

Government Continues to be Coy about Religious Classes

P&C Federation is highly disappointed at the NSW Government's rejection of many worthwhile recommendations in a review of Special Religious Education (SRE). The review stemmed from a 2012 Upper House inquiry into ethics classes in the state, and cost \$300,000.

Among the recommendations rejected by the government was to allow students not participating in SRE to continue their regular classwork. P&C President Susie Boyd commented

"Considering the majority of students are not enrolled in SRE, it is entirely reasonable to allow them to spend their time on something productive while SRE classes are in place."

The Government also declined to consider including Special Ethics Education (SEE) on school enrolment forms, which was removed in 2015.

Ms Boyd commented "The removal of all references to ethics classes on enrolment forms has no practical benefit whatever. On the contrary, withholding information on enrolment forms is to the detriment of public education. It appears to have been done to cater to the purely ideological objections of certain smaller parties, and we continue to be mystified by the Government's refusal to even reconsider this."

The independent review also recommended tracking enrolment numbers of SRE and SEE classes, which the government rejected on the grounds that it "does not consider it to be the best use of resources". Ms Boyd stated "It raises questions about what the government is concealing. Tracking enrolment numbers is an ordinary activity of the Department of Education, and there is no reason for exceptions to be made for these classes."

P&C Federation is also disappointed that the government will not allow high school principals to opt in to SRE or include information materials relating to SRE participation that parents have the right to withdraw their child from SRE. "Although it is strictly true that this information is publicly available, it is an effort to track down and it is disappointing that the Government is declining to be more forthcoming with this information", stated Ms Boyd.

Ms Boyd added that "There is no reason to give SRE classes the degree of privileged treatment that we have seen from the government. We call on the government to be more transparent to parents about what exactly their options are and be more forthcoming to the public generally about the provision of these classes."

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Media Contact:

President Susie Boyd

0418 163 665

susie.boyd@pandc.org.au

FEDERATION OF PARENTS AND CITIZENS ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Locked Bag 40, GRANVILLE NSW 2142

Telephone: 1300 885 982

Fax: 1800 655 866

Website: www.pandc.org.au

ABN: 37 439 975 796