

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

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For the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Dear Inquiry Members,

I am writing to you regarding the current enquiry which is being held into home schooling in NSW. I myself was home schooled for a short 6 months during class 6 in primary school. These days I am currently in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year at the University of Newcastle, studying a Bachelor of Psychology. I also have a 12 year old brother who is currently home schooled by my mother, which is the primary reason for my submission.

When my brother was at school he was falling significantly behind in learning, a fact which his teacher certainly couldn't seem to help him with. However, under my mother's tutelage, since my brother began home schooling (over 5 years ago) he has progressed enormously, from not even being able to recognise the letters of the alphabet at the age of eight while at school, to being able to comprehensively read and write by the age of nine at home school, and now even to the point of being able to write short fictional stories of his own (despite having learning disabilities).

Bullying in school was also a significant issue which contributed to both me and my brother undertaking home schooling. There was simply inadequate supervision or the means to deal with bullying within our particular schooling environments. In contrast, bullying occurs very rarely within the home schooling community that my brother is part of.

My brother has also developed fantastic friendships with other children within the home schooling community, with kids of all ages, both genders, and all personality types – home schoolers seem to be a very diverse bunch, and the kids are all quite accepting of each other. The common concern that so many people have that children who are home schooled have insufficient social interaction (which may impede their social development), is, in my opinion, a myth. This is based on my experience, witnessing my brother over this last five years go from strength to strength in terms of social relationships with his peers.

I also wanted to share with you my thoughts on the changes to the registration process for home schooling in NSW. The registration process, which I have witnessed my Mum and brother go through three times, definitely now has far more stringent reporting and compliance criteria than before, which I know is in turn making it far more difficult for families to acquire registration (not to mention taking up an enormous amount of extra time, and drastically increasing parents stress levels). I believe there is evidence to prove this situation, which was

provided by the Minister for Education, due to a request made of him in Parliament. I take issue with these changes for several reasons:

Firstly, if my understanding is correct, the requirements for attaining home school registration from the board of studies are so stringent now, that even teachers in school environments are not required to meet the same level of compliance and recording of outcomes on a daily basis per student, that home schooling parents are required to do. Secondly, increasing the difficulty of registration to such a degree may act as a deterrent to parents registering their children at all, and deciding to operate outside of the margins, which seems to be the very opposite of what most people want, and I'm sure is the opposite of what the Board of Studies want. Thirdly, as my brother is absolutely adamant that he does not want to return to school, my mother says that she would actually move interstate in order to avoid further difficult, stressful and unreasonable registrations (and especially in order to avoid taking the chance of having her registration withdrawn) before ever sending my brother back to school.

If these unrealistic changes to registration are not curtailed and home schoolers are not given support and encouragement by this inquiry, it very well may result in people like my mother feeling they have no option but to move States in order to gain access to a fairer, more supportive registration process. Then my brother will still be educated at home, but it will mean that he and my mother will have to move away from family, friends and a supportive community, which has taken years to establish, they will have to start this process all over again, and it will drastically change their entire life.

It is my feeling that these changes to registration are possibly an attempt to deter ever larger numbers of parents from home schooling their children, and that these current changes look like a transparent attempt to crack down on a form of education the Board of Studies does not seem prepared to *educate* themselves about – pardon the pun! I of course, do believe that the Board of Studies must ensure that home schooled children are receiving adequate learning, but I question what gives the Board the right to control *how* parents educate their child? I would argue that their sole duty lies in making sure of the quality of a child's education, and assess that learning *is* taking place, rather than trying to determine what and how parents teach their kids, as well as applying needless bureaucratic standards of recording and compliance to home schoolers (which operate/teach in a much more organic, holistic way)

I would therefore advocate for scrapping the recent information package released by the Board of Studies, and instead, adopt ongoing consultation between the Board of Studies, the Department of Education and Home Education Australia, in order to facilitate a more improved outcome for home schooling in NSW, including the registration process itself.

Yours sincerely,  
Oliver Watkeys