



MEDIA RELEASE

Synod of New South Wales and the ACT

Uniting Church in Australia

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Church submission supports ethics classes

The Uniting Church has told the academic responsible for evaluating the trial of ethics classes in New South Wales public schools that it supports the introduction of ethics classes for those who do not attend Special Religious Education.

Pilot ethics classes were conducted in ten New South Wales primary schools by the [Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales](#), in association with the [St James Ethics Centre](#).

In a submission to Dr Sue Knight at the University of South Australia, John Oldmeadow, Executive Director of the church's Board of Education, said, "Our support gives priority to the interests of all children, not just those with whom we share faith convictions."

He said the Uniting Church wished to continue its involvement in the conversation regarding the possible introduction of an ethics course as a complement to Special Religious Education, whose value and place he said the church affirmed.

"We are committed to both SRE and a meaningful complement for those students who are 'opted-out' of SRE," he said.

Mr Oldmeadow said it was important that the church consult widely with stakeholders in revising the relevant sections of current Religious Education Policy and Religious Education Implementation Procedures for the Education Act 1990 to ensure that SRE time continues to be a valued part of school life.

However, he said the church was "committed to seeing that the time reserved for this important element of our state education operates in an effective manner for all children. This includes those whose parents decide for them not to participate in one of the SRE options offered, for whatever reason.

"We are committed to the value of SRE as an opportunity for faith-based catechetical teaching and the promotion of ethical thinking consistent with the values of God, made ultimately known through Jesus Christ.

"It is also part of our commitment to the values of Jesus that we must advocate for justice for 'non-scripture' students who are denied a meaningful educational experience during SRE times, simply because of their parents' decision to opt them



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out of Special Religious Education. The ethics classes provide a meaningful alternative.”

Mr Oldmeadow said the groups who supported the ethics classes only sought to provide a meaningful option for those who do not attend Special Religious Education.

He said, “We understand that many in the wider Christian community disagree with this standpoint. However, the Uniting Church believes that it is no longer appropriate that our public education system provide special religious education options without regard for students whose families do not identify with any of the particular religious groups who may offer SRE in their local school.”

He said, “As the Uniting Church we affirm that faith is strongest when placed in its contemporary context and therefore the church needs to stand ‘in relation to contemporary societies in ways which help it to understand its own nature and mission’ ...

“Our hope is that many parents, through the Special Religious Education and in the course of everyday life, will continue to support their children as they explore the Christian faith and the deeper truths it offers in response to the question of how we are to live.”

The Uniting Church submission can be read [here](#).

See also: [Churches should welcome ethics classes](#)

See also: [Engage in ethics discussion](#)