

**Submission  
No 261**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

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**Legislative Council Home Schooling Inquiry**

We are parents who are home educating our oldest child and plan to formally home educate our youngest child when he turns 6. We would like to address some of the terms of reference of the inquiry into home schooling.

*(b) The current context of home schooling in New South Wales including:*

*(ii) Financial costs*

The financial costs of home education are high. We receive no funding for our child's activities and have lost a professional income (or partial income).

We bear the full costs of materials, teachers and other resources for participation in activities they would ordinarily do at school, including sport, art and craft, textbooks, teachers, music and language lessons. We have also spent a large amount of money accessing various therapies.

If we had sent our child to a private school (as we intended) that school would be given government funding to educate our child. We receive no funding or other support.

*(iii) Demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children*

Thomas is an Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning and a Senior Lecturer, at the University of Sydney. He has an undergraduate degree, PhD and a Graduate Certificate in Education.

Tamara is the primary carer and educator of our children. She has an undergraduate degree and PhD and is studying part-time for her third degree, in Health Science.

We both lived and worked overseas in professional roles, before returning to Australia to raise our children.

We chose to home educate our oldest child because we felt that there were no other options available to us that would not cause him extreme distress. In the year before he would have started school, we trialled a pre-school and found that he was overwhelmed by being with a large group of children and could not function. He also suffered extreme separation anxiety.

*(v) Characteristics and needs of home schooled children*

Our children are intelligent, curious, thoughtful and have interests that they are passionate about – from bird watching to film making. Our oldest child enthusiastically participates in Spanish classes, chess club, science classes and workshops and plays soccer with our local club.

However, he also has difficulties with sensory processing and integration and this has affected his social interactions (including severe separation anxiety), ability to sit still and concentrate and development of literacy, amongst other things.

By home educating, he is not constantly distracted and overwhelmed as he would be in a classroom; he can do physical activity when he needs to (which is important for self-regulation); work at a pace that he can manage; and we can support his learning so that difficulties with literacy do not hold him back in other areas. We have seen huge improvements in his social and emotional skills. We believe that if he was in school, he would be emotionally traumatised and academically performing below his current level.

Our younger child faces his own, different set of developmental challenges and we are glad to have the option of home schooling him instead of sending him to school next year. We do not believe that a school environment suits the emotional, social and learning needs of every child. We see home schooling as an essential option for these children.

*(vi) Comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education*

From our experiences of attending school, home schooling is very different from school education. We are able to be flexible and cater to our child's interests and needs. There are days where he wants to write stories rather than work on maths and, at home, he can. If certain skills take longer

to acquire, we can spend more time on them. We also have the flexibility to try different learning methods according to what works best for our child. We do not have class interruptions, so materials can be covered more quickly, leaving more time for children to pursue their own interests.

Home schooling also becomes part of an ongoing lifestyle, rather than confined to specific hours of the day. For example, family holidays are opportunities to learn about geography, history and culture. Learning becomes integrated into everyday life.

Home schooling is not confined to the home. Just like distance education, it can be done from any location. We also access many activities and resources outside the home, such as music, drama and sport classes, which are integral to covering the NSW syllabus.

*(c) Regulatory framework for home schooling including:*

*(i) Current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers*

We have registered twice for home schooling. We were fortunate to have friends who had been through the registration process with our authorised person (AP) and could guide us through the process. We feel that the registration process is not transparent; the BoSTES handbook does not realistically prepare parents for the process; and that awarding of registration is ultimately at the discretion of individual APs. Talking with other parents, requirements for registration vary between APs and some have made much more onerous demands than ours did.

*(iii) Adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses*

Our learning plan aims to meet the outcomes of the NSW syllabus. However, we do not believe that this is crucial to providing our children with a good education. We have worked and studied with very talented people from around the world who have been educated in diverse ways. We believe that the purpose of education is to learn how to learn and that a good education retains a child's love of learning and desire to engage in lifelong learning. We want to equip our children with the skills necessary to acquire the knowledge and skills they will need throughout their lives.

*(iv) Potential benefits or impediments to children's safety, welfare and wellbeing*

As we stated previously, we believe that if our oldest child was in school, he would be emotionally traumatised and academically performing below his current level. We do not believe that forcing reluctant children to separate from their families for many hours per day, most days of the week, is conducive to their mental or emotional health and we believe that this can negatively impact on learning.

We would also like to address the misconception that home educated children are vulnerable to abuse. This may be due to the misconception that home education only happens in the home and that children are socially isolated. Our oldest child participates in regular group activities most days of the week and is regularly seen by various health practitioners.

*(v) Appropriateness of the current regulatory regime and ways in which it could be improved*

The release of the latest *Registration for Home Schooling in NSW - Information Package* prompted our concerns that BoSTES is not supportive of home education and that there is not a clear understanding within the organisation of what home education is and how it is carried out. The pack states that home schooling must be carried out in the home; that content must be delivered by a parent; and places restrictions on travel during term time. This indicates a fundamental lack of understanding of what home education is. If enforced, these restrictions would limit the educational opportunities and resources available to our children.

Our concern is that the registration process that we have experienced has not been as onerous as the demands laid out in the information pack but that this could change at any time, based on the individual AP involved.

*(d) Support issues for home schooling families and barriers to accessing support.*

We would like to see more support available to home educating families. Currently, support is limited to that provided by other home educating families and our organisations. Ideally, our children would be able to access the resources that their public-school attending peers access. Access to programs such as Open High School and support programs for students with a disability should be available to all.

We would also prefer that the regulating body work in a supportive rather than just regulatory role.

We would like to see many more flexible education options available to all families. Some suggestions include:

- Part-time school – e.g., a class that runs for 3 hours per day; or access to specific programs such as music, sport or language classes;
- Semi-private classes in public schools – small classes (of no more than 10) that families could access for a fee;
- Classes where parents could attend with their children – for children with separation anxiety or who need additional learning support.

These could augment and support home education and provide access to school for a greater number of children.

*(e) Representation of home schoolers within Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BoSTES).*

We believe that any organisation that is involved in regulation of home education should consult with and have representation by members of the home educating community.

*(f) Any other related matter.*

Barriers to moving between school and home education should be removed. Currently, as soon as a child is enrolled in a school, registration for home schooling is lost; and if a child is enrolled in a school, their parents may not be able to remove them from school for three months, until registration for home schooling has been obtained. We would like to see this change so that children are not forced to remain in school during any transition period.

Yours Sincerely,

Tamara Shatar and Thomas Bishop.