

Submission
No 272

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Both my husband and I wish to thank you for giving us the opportunity to express our thoughts and feelings in relation to home educating our children. We have been home schooling our four children in NSW since Kindergarten level and have gained many insights into the needs and requirements of growing children.

I would like to comment on the following terms of reference:

(a) the background of home schooling including comparison of practices with other jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand,

Although we have solely been registered in NSW we are aware of many and sometimes great differences in systems from NSW to other states of Australia and even New Zealand. The NSW system has become very onerous and overbearing whilst not providing any real benefit, nor indeed, support to NSW home-schooled students. The Authorised Persons (APs) who come into our private homes often have offered little in the way of understanding to the needs of our children. We home school for many reasons. Initially, one of the primary reasons was due to the high anxiety levels our eldest child displayed. Having to 'prove' ourselves year after year does not actually help our children progress.

The majority of Home Schooling parents are quite passionate about their children's achievements so the onerous proof that we need to provide to APs who know little to nothing about home schooling does not support the government's position of ensuring every child receives a quality education. This process has actually proven to be a great inhibitor to families who otherwise would be providing so much more for their children than school can (just by the very nature of home versus school). Other jurisdictions have provided support in the way of information, access to needed resources and even financially. NSW provides nothing.

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

(i) outcomes of home schooling including in relation to transition to further study and work,

Whilst my children have not finished their schooling as yet, they have many local, former home educated friends who have. These young people are all very well mannered, mature for their ages and well educated. Some have taken to sharing their skills with our children. They are a delight to be with and it is very encouraging to see their successes. They are fantastic role models for my children.

(ii) financial costs,

As any government would know, it costs substantial amounts of money to educate children in a full and well-balanced way. From when we decided to home school our children we have covered **all** the costs associated with providing our children a full and meaningful education. We work and pay much in the way of taxes, but do not receive any government support for our children's education compared to what schools are provided with (for each student).

The costs associated with music lessons, language lessons or even swimming lessons are all to be covered by us. These in particular, can be quite expensive yet whilst schools are providing these lessons (free of charge) to students, our children can be forced to miss out. Unfortunately, we cannot even be granted tax breaks (from the tax we pay) for the costs associated with home schooling.

(iii) demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children,

As mentioned we decided to home school from the start with our oldest child. This was due to a number of reasons, the main one being that even though we were trying preschool, at that time, it was quite evident that his needs were not being met – the teachers being constantly distracted by too many other, badly behaved children. I watched my bright and energetic child withdraw and express more and more anxiety in these settings which was severely impacting on his ability to learn anything. Whilst being home, he has been able to thrive and learn; achieving out comes in his time and not according to some artificial schedule. My other children have also shown the same.

Being able to learn at home without the stresses related to group lineal learning of the classroom means each of my children can learn at their own pace. With each child the subjects they need to take more time on versus the subjects they 'breeze' through varies. Home schooling allows them that opportunity – to gain a deeper understanding of a subject rather than just rote learning it to pass a test.

As my husband works in shifts, home schooling has enabled us to still be able to enjoy quality family time. There have been many studies done that prove the active involvement of both parents are paramount to healthy, well balanced children. Being flexible in when we school has meant that not only are we able to cover our learning requirements but we can also be a family as well.

I actually enjoy being with my children and assisting them (ie teaching) with their learning! As a family we are able to plan and execute a natural, wholesome learning program that includes experiencing, first hand, many unique experiences.

(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers,

Although we are registered ourselves there are many legitimate reasons why so many others are unregistered. As mentioned previously, registration in NSW is onerous and gives absolutely no benefits (or indeed support) to parents. Some families have been refused registration purely because they travel (either through lifestyle choice or due to work commitments). I have met many traveling families. The parents work and pay tax, yet are denied the opportunity to register! This does seem very discriminatory as traveling and learning are so interconnected that they cannot honestly be separated.

A registration system that is set up FOR the family's/children's benefit, that actually supports them, would have more parents involved in the system. As I mentioned there are families that tried to register but were refused. Work requirements still insist they travel so they are forced to be in a difficult situation through no fault of their own. I am still yet, to find an acceptable reason (from BOSTES) why discrimination against traveling families who seek to register is allowed. Support in the way of a less onerous system, access to resources, greater access to information and even financial support would all encourage so many more families to seek registration.

(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children,

As parents we decided to acknowledge our parental responsibilities with all the needs of our children. Health, education and social well-being could not be separated. If we had decided to leave our children in the school system, as mentioned previously, their health would have been adversely affected to the point of significant impact on their learning ability. Our children have been able to grow with their own individual needs being met in a non-competitive manner. We have been able to choose which excursions our children would need to further their learning and understanding of particular topics and present them in ways to maximize the benefit.

Schooling at home also means that dietary needs can be met without adversely affecting (or being affected by) other students. This aspect has far reaching consequences with the basic health needs of all our children.

(vi) comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education,

Home schooling gives us the opportunity to tailor a learning package to the needs of our children. No one will ever know my children as well as I do. The lessons presented to our children are addressed in way to best match their learning styles. Our children can be taught one-on-one or in a small group setting. As schools use a variety of resources – not all lessons are taught in the same classroom, so too with home educated children. Some

subjects are best learnt in a group setting (such as drama, team sports, music bands etc) and we need to be free to access these.

A balanced education is not just learning in the home, just as schools use more than one classroom. A quality education comes from being involved in the community, learning with and from others. When children leave 'school' they need to be able to navigate their local communities and be able to contribute to society in a meaningful way. If they have done this for most of their 'school life' they will have no problem with continuing this (as opposed to children who destroy and vandalises property because they have never learnt how to be a part of society).

With reference to socialization, a major difference between school and home school is the availability of people of all ages. Schools will group children together based solely on age. This is an unnatural way to learn. 'It takes a village to raise a child,' has been echoed from our forefathers and so true. Our children learn from people of all ages and should be able to spend time with people of different ages.

I, like most other home school parents, am passionate about my children's education and experiences. I actively look for new opportunities for them. These opportunities are not always in the home but can be just about anywhere. When learning about history, we visit museums; when learning about the oceans we might visit the Aquarium or even the Great Barrier Reef; when learning about other peoples or cultures, we seek to visit them. We can also make use of our many and varied friends and family to enhance our children's experiences.

We have had the opportunity to travel with extended family and visit world heritage rainforests and reefs. International travel has allowed our children to experience different cultures first hand. Each of these travels have become a valued part of our education and have provided more in learning than reading it all from a book ever could. Learning, of course, is so much more than what a child can read or write about in a book.

Distance Education does not facilitate traveling families. The requirement for an oversupply of books and computers is difficult enough with limited space but the constant need to post large volumes of work in and chase Post Offices to receive work back is both costly and difficult. Distance Education does not take into account location. Why study the deserts when visiting the Great Barrier Reef? Or why study Sydney's transport woes when in Alice Springs? First-hand information that is relevant to the child (ie – what the child is doing right now) avails far more learning than trying to simulate the scenario from a book.

For the best education to be offered to students of different backgrounds, parents need to be free to choose which system best suits their needs whether it be institutionalized school, distance education or home schooling.

(i) current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers,

The current registration process in NSW is not compassionate to the needs of students. The Authorised Persons (APs) who visit us are, by their own admissions, not educated about home schooling and therefore have little understanding of our needs. They like to speak in a language that is foreign to the general public ('edu speak') and does nothing to enhance or ensure a quality education is being provided for the students. These meetings are often overbearing and degrading by their very nature. The current process gives me no benefit whatsoever and only serves to provide a time of increased stress. Often the APs are surprised by what we have been able to do as they seem to have a very narrow view on education.

A system where a current or former home schooling parent visits (as is done in other states) would be far more supportive and encouraging. In this type of situation, real advice could be given. A system where, once registered, resources could be offered, including part time schooling (ie for classes that require more physical structure such as the sciences etc), access to the government schools swimming scheme and other supports (eg. music or language lessons) including financial. A registration process that took into consideration the particular needs of a family/student including travel, special needs, or indeed learning ability would demonstrate the NSW government is leading the way for the students in this state. A far more 'user friendly' service would have much higher rates of registration.

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

Home educating my children has provided them with a safe and secure environment for them to learn and grow. I have heard of so many experiences from friends whose children have been bullied and/or punished for things they didn't do. My husband and I have assisted friends' children who have encountered serious bullying in schools which ultimately led to one child having to leave the school system all together and another having to find a different school. Children under these circumstances can never learn and achieve to their full potential. School children are often under the pressure of their peers to conform to their standards instead of being able to live by the ethics and standards set by the family.

One of my children has a condition, that whilst it doesn't affect his learning ability, it does open him up to cruel abuse at the hands (mouths) of his peers. He was bullied whilst in programs with school children however none of his home school peers have ever caused

trouble for him. Bullying and abuse by other students does seriously affect a child's learning ability. All of my children have a strong network of home school friends that they are able to meet with regularly. These fellow home schooling students of different ages and their families support a structure of social development and growth within our children.

Our children are attending after school programs of their interest and are involved in the community under my supervision. Any parent that takes on this task of being responsible for their child's education is not going to take this on just to hide potential abuse in the home. Just because a child might be seen in school every day does not mean that they are not being abused in the home. I have had personal involvement with children who were abused in their homes by their parents – physically, emotionally and through neglect. These children attended school. Nothing was done to help these children when they needed it most. Attending school and seen by teachers/school community does not equal saving a child from a bad situation.

(vi) appropriateness of the current regulatory regime and ways in which it could be improved,

An appropriate regulatory system that actually sought to support and care for the needs of students would enhance the experience for all concerned. If parents could access programs or resources that they need to help their children learn they would be far more willing to be involved with the process. A system that provides for children rather than just control parents would be better received. At present the process is over bearing and provides no benefit to either the parent or the child.

(d) support issues for home schooling families and barriers to accessing support,

The punitive rules against home schooling children accessing support that is open to all other students is particularly disappointing. These children are being raised to be strong contributors to society and the community but have to do so without being afforded the same opportunities as other students. The opportunity to complete TVET courses, be involved in learn to swim programs, or even attend schools part time (to access otherwise expensive tuition such as languages) could greatly enhance a home schooled child's education. If programs such as TVET courses or even Hospital School are open to regular schooled children, why not home schooled children? There have been many home schooled children with special needs who have been excluded from helpful programs purely because they are home schooled (and despite the fact they really need these programs). I fail to understand why a home educated student should be excluded from otherwise standard opportunities?

Schools that can be allocated funding to support home educated parents could also be of great assistance. For them to be able to provide classes in subjects that may require a group of students or requires an expensive set up (such as sciences, woodwork/metalwork etc) would be a substantial improvement. These types of classes could work quite easily where teachers offer classes to groups of home school children. These classes would be different to regular school based classes in that there might be a slight age range (so include siblings from the same family – which in itself can be enough to reduce a child’s anxiety) or allow a parent to support their child in a particular class (this doesn’t disrupt the normal flow of a regular class but enable the children gain a knowledge and understanding in a subject they might otherwise miss out on). These types of classes can and do work.

(e) representation of home schoolers within Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BoSTES), and

If BoSTES are responsible for managing all education within NSW then shouldn’t **ALL** groups be represented on the Board? Home education is growing at a significant rate within NSW and Australia. The Authorised Persons have already made it quite clear they don’t know much about nor understand the particular issues that Home Schoolers face. Home schoolers need to be represented and heard. As parents we have taken on a significant undertaking and save schools and the government much in the way of particular needs and financially yet we have no say over what happens.

Conclusions

I am looking forward to a system in NSW that rivals the other Australian States in providing for the child. NSW can take the lead in this matter and provide a system that seeks to ensure children’s needs are met. In our democratic society the parents are and will always be responsible for ensuring their child is raised to the highest standards possible. Education is an important part of this and cannot be separated from other parental responsibilities. Supporting the parents in providing what is needed through an appropriate registration system that actually benefits the families that register would be the most positive step forward.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Kind regards