

**Submission
No 240**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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Date received: 8/08/2014

Home Schooling Inquiry Submission

Summary

This submission has been prepared by Jason and Jodie Faulks. It attempts to respond to the issues and questions raised in the terms of reference document concerned with the inquiry into home schooling. The numbering of these has been retained to make reading easier, and the sections are labelled accordingly.

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A. The background of home schooling including comparison of practices with other jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand

A brief consideration of the available literature appears to identify NSW as the most restrictive and overly bureaucratic legislature in terms of its approach to the administration and oversight of home schooling. In particular, the NSW regime seems inclined to turn home schooling into “public school at home”, effectively limiting students to the one-size-fits-all curriculum that BoSTES has designed for all students, rather than the customised, individually-focussed curriculum that the home-schooling parent can deliver.

It is interesting to note that in NSW the Education Act attempts to set a standard for the state to provide an education of the highest quality. Leaving aside the difficulties of providing education to a generation who will work in occupations that have not even been thought of yet, what does an education of the “highest quality” look like? First it requires a teacher of utmost dedication, someone who deeply cares about his or her students, is constantly present and who is always taking opportunities to promote learning. Second, it requires a plan for learning that is totally customised to the needs of the student, including the subject material, the pacing and the levels of achievement. Third, it requires the student to have a love of learning, a deep engagement with the process and a belief in its value. It is no coincidence that this description accurately matches home schooling.

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

There is a large amount of research done in the USA and Europe looking at outcomes of home schooling. The results consistently show that home schoolers out-perform their peers in academics, social abilities and in commitment to community service. Any review of the available research on this subject quickly reveals that there is no overall or systemic problem with the quality of the education home schooled students receive.

- ii. financial costs

As has probably been described in many other submissions, home schooling parents pay a high price to choose this path. Apart from the cost of materials, home schooling families are usually restricted to a single income. There is no financial incentive for home schooling, given the complete lack of any form of assistance, unlike other jurisdictions (New Zealand for example). Clearly these families are dedicated to the education of their children.

iii. demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children

As parents who home school our children, we want to say that we do it not because it is easier or cheaper, but because we believe it to be the best option for our children and our family. We want our children to do well. We want them to value people, relationships and learning. We want them to learn how to show respect for others and how to be responsible. We wish to be beside them, coaching them on how to deal with difficult situations and people. We want them to take responsibility for their own learning and work out what motivates them and what they are passionate about. We identify what encourages them and inspires them and we create an environment that will propel them into their future full of purpose and determination to make a difference.

While there is no doubt research available on why parents choose to home school, in our case we took this option because of a strong belief that it provided the best outcome for our children, not just in their academic education, but also in their social and community education as well.

iv. extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers

All our children are registered, even under the current demanding scheme. We cannot state with any authority the extent of unregistered students, however we do understand why parents might choose to avoid the registration process. As home schoolers we are committed to our children and family and we have to make choices daily as to what activities benefit our family. Registration does not benefit our family because it is not designed to. Registration is not designed to find our areas of struggle and support us. It is designed to show someone totally unrelated to our

family and community that we are meeting outcomes designed by them not us. Filling in paperwork about what we do does not help us do what we want to be doing and that is spending time with our children, teaching and supporting them in their endeavours.

It seems amazing to us that there is any mystery as to why the home schooling community has not embraced this process - they are high-level stakeholders but have no ownership. It has not been designed to benefit students and their teachers.

v. characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children

Our children's needs are not different from other children. Our children like all others need love and security and attachment to their caregivers. They need a safe environment in which to learn. We believe that home schooling provides the ideal environment in which to foster strong positive relationships.

vi. comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education

Home schooling parents recognise that they know their children best and wish to individualise a learning program and environment that best meets their children's needs and abilities. There are usually a small number of children at home and thus the teacher to student ratio is excellent and this allows for very individual and specialised programs. We are not limited by government budgets and resourcing, we are limited by our own budgets and creativity.

Again, one of the main advantages of home schooling is the opportunity to customise the curriculum of the student. This is not an option for a public school education system clearly limited by available funds – it must pursue a more generalised program which by definition cannot meet the needs of all students to the same extent.

C. Regulatory framework for home schooling including:

- i. current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers

The current registration process is onerous and requires adherence to someone else's idea of what our children should know. It is our belief that the process discourages registration. It is based on a lack of trust and a belief that the state knows better than the parent. The more onerous it becomes the fewer people will register. The process does not benefit parents or children.

In order to promote registration, the process needs to offer more to the home schooling parents and students. This could take a number of forms:

- a. Financial – the government of New Zealand offers financial incentives to assist home schooling. It is interesting to note that of all school-age students in NSW, only home schoolers receive no government funding or assistance of any kind, notwithstanding Centrelink benefits available to all.
 - b. Professional – many authorised persons only interact with home schoolers in an apparent audit capacity and don't appear to have a mandate to offer support in terms of advice or assistance with material or individual student challenges. A service like this could encourage registration.
 - c. Involvement – home schooled students are effectively shut out of participation in the public education system, including in-school and extra-curricular activities. Permission to take part in some public education activities could be another incentive to register.
- ii. training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons

We are very fortunate at present to have an authorised person who takes an interest in the families who home school and has recognised the many benefits home schooling brings. The authorised person needs to understand that home schooling does not mean making the home into a mini school environment. In many cases learning happens in a very natural style and does not require sitting at a desk, filling in worksheets. It is important to understand the many ways in which people learn and that the school system is set up very differently from the home. Ideally the qualified person should have a strong desire to see children thriving and thus have the task of assisting parents in their endeavours rather than measuring if they meet the outcomes the BoSTES has decided upon.

iii. adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses

As stated earlier the NSW syllabus is not designed for our children and their individual learning needs. It is a general approach as dictated by the economic realities of educating over one million school-aged students between the hours of nine and three during the days of the working week while their parents are participating in the workforce. It seems strange that a group of dedicated parents who are willing to handcraft a plan for the education of their own children would be forced to adhere to such an approach.

The syllabus does not guarantee success. Unfortunately there are many, many children who leave government schools unable to meet the prescribed outcomes of the BoSTES syllabuses. Many of these students are enrolled in schools but are disengaged or simply don't attend, and the state seems unwilling or unable to address this. There are an appalling number of people who emerge from a public education unable to read and write, only to face a highly competitive job seeker environment in which they will struggle. Their teachers were professionals and were required to deliver the NSW syllabus; clearly this is not the determinant of educational outcomes. We believe that the research shows that home schoolers are high achievers and well socialised, productive members of society. The NSW syllabus can be an excellent guideline, but should not be insisted upon as the standard for parents that are so wholly committed to their children's education as to take it on themselves by home schooling.

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

Children benefit from time spent with their parents and extended family. They benefit from their most precious people taking an interest in what they are learning. They benefit from a safe, quiet environment in which to process the events of the day with someone who was present for all of it. They benefit from participating in family activities and having responsibilities. The benefits of being at home while young are so numerous as to be immeasurable. Families are so torn in our country

with the requirements of school time, homework and after school activities that the relationships are suffering.

Home schooling can be a huge benefit to our children's welfare as the opportunity to develop strong relationships with family members are so much greater than for those children who are away from family for many hours every day. Our goals are full of people who were unable to have strong positive relationships with the adults in their lives when they were children. Home schooling provides the ideal nurturing environment for children to develop the attachments they need in order to function well in the world as adults.

This item seems to suggest there might be a danger to children in their own homes and in the care of their own parents. While for a heartbreaking minority this might be the case it is not the domain of home schooling any more so than for any others. Quite the opposite in fact – we are talking about a group of people dedicated to their children and their education.

- v. appropriateness of the current regulatory regime and ways in which it could be improved

In our opinion the current regulation is the product of fear and a creeping distrust of home schooling. It is not designed to support home schooling; rather it is in opposition to this option. It would be wonderful if it could be set up to encourage and support home schooling, and make it easier for parents to choose this option. We are not taking resources away from students in the school system. In fact we cost the government a whole lot less than if we place our children into school, and we contend that our society gets well-educated, well-adjusted young people who are concerned with the welfare of others.

D. Support issues for home schooling families and barriers to accessing support

E. Representation of home schoolers within Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BoSTES)

It is frankly ridiculous that BoSTES is in a position of authority over home schooling in NSW yet home schoolers are not afforded representation on the board. This is a NSW government agency that does not accurately represent all constituent groups and this should be remedied.

F. Any other related matter

Parenting is a challenging vocation and home schooling is an extension of that. Please recognise that families who take on this huge task of educating their children are totally committed to seeing their children flourish. When you are a home schooling parent you have no one except yourself to blame when things don't go well - these parents are highly motivated and conscientious people. Please support us and don't make our task harder.

Finally, the committee of this inquiry is invited to contact us further for more information as required. We would be proud to introduce you to our children (ages 16, 15, 13, 11 and 7) and for you to see for yourself the quality of these young people.