

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 6/08/2014

Partially Confidential

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Homeschooling is a viable educational pathway of the future, which will continue to gain popularity by a portion of Australians. We would do well to prepare to support this option by forming a governing body which can embrace and facilitate (rather than try to deny and reject) home education!

1. (a) The background of home schooling including comparison of practices with other jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand ..

Home schooling has been around for as long as life has existed. It has been the traditional means of learning for thousands of years. The school model is relatively new. We have looked at other models of practice for home schooling in other States of Australia as well as New Zealand and have been encouraged at how effective the Tasmanian model is. The New Zealand model has been full circle and discovered that facilitation rather than regulation is most beneficial to the children. The NSW model is the most restrictive and oppressive of all Australian states. The effectiveness of the Tasmanian model is mostly due to fact that the overseeing body is separate to the governing body for schools and understands the inherent uniqueness of home education.

(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

Our two eldest children have made an extremely easy and smooth transition from home schooling into higher education and work life! One has finished her Bachelor degree in Music and is now teaching music both in school and in her home. She also has prominent leadership and mentoring roles in her community, has great relationships with her family and her social network. Our son who is 20 is enjoying his second year at University where he is excelling academically. He is such an outstanding young man with a vibrant personality that people often take notice and comment on his friendliness and leadership abilities. He also works part-time while at uni, mostly in the building trade.

(ii) financial costs

While financially home schooling has cost us greatly, statistics show that we have saved the State a great deal of money for each child. We have willingly and ungrudgingly taken this responsibility on ourselves. The biggest cost to us has been the loss of one full-time income. We estimate other costs to have been similar to private school tuition (for books, excursions, lessons, sports coaching). We do not desire to be financially compensated.

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

We never would have considered ourselves the home schooling “type”. We “fell” into home schooling while we were travelling the world – not wishing our children to fall behind. We soon discovered that we loved being with our children on a full-time basis and learning together through our experiences as well as through curriculum. We saw the benefit our children were gaining by personal “tutoring” and the bond they were gaining with each other and us. We also saw the skills they were able to gain in and around the home by not being absent from it all day. These skills have benefitted them greatly as they have transitioned into their own homes! For example: As a Financial Planner, my husband was able to teach them how to budget, save, make wise investments, do their tax returns, etc.

(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers

It's the old story of the wind and the sun arguing as to who could better remove the old man's coat. The wind insisted he could blow hard enough to take the man's coat off, but the man only wrapped it more snugly around himself....

I believe there could be as many unregistered homeschoolers as registered ones. There are many reasons for this, but the main reason is definitely the lack of trust that the public has for the BoSTES and their motives, as well as the march they are making towards more and more red tape. They are perceived to be about politics not education! Even many school teachers I know would love an opportunity to speak out about the evils of the BoSTES without the fear of losing their jobs. Since the 1998 clash with homeschoolers, they have been proven to be untrustworthy, underhanded, and bureaucratic. They say they are only interested in the children, at the same time making decisions that hurt rather than benefit the children.

In a typical support group of homeschoolers it is impossible to tell which are registered and which are not registered. They are always a group of very involved and concerned parents regardless of being registered or not.

The best possible way to increase registration in NSW is to form a separate body (perhaps made up of teachers, child physiologists, pediatricians, experienced home educators) not the BoSTES. A group who will facilitate, advise and encourage appropriate regulation. (Not many people are opposed to those they know they can trust and who genuinely have their best interests at heart.)

(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children

My eldest child started out at an excellent private school. It soon became evident that she was not being challenged by the teaching, but was waiting for the slower learners to understand instructions and information. When she started homeschooling she was able to go at a much faster pace and also delve more deeply into areas she was really interested in.

(vi) comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education

Just as learning in school is not restricted to the classroom, so learning at home is not restricted to text books or to the home. (The BoSTES 2013 new Information Pack is trying to force homeschoolers to be in their homes from 9-3 presuming this is the only legitimate way to learn! We reject this imposed model as oppressive and damaging to children.)

We all learn by many varied means, including experiencing, reading, hearing, doing, etc. Home-schoolers often utilize many avenues to learn, realizing that text book learning is limiting. Often, homeschooled children have opportunities to help in community or family projects during the day that teach them in a much more practical way, something which they may otherwise have had to learn only theoretically. My children were able to occasionally help in our small family business from a very young age, which they loved. This taught them so many skills, including telephone skills, computer skills, people skills, counting skills, etc.

(c) Regulatory framework for home schooling including:

(i) current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers

Any registration process should be beneficial, helpful and supportive of home education and its uniqueness. Registration should not require homeschoolers to conform to a school model. Requirements for registration should be made by a body of home educators, who may also be teachers, doctors, psychiatrists, or other helpful professions.

(ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons

I do not believe in the need for authorized persons as they exist at the moment (appointed by the BoSTES with very minimal understanding of home education, and complete lack of uniformity in their evaluation).

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

The NSW syllabus may be one example of a quality education but does not encompass all possible quality educations that exist in the world. A small amount of research on the internet will reveal a world of choice available to homeschoolers which may not be possible for the school system to incorporate. Therefore home educators should be free to utilize such resources and not be limited by the NSW syllabus.

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

I think there is a major benefit with home schooling to most children's mental health, especially. The increase of depression in young people in Australia today has sky-rocketed. Much of this is due to the stress of things associated with school, such as peer pressure, academic pressure (HSC), and lack of self-direction or self-regulation. Homeschoolers generally grow up with more autonomy which gives them a sense that they have more control of their own lives, choices and destinies. Homeschoolers also tend to spend more time in the real world doing real things which they will continue to do once their formal education years are finished, so the transition to adult life is much less of a shock. All these things contribute to mental stability and mental health.

Because home educators are taking on the responsibility of teaching their own children, they most often form support networks where they can get help, advice, encouragement and mentoring from other home educators. They often enter this serious undertaking with fear and trembling, knowing that they can only blame themselves for any failure, rather than being able to blame a school, or teacher. Their friends and families are watching them to see if they will "succeed". The pressure is on! This ensures that home educators very often become extremely diligent in taking care of the fine detail of their children's education, health and over all wellbeing!

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

It is appropriate for our government to be concerned for the welfare of all Australian children. Our aim should always be to facilitate helpful ways for families and individuals to flourish, learn and grow. History has taught us that government taking over the responsibility of children from their parents does not work and is in fact detrimental. Parents naturally have the most responsibility, interest and care for their own children. If the State can help and support parents in their job of raising their children then everyone will benefit. When considering other jurisdictions in Australia, I believe that NSW is behind compared to almost every other state. Tasmania, Victoria and the ACT have much better systems of regulation. In the e-brief on the NSW Parliament website "Home Educations in NSW" by Talina Drabsch, #6 says, "The Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC) is an independent advisory council, responsible to the Minister for Education, but separate to the Department of Education. It advises the Minister and the general public on matters pertaining to home education and is also responsible for the registration process and monitoring of individual home education programs. Whilst it is the responsibility of the parents to devise, implement and evaluate the program used, THEAC assists the process by providing information on where to access programs, books about home education and through information sessions. Home schooled students in Tasmania are not required to follow the National Curriculum."

She also shows the ACT regulations sum up with these helpful points:

“Home education is to be committed to:

-Offering a broad range of opportunities that foster in each child the development of the child’s unique spiritual, emotional, physical, social and intellectual being.

- Valuing the individual needs, interests and aptitudes of each child.

Preparing each child to become an independent and effective local and global citizen.”

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

The BoSTES is not really showing that they have the best interests of the child in mind when they have excluded homeschooled children from any and all support programs which are available to any other child in any other situation in NSW. They have stated that their concern about registration of homeschoolers in NSW is for their safety and well-being; yet do not offer them the same support systems that would make them “more visible” by the public. By offering TVET, Open High School, School Sports Programs, Hospital School Programs, TAFE, etc. the government would be better able to observe and incorporate homeschoolers into the mainstream.

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

The basic minimum requirement should have been for BoSTES to have a member representing home education on their board, just as they have a member representing every other area of education!

However, moving forward it would be much better to adopt a system separate to the BoSTES, such as in Tasmania, to regulate home education. This could be a body able to accept and embrace the future growth and popularity of home education, rather than trying to deny it.