

Submission
No 72

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Mrs Vanessa Buckland

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Partially Confidential

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Vanessa Buckland

For the Attention of, The Legislative Council Home Schooling Inquiry.

My name is Vanessa and I am an enthusiastic Home Educating mother of three beautiful boys, 10, 7 and 1. My husband is Operations Manager

We are a Christian family who love the Lord Jesus and are committed to providing our children with a high quality education, equipping them to reach their full potential.

We would first of all like to express our thanks for being able to participate in the inquiry. It is a great privilege to be part of a government who believes in a democratic process for all citizens and we greatly appreciate our opportunity to be heard.

As stipulated in The Education Act 1990, we strongly agree it is primarily the parents' responsibility to provide their children with a quality education and we are whole-heartedly endeavoring to achieve this outcome.

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

*(b) The current context of home schooling in New South Wales including:
(iii) Demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children,*

There are endless reasons why one would choose to homeschool their children, however some of ours include the following:

- Due to the nature of my husbands work responsibilities, his peak times are always mainstream school holidays, which would never allow him to enjoy family time with our children while they were on holidays. Home schooling allows us to be flexible to accommodate this.
- We are able to provide our children with an education that is tailored specifically to their needs, abilities and interests. Providing one on one attention. (I will expand on this further).
- We are able to nurture our children's natural desire to learn in a safe, non threatening, loving environment, one in which they have always been a part. To further build and strengthen those family bonds that are so important in growing confident adults and becoming valued members of society.
- We are then able to expand that environment when appropriate to explore and be involved within our local communities and beyond. To experience the wonderfully rich and diverse nature of other home educators and general members of the public. Whilst we may be

Christians we do not as some may think, hide our children away from the real world but rather they are socializing with a broad range of age groups, friends at mainstream school and those of differing World Views.

(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers, (C) (i) current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers and (iii) adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses and (e) representation of home schoolers within the BoSTES.

Whilst I can't speak personally as I am a registered home schooler, I can offer an opinion as to why they may choose not to register based on my last registration experience.

Leading up to my registration since the implementation of the new information package, there were changes made without proper consultation with the home schooling community, which made the process quite onerous on me and took far too much time away from actually educating my children.

The increased reporting and assessing measures are becoming arduous and do not seem to be concerned with the quality of my children's education or them as individuals, but the conformity to the syllabus in way of linking everything to specific outcomes. This I might add, can restrict our children to a particular stages when they could be advancing at a faster pace as understanding allows and conversely push them ahead before fully comprehending an outcome just because they are supposed to be able to, because of there age/stage level and thus not really learning anything. We should have the freedom to tailor our children's learning to fit not only their age, their whole person. To provide learning opportunities and experiences to support their needs, talents and interests, regardless of whether it's in the NSW syllabus.

I was concerned about feedback that certain APs were not very experienced with the multitude of ways children can be educated and had a tick the box attitude when it came to assessing the program and generally were not encouraging or supporting in their manner. This also led to my apprehension even though I knew we had a sound program outlined.

It would be desirable that the APs entering our home would have experience with home education and have a supportive attitude and approach to this legal and valid educational model.

This package restricts even where or how we can deliver our children's education and instead of being able to access professional classes outside the home we are being told this no longer will count towards our registration program. This seems to contradict the idea some have that our children are isolated at home and not socialized. When we are endeavoring to provide just that, accessing community learning groups and outside professionals as needs arise.

I just don't think there are any benefits that I can see to be registered under the current regulatory regime apart from to abide by the law, when ours and our children's rights seem to be being limited more and more and the whole process seems unnecessarily onerous and subject to individual APs opinion. They may not even have received proper training to assess effectively the program or specific learning needs of the children. I personally don't have a resistance to being registered, but I do believe there needs to be changes made to the overall

approach to and opinion of home schooling as a viable and worthwhile mode of education.

I believe one of many solutions to this, would be to have representation of the home schooling community on the BoSTES, of which we currently do not have any. I find this rather discriminatory as every other sector seems to be appropriately represented. I truly believe this can bridge the gap and debunk many suspicions and fears surrounding home schooling and the positive attributes it encompasses.

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

Whilst we personally are not requiring any of these at the moment I would like to think they would be available to those students that do need them now and in the future, as their government and private school peers do have access to, such as TVET courses, Open High School, sports/music programs, support programs for those with a disability and other such programs. I could see how part-time enrollments would be beneficial to access particular subject interests of children such as debating, cross country, etc., and even to support families that maybe experiencing a longer than expected illness.

(b) (ii) financial costs

Taking into account home schooling families are saving the government money by owning the responsibility of our children's education, I take offence at those who believe home schoolers are out to scam the welfare system. Considering we are losing an income to support this and paying taxes which ultimately help fund government schools, I think a little support, while maybe not desired by all, could only benefit our children in accessing materials and/or equipment otherwise beyond our means. This would be greatly appreciated and valued.

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

Firstly I would like to address the less than positive views expressed by some that home schooling children may be vulnerable to abuse because they are not being seen in school every day. Personally my children are out in the community most days, grocery shopping, park visits, beaches, art galleries, museums, walks, libraries, play groups, etc. interacting with the wider community at large. I think the suspicions that people may have would be quickly eased if we had a voice in the BoSTES as they would see faces, not assumptions and misconceptions. I think it is hurtful and discriminatory to label any group in this way. May I mention the increasing number of loving, concerned parents removing their children from the ever increasing, toxic environment of the school playground, in which bullying and sexual harassment appear rife?

The emotional wellbeing, welfare and safety of our children are paramount in our processes on a daily basis. Our children are in an environment filled with loving family, friends and members of the community, who encourage them to be all they were created to be.

On to the potential benefits of homeschooling of which I believe are numerous. We have so enjoyed taking this journey with our children, discovering their different ways of processing information and exploring their surroundings. I read somewhere once that "learning like breathing, happens all the time." I have experienced this many times with my own children. They are not limited to times in the day but are in a constant state of learning new things and cementing past experiences. Yes we have timetables and such, but we are not controlled by them. If there are interruptions to the program we adjust accordingly.

I believe our family bond is greater due to the increased time spent together as a family unit. I also haven't seen this hindering their ability to interact with others and detach from us but actually equips them to be emotionally confident and able to relate to others of varying ages because they have been cared for in this way. They have always been around a wider mix of people due to the nature of the home schooling environment, and they are not dependent on their same age peers but are increasingly able to communicate with all ages.

This bond is especially true of our sons in their brother relationship with one another. They are very close and spend a large portion of their day together in varying activities. This wouldn't be as easily achieved if they were in mainstream school as their age gap would have them separated for most of the day and then the school culture that I was familiar with didn't lend itself to playing with my sisters. That was far to "daggy". Please correct me if that has changed.

Of particular enjoyment to me as a mother is the excitement they display for their littlest brother who is just beginning to walk. They squeal and clap and encourage him in those precious moments and he beams back his happiness at his big brothers. More priceless bonding.

Or when my eldest had learnt to read, I would find him snuggled up with his little brother and teaching him the proper names of the vehicles in the book or the colours on the page etc.

I believe these relationships are crucial to the overall development of their characters and how they will be able to positively impact and contribute to society as adults.

Please ensure our children's right to a high quality education remains intact, and that our strong family unit continues to be strengthened through our choice to home school.

Thank you, so much again, for allowing me to share my thoughts with you in this inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

Vanessa