

**Submission  
No 193**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

**Name:** Ms Danielle Wheeler

**Date received:** 8/08/2014

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Danielle Wheeler

7th August 2014

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

I am a homeschooling parent of a 13 year old boy. We have been homeschooling since 2007 and registered with the NSW Board of Studies since 2008. I am making this submission based on my experiences as a homeschooler, and following conversations with several homeschooling families. I am a member of the NSW Greens and have a working relationship with Dr John Kaye, MLC.

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

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

(ii) financial costs,

Currently, all costs of homeschooling are born by the families involved. As registered homeschoolers, we are eligible for the School Kids Bonus of \$840 pa, but this may change under the Abbott Government. I use this money to pay for school books and external classes in subjects I do not feel able to teach or that include an important social component, such as music, gymnastics and drama. While I do not keep detailed financial records of our education expenses, I estimate that we spend approximately \$1700 each year above what we would spend if our son was in public education. This is not an unachievable amount, but it does put some strain on our household budget given that I no longer work outside the home because of my commitments as my son's teacher.

I am concerned that once my son turns 16, we will be unable to receive Family Tax Benefit or Youth Allowance because Centrelink does not deem homeschooled youth to be in full time education. This will make educating our son at home extremely difficult, and will adversely impact on the curriculum materials we can purchase and the outside activities he can attend. This matter could be easily rectified by the BoS informing Centrelink that registered homeschoolers are indeed in full time education.

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

We began homeschooling because of an ongoing problem with bullying at my son's school, and problems with his class teacher (our son attended a Steiner school: there is only class per year which stays with the same teacher for seven years). Our son attended school from preschool through term 2 of Year 2. When we removed him from school, aged 7, he was anxious, frequently ill and refused to go to school at all. It has taken many years for this anxiety to resolve. We now know that our son has mild dyspraxia which impairs his motor co-ordination and leads to some social difficulties.

We continue to homeschool because we believe it allows us to provide a very high quality education to our son. My husband and I have both completed degrees in science. We are all avid readers. We prize critical thinking and knowledge above sporting achievement. The flexibility of homeschooling allows our whole family to pursue our interests and make the best use of our limited time, while still spending time together.

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

We did not register for the first 9 months of homeschooling. I hesitated to contact the BoS because we were still finding our feet and working out what approach suited us best. When I did contact them, I found the AP very helpful and supportive and was surprised by feelings of validation the registration process gave me. We have now half way through our third two-year registration period. I know a few families who are unregistered. Most of them simply feel no need to register. Some have been frightened off by recent negative talk about the BoS.

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

Our son has mild dyspraxia. Social situations can result in anxiety. Sport can be humiliating and a source of bullying and ridicule. Homeschooling allows him to learn without social pressures. We belong to a fabulous homeschooling group, where each child is accepted as they are. Anti-social behaviour is quickly squashed. Several of the kids in our group have been victims of severe bullying at school. Its lovely to watch them relax and then shine in the safe environment homeschooling provides. Our son, once the class klutz, segregated because of his poor co-ordination, is now excited about doing gymnastics and trampolining.

Homeschooling allows for education tailor-made to the child's abilities. Our son is very good at reading, writing and language based activities. He is slower at spatial reasoning, especially geometry. I am able to spend more time on things he finds difficult, and accelerate him in other areas to prevent boredom. An education like this is a privilege. We attend weekly sport and drama lessons as a homeschool group. I run a weekly bookclub for the teenagers. The kids engage in discussions and debates, and are spending this term reading Shakespeare in a local park.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

(i) current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers,  
We have been through the registration process three times. I have always found the APs helpful and supportive of homeschooling, even to the point of articulating that homeschooling would be a big change for our family when we first began, and gently telling me to relax and lessen the book work. I don't put any more work into registration than I would do into planning my son's school work for the year. It helps me define our objectives and is a great opportunity to have an experienced educator come into our home and give advice on curricula, standards and record keeping. It also helps my son to see that someone outside our family takes his education very seriously.

We have only experienced one noticeable change: our second period of registration was completed by documentation. I understand that this option has been removed, which I applaud. I found registering by documentation very time consuming, and it lacked the personal input and advice of the AP, which I missed greatly. I did not notice any change to the registration process with the change to the National Curriculum.

(ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons,  
I have been visited by two APs over the last 6 years. Both are very experienced educators who support homeschooling. I found them really helpful and enjoyed their input.

(iii) adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses,  
I have no concerns about adherence to the NSW Syllabuses, although we do not follow them to the letter, particularly with respect to the timing of content teaching. We have added additional material to some courses, taught things in a different order, or delayed teaching of some things we felt our son was not ready for. We enjoy this flexibility. At no stage has an AP told us how or what to teach. I do find that the outcome statements are helpful in ensuring that our son keeps pace with this age group and could return to school if required.

(iv) potential benefits or impediments to children's safety, welfare and wellbeing,  
Homeschooling provides a safe place for children of all abilities to learn without negative social interference. Several of the children in our homeschooling group left school because of bullying, in some cases including physical and sexual assault. It is naive to believe that all schools are safe. In my experience, homeschooling parents work very hard to ensure that their children are given a good quality education and plenty of social opportunities. AP visits present one opportunity to assess families. It is a very long bow to link homeschooling with child abuse. Schools are only one form of community oversight, and many child victims of abuse attend school without that abuse being detected.

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

I have no concerns with the current system of regulation. It is not time consuming and provides a good incentive for me to organise our school year. I do no more planning for the AP than I would for my own peace of mind. As an experienced homeschooler, I find one visit every two years adequate, but I would be happy to have a visit annually.

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

As our son gets older, it would be great to be able to access VET courses, OTEN, and other supports available to public and private school children. Part-time schooling, as offered in Victoria, would be helpful. I'm not sure that the BoS makes it clear to all homeschoolers that they can ring their AP for advice on curriculum matters.

As a homeschooling parent of a bright teenager, I am dismayed by the dismantling of TAFE. For children who have had bad experiences in mainstream schooling, TAFE provides a lifeline. Excluding children under 17, and the erosion of the Tertiary Preparation Certificate are huge blows to homeschoolers and their kids. Increased fees makes TAFE impossible for many single income homeschooling families. TAFE is a vital pathway to further study. I wish the homeschooling community would spend more energy trying to save TAFE and less railing against the BoS.

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

It would be a great show of faith if the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards included an experienced homeschooling parent.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry. Please contact me if you would like further information.

Yours sincerely,

Danielle Wheeler