

**Submission
No 39**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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To The Director
The Select Committee on Homeschooling

Legislative Council For Homeschooling Inquiry

Our family, which consists of three children aged 16, 14, and 12yrs, has home schooled now for 6 1/2 years. We are thankful for this opportunity to participate in the inquiry by this submission. Our main concern that we wish to express is about how difficult the registration process is for home schooling. We have other more minor concerns which we will address below. We will only comment on the terms of reference that we feel applicable to our family.

(b) (i) Our family enjoy home schooling and feel that we have had great success with it. We feel that we have been able to foster a love of learning, by following their interests and talents. We have also been able to instill in them a balance and holistic approach to life, that not only includes their family, but the wider community. We believe, from previous experiences with school, of our own and our children's, that school places too much emphasis on 'testing' and 'teaching to the test' instead of helping children learn about life in general, and how to live a productive life that ensures each person is committed to the their own family and their community.

(ii) For us the cost of education is irrelevant, but having said that, we have incurred a financial cost due to having only 1 income. We believe that that cost is worth it, that we have invested far more than finances into our children's lives; ourselves. Nothing is more beneficial in a child's life than having people involved in their lives, caring, loving and teaching them.

(iii) Both of us have tertiary education with bachelor degrees. We have 3 teenagers who were schooled in a small christian school for the beginning of their school life. We however were encouraged by what we witnessed from homeschooling families and thought that this kind of life and education for our children would produce the kind of people we wanted our children to become. It is proving to be everything we hoped for our children. We believe that God is sovereign in our lives, and wish to be able to show and teach this to our children in everything that we do. Homeschooling allows this to happen. We feel the school environment would not allow this to the extent that we would like.

(v) Home schooling allows us to tailor our children's education to their needs and talents. This we have found enables a quality education that allows our children to grow and understand their world.

(vi) Part of our schooling involves books. Books are a necessary and integral part of learning. But other parts of our homeschooling involve activities which are rich in content and experience, and allow for learning in context rather than learning for the sake of learning. These activities allow learning to be flexible and worthwhile. Some of our own activities are:- homeschool group where we meet up with other homeschooling families with children

from all ages participating in a variety of activities; church activities like youth group, bible study, music group; playing music at our local nursing home and conversing with its residents; music tuition at our local Conservatorium.

We view ourselves, as our children's parents, facilitators of their education. We have discovered that at a young age, we are their teachers, helping them to learn basic life skills, then as they learn and grow, we become their tutors, still guiding them through life. The final step in their education is we become co-learners, learning alongside them. This is where our family is up to, and this is an exciting part of our children's education! This is such a rich and privileged opportunity for us as parents, and we would not pass this up for anything!

One very important point we would like to make under this term of reference is how the BoSTES will not recognise extended travelling outside of the school holidays, implying that homeschooling can only be provided in the home. We have personal experience that this is a false view on education. We have travelled around various parts of Australia, on several occasions. Our children's learning experiences have been extensive, rich, and amazing. We travelled to WA for 8 weeks when our eldest was in Kindergarten. He knew, at 6yrs of age, all the states and their capitals of Australia - because he had been there! We also travelled around QLD for 3 months and travelled down the Murray River following Sturt's footsteps of his discoveries of Australia's inland river systems. We have many other travelling experiences as well. Can you imagine the wealth of knowledge our children now have of their own country and its history? We always use these trips to learn about the places and their history, geography, and people, including the Aborigines. Please do not think that education has to stay in the home. Please do not take away the chance for learning and knowledge to be experienced first hand. This kind of regulation will force families to go into hiding, and force them to restrict their children's education.

(c) (i) We wish to express our dissatisfaction with the current home schooling regulatory framework and registration process. We can see why many homeschoolers are not registered. We too wish sometimes that we were not registered, but that would go against our belief that we need to abide by the law of the land, as God's given authority. We feel there is not enough adequate consultation with homeschoolers. If there are no consultations with homeschoolers, how can our needs be known and met? This is why the regulation process for homeschooling is so arduous for us. The first problem with the process is the amount of time it takes to make an application. We have 3 children and each child's application needs copious amounts of paperwork, time to prepare according to the syllabus, and record keeping.

The second problem is the syllabus. To meet the syllabus requirements actually restricts homeschoolers. We will address this more in point (iii).

(ii) My experiences with APs has always been positive. We have enjoyed having the many that we have had visit us in our home. We have had many because we have moved several times, and as well have had 4 registration visits. My concern though is there seems to be inconsistencies between APs. I have friends, in my own region, who have had the same AP, and have had different experiences which have made the registration process for them difficult. This has happened since the 2013 Home schooling Information Package came out. We were concerned when the Q and A page was written on the BoSTES site, stating "For home schooling families who were meeting the requirements for registration prior to the publication of the updated Information Package, the clarified and more explicit information has not created a need to change the approach to home schooling. The requirements for

registration have not changed.” (from <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/home-schooling/home-schooling-info-qa.html>) This implies that those who are new to homeschooling will be required to follow a different process to what we follow. This seems the case in our region. For my friends in my region, the process differed amongst us according to which AP visited us. HEA also has many more complaints about the difficulty of the registration process since the new information package.

This too is an area where there is no consultation with homeschoolers. If APs could receive training from homeschoolers, it would help APs to understand the uniqueness of homeschooling, and gain personal experience about homeschooling. Therefore they would be able to support homeschoolers more.

(iii) We have an issue to the adherence that is needed by homeschoolers to the NSW syllabus. We believe that the NSW syllabus is a guide on what a child’s education may contain as a minimum. However, what we object to is the apparent narrow and restrictive interpretation of the syllabus in the homeschool environment. These restrictions extend to the adherence with the scope and sequence which prevents our children learning outside of that. The need to place children in “narrowly defined” grade stages unless particular permission is sought and granted, restricts them, stopping them from extending themselves. This also stops us from selecting curriculum that can meet our specific needs and desire to educate in certain ways. It can be quite a difficult process to try and fit certain curriculums into the NSW syllabus within the narrow confines of what is being applied. Is that to say that some curriculums are not worthy because they don’t fit the NSW syllabus exactly? It should not, particularly when the curriculum is working well for some children. We desire for our children to have the highest possible education that we can give them. We as our children’s parents know and understand them better than a syllabus and better than a board of people i.e. BoSTES. We do not want a government telling us to this degree, as adherence to the NSW syllabus requires, how to educate our children. We believe that we are doing the best by our children. Adhering to a narrowly defined school syllabus in a homeschooling environment just does not work. Homeschooling needs less restrictions, more freedom to allow education to happen.

At this point we would like to note that the NSW syllabus is a very difficult document to read and understand. Ironically, and somewhat disturbingly, our friends who are teachers (both public and private schools) complain of the same problem. In addition these teachers lament the amount of time it takes to comply with the record keeping. Their objection is the same as ours - let us teach our children rather than getting tied down by red tape and needless documentation.

(iv) We have been able to provide our children a well-balanced, caring and safe environment. We removed our children from their school in 2007 when we moved towns. We saw this as an opportunity to start to homeschool them. We did not register for about 6 months, so we were under the radar for a while. This was due to us being unsure of where we would live and what our life would entail. The requirements of registration to not remove children from their school until formal approval has been granted is not a good part of the registration process. It means that due to life’s circumstances, children could be forced to stay in situations that are not ideal. For us it meant that we did not follow the rules. Please consider changing that. Maybe an interim registration for special reasons, like re-settling of family could be considered. Sometimes people just need a little room to think while they gather themselves again.

(vi) We feel there needs to be a change in the registration process. We have already stated some of this in above points. But we would like to re-state some of them in view of this point of reference to make our point clear. We would like appropriate regulation to be in place. We agree that some regulation is needed to ensure that all NSW children receive a quality education and to ensure that there is no neglect or abuse of children. Other states have some good regulation processes in place. e.g. QLD has an interim registration for when an initial application is submitted. This is a good idea for those who are forced by life circumstances to remove their child from school. This would allow the family to follow the requirements without disobedience of those regulations while they gather themselves together. VIC has a statement of responsibility to homeschool. This idea allows for freedom to school to the needs of the child, not force the child's education into a syllabus and regime that may not work. TAS is regulated by a group that includes homeschoolers, with support being a part of that process. This would ensure that homeschoolers are understood and that they feel supported. It would particularly help new homeschoolers transition, allowing them to feel they can follow the registration process, and not be burdened by it.

Home visits every 2 years could still be performed to ensure that a quality education is being delivered to each child, and to ensure their well-being. Much less emphasis on record keeping, syllabus requirements, paper work, assessments and following the whole process similarly to the ways school do, would ensure a more appropriate regulations are in place.

(d) We feel that we do not necessarily need external support to educate our children. We receive enough support through our homeschool group, friends, family and church. However we would like to be able to receive resources such as Centrelink benefits for our children once they have reached 16yrs. We already have taken on a financial loss through having only one income available. We would like to receive the same benefits that other families who send their children to school receive through government support. We feel we are discriminated against in this way.

There is also a lack of support for new homeschoolers. We feel that new homeschoolers struggle with the current registration process because it is so arduous. Their ability to transition into homeschooling is greatly reduced because of the current registration process and the emphasis placed on following the NSW syllabus and its scope and sequence. People and their education needs are diverse; we don't need regulations that are so restrictive that those needs cannot be met. Support is needed for homeschoolers in this diversity.

(e) The variety of members represented on the BoSTES is very diverse. We are thankful for that diversity. But we feel the lack of a member on the board who represents homeschooling community is limiting that diversity. Homeschooling is becoming a significant part of our community numbers. A representative from the homeschooling community is necessary.

Thank you for this opportunity to express our views. Thank you to those also on the inquiry committee for taking the time and effort to research homeschooling and consider our opinions.

Regards
Ken and Cathy Newby