

Submission
No 236

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

6th August, 2014

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

We would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a contribution to the Home Schooling Inquiry.

We would like to comment on the following terms of reference for the Inquiry into Homeschooling:

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

My husband and I are both former teachers in NSW Government Primary Schools.

At the end of 2008 our son was in Year 2 at our local primary school. We were acutely aware that a gap had begun to develop in his academic performance as compared with that of his peers. He was not reading at all well, had difficulty understanding instructions due to hearing loss in both ears, and was not ready in any way to proceed to Year 3. He was falling behind and we were unable to access any extra help for him at the school. His needs were not severe enough for him to receive additional help. We were desperately concerned that if he progressed to Year 3 he was going to “fall through the cracks”, and that the gap we had already identified would grow until it would be impossible to fill.

We were unprepared to allow this to happen, and decided to withdraw him from school and home educate. Home education gave us the opportunity to allow him more time: time to fill in the gaps in his learning, time for him to practise skills, time to mature emotionally and socially, and most of all, time to develop at his own pace rather than at a pace determined solely by his age and grade level. Had he remained at school he would have been churned through to the next grade at the end of every year regardless of whether he had met the outcomes for that grade or not.

He was supposed to begin Year 7 in 2013, but we knew he was not academically ready for Year 7 at that point. With the agreement of our Authorised Person (AP) we decided to give him another twelve months of primary education – not to “repeat” as such – but again allow **more time** to develop the skills he would need to tackle High School. He is now enrolled in a school having commenced Year 7 this year. He has achieved excellent results in his first semester’s report, and we are certain that our decision to home educate has been vindicated.

School education must provide a “one size fits all” model simply because of the way that it is structured. It is built around educating many children of many different abilities all at once. It is inevitable that some children will miss out due to special needs, maturational differences, or simply being lost in the crowd. We were not prepared to stand by and watch that happen to our son. As is stated in the Education Act (1990) we are responsible for our child’s education, and we took that responsibility very seriously, and at great personal cost.

Our daughter began Kindergarten in 2008. In a matter of weeks our bright, happy, confident daughter turned into a frightened, miserable, clingy little girl who wouldn't let us out of her sight. To say that we were shocked would be an understatement. Our daughter was fine in the classroom, loved her teacher, and got on well with her classmates. The playground however was a different matter. She found the politics of the playground – even in Kindergarten – incomprehensible and frightening. Even at 5 there were instances of children excluding others for the most spurious of reasons. The rough and tumble play of the playground left her feeling scared and vulnerable. She cried on the way to school every morning for an entire year.

We decided to home educate her alongside her brother. We couldn't, in all conscience, continue to subject our child to the anxiety and fear that school had created. I had planned to start on Year 1 level work, but realised within a matter of days that she really hadn't learned very much in Kindergarten. She was so fearful and upset all the time that it rendered her unable to learn. Instead of being able to start a Year 1 curriculum, I had to go back to the beginning of Kindergarten, especially for reading. Within 6 months our daughter went from having to sound out the most basic words to reading entire books independently. Within 12 months she was reading novels intended for 11 and 12 year olds, and she was only 7. By the time she was 9 she was beginning to write her own novels for pleasure.

It took almost two full years to undo the damage that school did to our precious daughter. It took two years for her to regain her confidence, and her joy in life – the joy that we saw extinguished in less than a term at school. We were both primary teachers, having taught countless numbers of children, and had no idea that there are some children who are just not suited for school.

Now at the age of 11 our child is bright, happy, and confident again. We have a child who happily leaves us to participate in activities away from the family. She has a couple of “best friends”, and a group of other girls with whom she loves to spend time. Everyone who meets her comments on how engaging and social she is. Our daughter is making excellent progress academically and is thriving in a home education environment.

We chose to home educate both children for vastly different reasons. In both cases it was absolutely the right decision. We are grateful that home education is an option for families such as ours.

Thank you for the opportunity of sharing our story with the Committee. For us, the ability to take on the responsibility for our children’s education was essential for their health and well being. We are grateful for that, and would like to see it continue for others who may be in the same or similar position.

6th August, 2014

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

We would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity of making a contribution to the Inquiry.

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

(ii) financial costs,

Our decision to home educate has cost our family a minimum of \$400000 over the past 5 years. In order to home educate one of us had to relinquish their \$80,000pa job. That makes home education one of the most expensive forms of education that exists. It was not a decision that we took lightly, nor on a whim. We believed when we started, and we still believe, that it was in the best interests of both our children to withdraw them from school and home educate.

We still home educate via Distance Education. Due to the changes mooted in the 2014 Federal Budget, the two forms of financial assistance that we currently receive (Family Tax Benefit Part B and the Schoolkids Bonus) will end. This will make a significant difference to our family's financial situation. It will not change our decision to continue to pursue Distance Education for our children.

Their needs are far more important than the bottom line on our bank statement.

There is no financial advantage whatever to home education. Financially there is only disadvantage by the time a job is relinquished, and thousands of dollars are spent on educational books, resources, and curricula. Yet, parents continue to home educate. Why?

That is the question that must be asked above all others. Why do something which is going to affect your family not just now but in years to come, given that no job means no superannuation either.

Why? Because it was the best possible decision we could make for our children. That's why.