

NSW Government and Opposition Must Stop Special Treatment of Scripture Classes

P&C Federation welcomes the pledge by the NSW Opposition to amend the enrolment form to give parents a clearer choice between scripture or ethics classes. However, it is disappointing that they have not vowed to allow children who opt out of these classes to do other school work while the classes are running.

Previously, the enrolment form gave parents a simple “Yes/No” choice on whether to enrol their children in Special Religious Education (SRE) or Special Education in Ethics (SEE). In 2015, the SEE choice was removed from the enrolment forms, making enrolment decisions much less clear for parents. For students not enrolled in these classes, no academic instruction or formal school activities can occur during time set aside for these classes.

P&C Federation President Susie Boyd commented “We commend the Opposition Leader Luke Foley for promising to give parents a clear option again, and we hope the Government follows suit. Withholding information on enrolment forms does nothing to benefit public education.”

“However, it seems neither the Government nor Opposition supports allowing students not enrolled in these classes to do other school work during the classes. This means that for twenty to forty hours of the school year, students are blocked from any study. We hear many stories about children effectively twiddling their thumbs for an hour each week due to this policy.”

A review into SRE and SEE recommended this policy be changed to allow students not enrolled in these classes to do other regular school work. However, the Government rejected that recommendation with no explanation.

“Since most students are not enrolled in these classes, this special treatment makes no rational sense”, Ms Boyd said. “It privileges a minority of SRE and SEE students at the expense of the majority.”

“Our view is that SRE and SEE should be treated like any other class. Parents should have a clear choice on whether to enrol their children in them, and students not enrolled in them should be free to do other school work. There should be nothing controversial about that.”

Ms Boyd added “We call on both the Government and Opposition to end the undue privilege these classes get, and to act in the best interests of all students.”

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