

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

**Name:** Ms Cathy Choo

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Cathy Choo

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Thank you for the opportunity to comment regarding the inquiry into homeschooling. My husband and I currently homeschool with our 7 year old daughter, in Victoria. We also have a 2 year old son.

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

*(a) the background of home schooling including comparison of practices with other jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand,*

We are very happy with the registration requirements and the law regarding homeschooling in Victoria. We have found the requirements to be supportive of a broad range of approaches, which means we can maximize the benefits and learning for our daughter.

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

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

Although we are not in NSW, my husband has a doctoral degree in clinical health psychology, and I have a doctoral degree in clinical psychology. We have both worked professionally as psychologists. We homeschool our daughter because of the benefits to her learning and her well-being. These benefits would be reduced, perhaps considerably, if we were required to do school-at-home, follow a curriculum, or if much stress were placed on our family related to registration requirements.

*(iii) adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses,*

This week my daughter was interested in experimenting with acids, bases, and an indicator solution. I'm pretty sure that isn't in the Victorian curriculum for grade 1. Many times we have discussed atoms, evolution, electricity, because she was interested and asking. Bringing it up at other times wouldn't have been as helpful. This morning she set up a 'doll making shop' and made dolls and houses, and now she is explaining in detail, as part of game she made up, how each person makes things differently even when given the same things to use. I doubt she would be as interested and engaged in those things if she had done it because I or someone else planned it, rather than because she was interested right then and chose to. Trying to put her learning on a schedule – other than hers – would be less helpful to her learning.

Unschooling, as we do, is very efficient, because there is no effort wasted trying to get someone to learn something they are not currently interested in (Julie Daniel, 2013, an expert in efficiency, <http://sandraddodd.com/hsc/interviews/julie.html>). If we were required to follow a syllabus, it would hinder our daughter's learning. The options for learning are considerably more flexible in homeschooling rather than in school. The limits of school shouldn't become the limits of homeschooling!

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

I've submitted this to HOVA with my name attached, but I will repeat it here:

#### Social and emotional benefits of homeschooling for our daughter

Adults, usually strangers, regularly comment that my 7 year old daughter is very social. They say it with a smile, after she comes up and introduces herself and asks them something about what they are doing. She likes babies and young kids, and often coos and chats and does silly things to make little children laugh. She likes kids her own age too, and older. It's not that she's extroverted - she's a bit introverted if anything, like me and my husband. But she has a sweet, joyful life with many chances to chat to people in all sorts of situations, and to observe me and my husband, and others, doing so. Many (most?) kids have reason to be wary of adults, so my daughter's casual confidence is unusual.

Last year we spent a few hours visiting a real operational farm that is open to visitors (they do tours, and talk, and so on - the wife used to be a teacher). At the end of our visit, the wife commented, in an impressed sort of way, that my daughter was very mature for her age, and that we were welcome to visit anytime. My daughter had been patient during various parts of the tour, and had voluntarily helped with a few things, and had followed requests cheerfully without complaint. The other two kids on the tour (not ours), both older, had not helped, nor done what they were asked to repeatedly. Because we unschool, my daughter has many choices about what she does and how, and plenty of help, so she doesn't mind helping or waiting.

Some of the maturity is because she is with me or my husband in so many situations, and she gets to observe how we handle different things that come up - different expectations of behaviour in different situations, or if someone is ill, or needs help, or is unreliable, ... subtle things in how and why to communicate and act in different situations. She shows subtlety, in how she handles some things. She gets many more opportunities because we homeschool and are together more. And because we unschool, she is interested and wants to understand what happened and why. She asks.

A few months ago we visited Sovereign Hill - the historical gold mining tourist attraction - and happened to be at the theatre while the actors began a dress rehearsal for a play for the coming holidays. My daughter sat in the front row and participated with joy! It was a pantomime, where the audience were encouraged to boo,

cheer, or tell the actors where the other was hiding, and so on. My daughter did so with lots of enthusiasm, she was so into it and loving it! I was concerned she might be responding too much (maybe distracting the actors, or taking a little too long by answering fully or repeatedly), so I came up to where she was (I was in the back with our toddler) and whispered to be quieter. But the director, who was close by, said clearly, looking me in the eye, that she was fine. A group of 20 or more school kids came in and watched the last 20 or so minutes, maybe longer. They didn't participate at all. They just sat there. When it was over - it had been about an hour - the director came up to me and said, again looking directly in my eyes, "She's fantastic." He really wanted me to know. School groups come through daily, and the play was planned for the holidays when it would be even busier with families, but I guess real, joyful, enthusiasm, shared, isn't something he sees often.

It isn't just her personality. There have been times - not many - when there were many more frustrations in her life, and less help, and she was at those times irritable and unhelpful. Unschooling well has brought so much peace and well being to her. My mum, who was a primary school teacher for many years, said a year ago, "She is just so happy, isn't she." In a wondering kind of way.

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

The current regulatory regime in Victoria means that we can focus our time and energy on our children and their learning. A more invasive regulatory regime, such as is currently in NSW, would worsen our homeschooling due to stress and time spent on preparing evidence for regulatory checks rather than preparing resources for our children. We homeschool because it leads to such wonderful, joyful, wellbeing and learning for our daughter, with in-depth understanding, and learning that is meaningful and useful to her, so reducing the quality of that would be very concerning for us.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment regarding the homeschooling inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Cathy Choo