schools.

It is disappointing to hear that there is still discussion about whether Children should be allowed to advance their understanding of ethics in a non-religious forum, especially as the evaluator's report confirmed the benefit of having such classes for those opting out of SRE.

Either people are reading more into the situation or they have other agendas, whatever the case, many arguments stating that Ethics classes should not go ahead should now be discounted as redundant or malicious (some arguments in the early stages where beneficial but these have been addressed and are no longer voiced).

In its current form the DET policy is antiquated and discriminatory, and needs to be updated. Please ensure the ethos of a modern, cosmopolitan and consultative Australia is placed before the fear of change espoused by a small (vocal)portion of the population.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. I find it appalling that even though the evidence of ethic's classes being absolutely totally beneficial to those children not taking SRE has been proven, that those of religious beliefs have a say in not allowing those children not in SRE classes equal rights to ethics teaching, in an unbiased way.

Thanks for conducting the ethics trial. Both my sons (Kindergarten and Year 4) sit out of scripture which at different times has been very ostracising and confusing for them. A third of the Year 4 class now sits out of scripture, and every parent I have spoken to at our little public school would prefer that their child did not have to attend scripture.
Both my boys understand the reasons for my stand and are supportive of it. The Year 4 boy in particular is looking forward to the ethics classes as he has a very enquiring mind!

Thanks again and I am so grateful that the discrimination my little boys experience will soon end.

Also, as a victim of the psychological harm that my scripture teacher caused me when I was in Year 3, I am pleased that students will be better protected and supported by being offered a decision about where they can spend scripture time.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report released today demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

In particular I believe the introduction of an Ethics class will help engage "non scripture" students with social justice and moral issues.

I also support Recommendation 6 on page 83 of the report. Scripture teachers should follow a prescribed curriculum, it should be made available to the school and parents.

I respectfully request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I strongly believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

It is clear that the proposed introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it offers a valuable and reasonable alternative for parents whose children are currently learning nothing in this time.

I have read the evaluator's report and it is clear that students will benefit from attending these classes.

I request that that the current discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Ultimately, I would prefer that SRE be removed from the curriculum entirely so that all students are using this time for meaningful learning. Individual religious beliefs and instruction should be kept separate from state-based education. There is adequate time after school or on weekends for parents to ensure their child receives whatever belief-based instruction they desire.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

While the introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time - I would also like to express my disapproval that public funds are being used to teach scripture in public schools. A unbiased world religion class combined with ethics would be a far more suitable course of study in public schools.

In any case, the evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending ethics classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

As a parent of a child at a NSW public school, I believe that all children not enrolled in Special Religious Education should have an informative, educational alternative available to them. At the moment, children such as my daughter don't spend this time doing anything other than "free play".

Ethics classes are a valuable alternative to SRE, not a replacement. All children have the right to spend the time allocated to SRE in a meaningful way.

I have read the evaluator's report, and it demonstrates that NSW public school students will benefit greatly from attending ethics classes.

I request that you heed the report, and change the current discriminatory DET policy so that all NSW children have the opportunity to learn and engage during the time allocated to SRE.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in attending ethics classes if their parents so elect.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

In addition, students should be taught about the different religions of the world - regardless of whether they attend SRE for one particular religion. Knowledge results in tolerance and a greater understanding of those who have different beliefs to their know.
Just letting you know that I support Ethics being taught in schools as an alternative to SRE. Kids should have a useful alternative to SRE if their parents elect not to send them to SRE.

Our child currently does not attend scripture classes and has to waste his time doing colouring in. It appears that any other work is not allowed during this time. He is BORED and we as parents feel that he deserves to have the option to partake in useful discussions about ethics. Clearly the evaluator’s report finds that an ethics program will benefit all students. It is time for the DET to wake up, get off their bureaucratic butts and engage with the present.

The time made available to enable children to be made aware of what constitutes ethical behaviour is invaluable. It is very likely that there are many children who would not have the chance to have discussion on this important topic in any other way. Ethical considerations have the potential to arise on many occasions during a person's life in both a social and working context and, therefore the attendance at ethics classes should be seen as a wonderful opportunity to prepare children for their life ahead.

As the child of a 10 year old boy currently attending [Redacted] Public School and choosing to opt out of SRE classes I fully support the provision of ethics classes in our state schools. It is my understanding that at [Redacted] the teachers do already use the allocated SRE time to teach a values based course to non-SRE children however I would find it reassuring to know that they are teaching to a specific course content that has been developed by people with expertise in this area.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I call upon the NSW Government to introduce the regular teaching of secular ethics, following the trial and the favourable report by Sue Knight and others. It is wrong that the Department of Educations policy on the implementation of religious education should prevent students who do not attend such classes from being instructed in subjects such as values, ethics or civics or receiving education about religion (as opposed to education in a religion). It is only reasonable that students who do not choose to attend religious education classes or whose parents make such a choice should have an alternative such as ethics. This would, of course, not be a case of eliminating religious education. I will appreciate your response.

I strongly support the proposal to have Ethics education in schools as a meaningful alternative for children who do not participate in scripture classes. From the public discussion on the subject, including the input from the children themselves, this program
has been highly successful in engaging children to think about ethics in a variety of situations.

It is extremely important to move away from having any sort of religious input in our public and supposedly secular education system. Further, the promotion of intelligent discussion and the acknowledgement of different ways of thinking by primary school children will ensure a more considerate society in Australia's future.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I will have a child ready for school within the next five years. I will be choosing a school based on whether they have a good alternative to SRE. I truly believe that the ethics program is a worthwhile alternative.

Ethics classes are a wonderful addition to the curriculum in NSW public schools. The current scheme of using public resources to provide religious indoctrination for school children is questionable at best. The fact that children who are not enrolled in SRE generally have no useful replacement activity during this time is absurd.

If parents are keen for their children to have religious training, let them take their children to _church_ or mosque or temple!

The DET policy is archaic, discriminatory, and a big time-waster for non-SRE students. It need to be changed.

I have two children who do not yet attend school. It's my hope that, by the time they are of school age, they will be able to attend ethics classes instead of simply killing time until scripture class finishes.

You have the opportunity to back an historical decision. I urge you to do just that.

If you don't, may I bring my kids to your office during the scripture classes that they won't be attending?
All responses are unedited

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE. In the future I would hope that scripture classes be taken out of the school setting. Churches can hold 'Sunday school' for these lessons. They really have no place in a modern secular state's public education. Children should be taught about all major religions in a non biased informative way.

I applaud the findings of the evaluator's report and would welcome the introduction of ethics classes for children who are not taking SRE. Currently, our children are moaning about sitting with children across 3 age levels and being read a "boring" story when their peers are taking SRE. This is a waste of their time, especially when every primary school teacher will tell you that they race to get through all their subjects each day. I am concerned that SRE is prioritised given we attend a public school in a secular society and also that some Christian parents have withdrawn their children from SRE due to concern about the delivery of the message - not due to being atheist. These children deserve better than being sidelined for a period each week and made to feel excluded which is the current situation. Let's give them some ethical issues for their developing minds to debate in this time.

Having read the report 'NSW Ethics Course Trial - Final Report' I wholeheartedly agree with the recommendations and support any decision to see this program introduced.

Beyond this I would like to comment that I had wished to see a more general change in DET policy with regard to 'parent choice' as it applies to those areas of the curriculum which are traditionally occupied by secular teaching. That as much as this is about opening up the possibility of ethics classes as an alternative to SRE, it is a removal of all 'non-compete' type statements and that it provided a basic framework & policy with regard to future alternatives being developed.

Please give my children access to the subject of ethics. It seems completely unfair and unreasonable that non-Christian families do not get access to this subject. The only reason offered by opponents of this proposal are based on self-centered protectionism not rationale reasons. The church does not own ethics.

I strongly support your stance on the issue that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. I have two children who attend _______ Public School and currently opt out.
All responses are unedited

of scripture. I look forward to them having the choice to participate in ethics classes in the future, instead of sitting idle for one hour a week.

My Son attends [REDACTED] Public school and I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

All the Children benefit, the best example for me is that any child who attends any religious class can also join the course and then return to the religious class of their choice. The same goes for children of no religion.

This way everyone has a broader sense of what society is today and can help to mould our future into one of self-expression and tolerance.

I am writing to you to urge your support in the party room and on the floor of parliament for the school ethics program. This has been trialled at the school our daughter attends - [REDACTED] Public School - and the feedback from parents and students there has been very positive.
Indeed, when we were selecting which school our daughter was to attend (she is currently in kindergarten) the fact that the school was part of the trial formed part of our considerations, in a very positive way, in sending her to the local public school.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.
The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.
The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I am very concerned that this issue will be delayed once again. It has proved its popularity, and should be allowed to proceed. It is unethical to rob children of hours of their rightful educational time, simply to pander to those of religious persuasion who wish to deny others of no religious beliefs, their own alternative. To belong to a religion is not mandatory (thank goodness) in this country, so the rejection of an alternative educational alternative to religious studies in schools is discriminatory.
Please deal with this issue once and for all, and stop the procrastination.
I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Choice and freedom in education are essential to healthy happy democracy.

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

It is now time for this option to be available to our children.

I strongly support the introduction of ethics classes at [Redacted] Primary where my daughter is enrolled. A qualified teacher has agreed to volunteer to deliver the program. I believe it would have significant value to our children's overall educational experience.

I am glad to read that the independent report into an alternative to SRE was positive for the students as was my personal experience from talking to the students at our School, [Redacted] Public.

I am NOW desperate for this issue to be FACED honestly and with integrity by all politicians, This is a DEAL MAKER OR BREAKER for me! My children's education is important to me as are my own personal values of tolerance and free expression,
We believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way. And the evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We couldn't believe it when my children were in primary school that it was possible to have this 'unscripture' time, with nothing available to the children to do or learn. An ethics class is a wonderful alternative to scripture.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I personally strongly support secular ethics teaching. My son is currently is left to play lego, while the various religious groups take up 1 hour a week of his valuable time with study that should be being done in Sunday school.

I would even say, go further...
Remove SRE classes altogether (they should be taught at the weekly religious gatherings ie Sunday school etc) and let everyone have ethics classes!

Given all that is happening in the religious world these days, who can deny that Christians, Muslims, Jews and all others need some ethics teaching.

But the current proposal to complement SRE classes with ethics classes is a big step in the right direction.
Please don't let the "Christians Against Ethics" groups sway your ethics on this.

I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now. All NSW children should be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

The Ethics debate has seen the Church leaders spinning like tops.

It is extremely disingenuous of them to suggest that the real agenda here from those who are pushing for an "Ethics" class alternative to SRE are really a bunch of 'secularists and humanists' (read 'atheists') who want to have SRE banned in schools altogether.

This may indeed be the agenda of a minority of parents, but could I remind the Religious leaders that the Constitution of the most Christian country in the world, the USA, bans any form of religious instruction in State schools, and for very good reasons.

There is no such thing as a 'Catholic' child, or a 'Protestant' child, or a 'Muslim' child - there are just 'children'. The process of SRE just accentuates the differences in cultural backgrounds in our multicultural and immigrant society, which should be avoided at all costs. The emphasis should be on the fact that these pupils are first and foremost Australian children.
Cultural education, including religious indoctrination, should not be in the hands of a State school.

Surely most parents would prefer a course teaching their children how to think rather than what to think.

Religious education though should be an essential part of the secondary school curriculum, with a thorough course in comparative religions. However such a course requires a degree of intellectual maturity which primary students are unlikely to have acquired. One can’t teach the calculus to students with limited maths education.

The agenda of the Church, based on mid 19th century legislation when the world was a very different place, needs desperately updating. Whether the Church likes it or not, Australia is a secular society, even though many no doubt would like to turn it into a theocracy.

We have freedom of religion but we are a long way from having freedom from religion.

This is one case where we should adopt the example of the USA.

We believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

We request that that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I have two children who took part in the ethics trial at [redacted] P.S. It was an enlightening experience for the whole family and the children thrived on some exciting enlightenment! My son goes on the high school next year, but my daughter enters year six. She wants to continue with ethics next year, and I want her to have the opportunity to expand her mind further in ethics, philosophy and empathy. Please support the introduction of ethics classes, don't fear further thinking, discussion and knowledge, let it thrive!

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.
Public submissions in response to the Ethics Course Trial final report
November 2010

All responses are unedited

We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

Hi, I have just read about the report on Ethics classes for NSW DET schools. I want to be another voice telling of my support for this initiative. As a parent of 4 kids in the NSW school system. It is important for my kids to have this chance to do something useful while SRE is going on for religious kids. currently my children sit around and draw and are losing valuable time during the school week. Please make sure you vote and support this valuable initiative. So that I can continue to support you in state government. I have exchange a number of emails with Barry O'farrell on this. He has not given me confidence that the opposition is doing the right thing here. I feel that if the opposition were to block this I would be forced to vote for another party in the next election.

I am writing to seek your support in changing DET policy to allow children who do not attend scripture to attend ethics classes.

My children currently spend one hour of school time each week colouring in while their peers spend that hour being taught religion by unqualified, untrained scripture "teachers".

All children have the right to spend that valuable time being taught in a meaningful way. Discussion and consideration of ethics will improve not only the children, but the community generally.

I send my children to a public school because it is non religious. It is discriminatory and unfair that children who do not attend scripture are not taught during that time.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

Please support the introduction of ethics classes in NSW schools

I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture. All children should have the right to spend this time in a meaningful way.

The introduction of ethics classes can provide an alternative for children who are currently learning nothing in this time. However, it would be even better if all children could have access to ethics classes, with religious instruction left for outside school hours.

The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes.

My children are currently told to sit in the library: they can read, but not draw or do anything else.
I request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

My 6 year old son opts out of scripture and finds the time spent in the school hall with a book very dull. I supply him with craft activities in an effort to make the time interesting. He recently told me he does not want to go to school on scripture days. Of course I want him to spend this time in a much more meaningful way. All children have this right. I believe that ethics classes should be made available for all children who opt out of scripture.

The introduction of ethics classes is not meant to replace SRE - it can provide an alternative for parents and children who are currently learning nothing in this time. The evaluator's report demonstrates that students will benefit greatly from attending these classes. We request that the discriminatory DET policy be changed now so that all NSW children have can be engaged and learning in the time allocated to SRE.

I write to express my support for ethics classes as an alternative to scripture classes, so that all children who opt out of scripture will have a meaningful learning experience during that time.