

**Submission  
No 181**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

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*Partially Confidential*

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The Director, Select Committee on Home Schooling  
Parliament House, Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000  
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Dear Sir or Madam

I would like to provide a submission to the Select Committee's Inquiry into home-schooling:

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

We should not necessarily copy what other jurisdictions do, but should rationally consider what is best for the children of NSW.

The paramount issues are the welfare of children and the rights of parents to bring up their children according to their own conscience and values without excessive State interference.

**(The background of this author:**

I provide background so that my strong opinions expressed below can be seen in context as coming from somebody who has had wide experiences in a diversity of educational environments, having attended 7 schools in England and Australia.

Born in Melbourne, I attended schools in England from age 5 to age 13, in two Government primary schools, and in two prestigious boarding schools. My final three years in England, were at Kings' College, Taunton, which had a history of many centuries. It was better than English government schools, which were in my opinion better than NSW Government schools. The education at Kings' Taunton was "old-fashioned" and disciplined. From age 10, we learned French and Latin, studied Shakespearean plays and poetry, etc. It was equally prestigious to be in the choir, or good at drama and music as it was to be in the top rugby or cricket team. I was aghast on arriving in Australia to see how dilute was the education being provided at Cronulla High School in my year 8, which was the second year of the "Wyndham scheme", which I regard as the beginning of the decline in education due to modernistic ideologies, and it should surely on any objective analysis be regarded as a disaster.

The Education Department bureaucrats should have heeded my father's pleas to put me into year 10; e.g. the mathematics, trigonometry and geometry that I had been taught in my year 7 in England was not covered in NSW until years 10 or 11! And so for years 8 and 9 at Cronulla High school I was very bored – I came top in every exam, attaining marks of ~95% in every subject, while refusing to do any homework, and spending much time surfing. In year 10 our family moved, and I attended Castle Hill High School for the first half of my year 10 in 1966. Again being bored with school, I indulged in pranks, which the Headmaster did not appreciate, e.g. I substituted a 'skull and crossbones' flag for the Australian flag at school assembly on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1966, and I was about to be expelled. My father in driving to work past the Kings School Parramatta called in, and the Headmaster had just expelled a boy, and thus I was immediately slotted into the vacancy in mid-1966. I was Dux of The Kings School in 1968, and at Sydney University I gained first class Honours and the University Medal in Engineering. I attribute much of my success to the English school system being better than the NSW school system; I had an unfair advantage over my competitors, who were handicapped by the NSW education system.

At school and Uni I coached Aboriginal students (for free) under the "AbSchol" scheme.

(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

My wife and I home-schooled our three children for most of their primary and secondary education, and the outcomes have been good, and they have made good transitions to further study and work. (Our oldest son died of leukemia in 1984 aged 9, and I refer below to our three sons still living)

Our middle son after gaining BScHons from UTS, Sydney, two years ago in Europe gained a PhD for researching the growth of cancer cells, and even before his PhD he had a paper published in 'Nature', the most prestigious scientific publication in the world. That is an unusual achievement, because most professors spend their entire careers aspiring to have a paper published in Nature.

Recently he said to us (without our prompting!) that some of his persistence and meticulous scientific research techniques derived from having been self-motivated in home-schooling.

For four years we lived on a farm, and the children were allocated a set amount of schoolwork to do each day; our middle son would often be up at 6am at his desk, and be out the door by 9am, having completed his quota for the day; then the boys would spend the rest of their day building a racetrack, bridges and cubbies in the five-acre swamp etc.

Our oldest son self-studied computers during years 11 and 12 and entered University to do a computing science degree. After only one week in year two of this three-year degree he was asked by the Compaq computer company to work for them doing in essence the SAME job that he would have got as if he had completed his three-year degree. He has gone on in a career in computers, working for big companies like Hewlett Packard etc.

Our youngest son was more difficult to home school than his older brothers, and I am very grateful to the government school, Senior High, to which he gained competitive entry to do his years 11 and 12 and for him that suited him better. Each child is an individual and what suits one may not suit another. The NSW Government would do well to create more schools like Senior High. It was excellent.

He did not go to Uni, but entered retail then advertising & marketing, and has worked well.

All three children are well-adjusted socially, and during their homeschooling we met with other homeschooled children and their parents. In my observations and experiences of several dozen homeschooling families I affirm that homeschooled children do not suffer socially – in fact the evidence quoted to us in 1987/88 by a notable academic researcher, Dr Raymond Moore of USA, goes the other way.

(ii) financial costs

I do not know current costs.

When we did homeschooling (1988-1998) it is my impression that our costs were roughly the same as, or a little more than, the cost of sending a student to a government school.

We shopped around and found some outstandingly good materials from USA (e.g. 'A Beka' for science, history and geography, 'Saxon' Maths, and 'Rod & Staff' for English grammar, poetry, literature etc). We began the home-schooling experience using the "ACE" (Accelerated Christian Education) materials from Dr Floyd Risser for the first year (1988),

and then as the years went by we had the experience and the courage to diversify. Costs of those home-schooled materials were very modest and reasonable.

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

Our motivation for home-schooling was to do the best for our children.

Above I, Mr Stewart, mentioned my orthodox education in England up till age 14. I am a mathematician / engineer / scientist who is well-organised and logical.

My wife, a potter, is the opposite end of the spectrum, and being well-organised is not one of her strong points.

For our very first experiment with home-schooling (not the younger two, only our oldest son doing year 5 in 1988), she found the "ACE" (Accelerated Christian Education) materials were so good because they are so well-structured and well-organised; there was a little exam at the end of each neat module, and the student does not advance to the next module until he/she passes the little exam, going back if necessary to do the module again.

When we first did home-schooling of our oldest son in 1988, my career took a turn that required me to work very long hours and be away a lot, and so I was unfortunately of little assistance to her, and she floundered.

At the end of year 1988 my wife was depressed, thinking that she had failed, and I said "It does not matter if he has to repeat year 5." However when he began year 6 at the same school at which he had done year 4, he found that he was ahead of all the other students, and he had recovered the 'joy of learning' that was being pummelled out of him in year 4 by an over-restrictive school classroom learning environment.

I affirm that a 'muddling mum' can singlehandedly do a better job than a professional teacher with a class of 30 students. It is a convenient myth that only teachers can teach. (It is also absurd that the one-year Dip.Ed has become a 1.5 year Bachelor of Education).

Our education systems have been churning out in increasing numbers (!) people who cannot even read or spell properly. I say that because, as Road Safety Manager of the RTA's western region from 1990, I commissioned a master's degree Psychologist to interview a statistically-meaningful sample of 600 people in western region (Lithgow to the SA border and the Vic border to the Queensland border) about their attitudes to road safety. I did this because in western region the involvement in crashes of alcohol or failure to wear seatbelts was far worse than it was in the rest of NSW.

He found a surprising percentage of young people who could not read and write properly, and that was an obstacle preventing them from getting a driving licence, and thus many were driving unlicensed – it got worse the farther west one went, and the local Police officer would often 'turn a blind eye', focussing on bigger problems. I instituted remedial programs to assist people to obtain their driving licences (they were capable of driving – they were driving anyway while unlicensed!), and part of that work was that I employed Australia's first and second Aboriginal Road Safety Officers.

Another possible reason for motivation of parents to homeschool children is the feminisation of primary schools; male teachers are rare. This was part of the reasons for my wife and I taking our two younger sons out of a Government primary school at the same time as we decided to take our oldest son out of year 8 at High School. This sort of thing is referred to in Miranda Devine's article of 27 July in the Sunday Telegraph (attached).

(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers

We regarded the home-school registration requirements at that time (1988-1998) as mere petty bureaucratic restrictions, based on enhancing the “power-base” of the Education bureaucracy, and not based on valid criteria of genuine interest in the welfare of children. Therefore we chose on several occasions (as we moved around due to my employment) to put one or two or all three children into a school for a year and then subsequently to do home schooling WITHOUT applying for registration.

Unfortunately the mentality of professionally-trained teachers is towards excessive control, and the school environment in kindergarten, infants and primary schools suits girls and traumatises some boys.

At the time in 1987 that our oldest son in year 4 (a creative and sensitive individual more like his artistic mother than his engineer father) was losing his ‘joy of learning’ due to the restrictive classroom environment, we heard some research that showed that for every one girl in a “slow-learner” class there would be 30 boys, who then became underperformers who hate school and are more likely to become delinquent and get into crime.

Especially in kindergarten, infants & primary schools, the design of the system suits girls more than boys, who mature later than girls and many individuals develop at different rates. That is the main reason we took our oldest son out of school for yr 5, i.e. that he was not enjoying learning – then when he returned to school for yr 6 he was ahead of the curriculum; during that year 1988 he had had a lot of time to himself to read huge quantities of books, and in that way he recovered the joys of discovery and of learning.

We also question the whole concept of grouping children by chronological age, and shunting them up year by year to the next year-level regardless of their academic attainments or emotional development. It is a wrong mode of operation.

We also question the trends of the last few decades whereby school students seem to get set more and more homework as the years go by; that is a poor substitute for better, more-focused, more intensive tuition in the classroom. In my view homework should never be longer than a maximum of four hours per week.

One big reason for us home-schooling was the woolly and dilute nature of some government school curriculum materials, and the excessive homework and the waste of time and inefficiencies involved in teachers getting children to do assignments, which had only marginal worth in actually achieving any learning.

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

Parents of home-schooled children networked with each other and we met with some who had registered with the government and some who had not registered.

It is our observation that children who were home-schooled had better social and emotional development than children who attend normal schools. This is an observation “on average” and you may well find individuals who would differ from that overall average trend.

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

We had distance education during 1983 for our oldest son who died of leukemia in March 1984. He was diagnosed in July 1982 and the remainder of 1982 involved no schooling at all as he was occupied in and out of hospital, and we had long holidays in Queensland. During

1983, he was however diligent in doing the schoolwork prescribed by the distance education teachers, who seemed to be nice people (we never met them in person). We were at that time more concerned with medical treatment than with the efficacy of schooling, but I can say that our son did enjoy the distance education schoolwork, and my impression, based on this narrow sample of only one year, is that distance education is better than normal schooling, but not as good as home-schooling.

### (c) Regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

I have no familiarity with current registration processes, but they are unlikely, granted the ways that our society has been becoming more socialistic and bureaucratic, to have become more “user-friendly” than the requirements that my wife and I judged to be too clumsy and intrusive in 1988-1998.

If the home-school registration requirements are too onerous, then you create the incentive for home-schoolers to remain unregistered (as we did successfully for 10 years).

I do not accept the proposition that it is necessarily desirable to reduce the number of unregistered home-schoolers. I propose an alternative means than requiring registration, because surely the mutually-agreed aim is that homeschoolers deliver good outcomes both for their children and for society as a whole, rather than registration being an end in itself.

I advocate that you have an external exam at the end of each and every school year from age 6 to age 16 in only the main subjects like Maths, English, Science and perhaps in History (“*those who fail to learn from the mistakes of history are doomed to repeat them!*”).

This gives you objective yardsticks by which to measure children’s learning progress and identify any deficiencies; this would allow remedial actions to be targeted promptly.

You could legislate a legal requirement that (apart from children with a Doctor’s certificate due to disability or cancer treatment etc) every child should sit these simple 3 or 4 exams.

If the child can pass the exams, then leave the parents alone -- NO need for registration.

How they prepare their child to pass the next exam in a year’s time is their business.

If the education system is not prepared to commit the resources for teachers to mark exam papers during November, December and even January, then we are not serious as a society in committing resources to setting up future generations in our technological age.

#### (ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons

I am not sure that is meant by “authorised persons”.

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

Why should students adhere to NSW syllabuses which have become padded with trendy nonsense such as teaching primary schoolchildren that “*heterosexuality is not the norm*” and that homosexuality is a good thing?

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/sydney-news/being-straight-no-longer-normal-students-taught/story-e6freuzi-1226497360980>

We have teachers adhering to the NSW Syllabuses churning out young people in significant numbers that cannot read, write and spell properly and cannot do simple mathematical tasks like working out a shopping list. No wonder that some of our youth are virtually unemployable, as I have been told by various farmers and industrialists.

I make the positive recommendation that external exams in 3 or 4 basic subjects be set at the end of each year and then, instead of requiring registration, require that parents of home-schoolers simply address their children's educational progress so as to at least pass those exams.

My oldest son (who did year 5 as our first ever bit of homeschooling, and returned for year 6 at the school at which he did year 4) was in a High School in year 8 and he brought home some assignments. I looked at them and was shocked at how dilute and lacking in any intellectual substance they were; it seemed to me that these assignments (one was in history) would merely waste a lot of my son's time but he would not actually learn much for the time spent. I could assess, almost 'calibrate', them against my clear memories of the sorts of things that the teachers were giving to my fellow-students and myself in year 8 at Cronulla High School. The contrast was appalling. As if the Wyndham scheme was not bad enough, we have had years of 'politically-correct' ideologies and we now have dilute wishy-washy materials being taught. My wife and I immediately withdrew our oldest son from the High School and home-schooled him. At the end of year 9 he sat for a scholarship exam for the Kings School Parramatta for the award of only two scholarships to enter year 10. He narrowly missed-out as he was number three out of the 60 students that sat for that exam; therefore he continued in home-schooling for year 10.

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

It is a 'non sequitur' that a regulatory framework for homeschooling would deliver any benefits at all in terms of the educational attainment, safety, welfare and wellbeing of homeschooled children.

Why should there be discrimination against homeschooled children by those in authority? Simply set objective standards as measured by external exams that are applicable to ALL children, regardless of homeschooled or whatever.

The conclusion that a regulatory framework is needed rests on the arrogant presumption that the Government and teaching professionals know better than parents how to bring up children.

This sort of socialistic nonsense is manifested in the recent proposal by a federal Liberal Government's minister that I heard live on the radio to the effect that before grandparents could be permitted to provide childcare to their grandchildren then they would need to go to TAFE to be trained!! Trained by whom??!! New meaning to the phrase 'nanny State'.

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

I do not know what the current regulatory regime is, but I doubt that it would be better than the clumsy and ineffective regime prevalent during 1988-1998, to which we had a "conscientious objection".

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

USA President Ronald Reagan said that the nine most dangerous words in the English language are "*I am from the Government, here to help you.*"

My experience of homeschooling families is that they do not want, nor need, governmental support, which of course costs taxpayers' money.

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

Such representation assumes a compulsory registration of homeschoolers so as to comprise an 'electorate' within which one could conduct elections to select a representative.

I disagree with compulsory registration of homeschoolers.

I have already stated that the Government should set exams at the end of each year that ALL students are required to sit for. Then you have an objective standard.

However if compulsory registration is enforced and if elections occur, then there should be THREE persons elected, not one. Two could be observers and one could have a vote at the Board committee meetings, and the three persons should rotate who votes.

(f) Any other related matter.

It would be more cost-effective for the Government to promote homeschooling.

The government is promoting 'ageing in place' for older people instead of entering institutions, so let us extend the same logic and save money on large educational institutions with huge staffing, and let us promote 'schooling in place' i.e. at the home.

I add that my opposition to State interference in parents educating their children is totally different to my acceptance of the need for State interference in other portfolios such as DoCS or Police needing to take action where abuse of children is occurring.

Yours sincerely

signed

Mr Lex Stewart

*submission to Home Schooling Inquiry 8aug2014*

I attach a Scan of an article in the Sunday Telegraph of 27 July 2014



# MIRANDA

"POLICE were patrolling Rawson Park on Friday night when they spotted two teenage males standing in the darkness at about 10.30pm. Police deemed it to be suspicious and thought they may have been there to consume alcohol or drugs.

"The 18-year-olds stated they were just hanging out and eating lollies. After a search nothing was found but red frogs in their pockets. The pair were moved on ... by officers."

The red frog crime wave in Mosman was reported in my local newspaper a couple of months ago. It is an amusing snapshot, but it is also a symptom of a terrible ailment in our culture: a concerted attempt to criminalise masculinity. Men and boys are always suspect.

It starts at school when boys are punished for playing boisterously. The games they love are banned, recess is curtailed and they are expected to restrain their natural exuberance.

Except for the oasis of sport, male energy is devalued and virtually criminalised.

Take the boys, aged 9 to 14, playing with toy guns one afternoon in Lismore, on the NSW north coast, when armed police swooped. The boys were handcuffed, forced to lie face down and searched.

"He's just a kid, a normal boy, proud of his new gun," a shocked neighbour said of the nine-year-old.

It goes without saying a lot of boys rebel. It may be why 93 per cent of people in jail are men, why three times as many men as women commit suicide, and perhaps even why a disproportionate number of young Australian men are flocking to Syria for jihad.

Contact sports such as rugby league are one of the last bastions of masculinity, where men are free to unleash aggression within confined norms. But at its elite level, the game is engulfed by brawls, drunken indiscretions, vandalism, depression and suicide.

Todd Carney performs a stunt called the "bubbler", in which he aims his own urine at his mouth, and his career is over. It's an era of zero tolerance for male misbehaviour.

The contrition of players is often accompanied by a hard-luck story of a childhood with no father on the scene.

It's a cry for help but the NRL's response is to threaten clubs with \$1 million penalties and axe misbehaving stars.

Boys are simple creatures;



# DEVINE Being a bloke is now a crime

Sometimes it seems like being a man is enough of a crime. Picture: Gordon McComiskie

they crave order, boundaries and a defined sense of purpose, qualities erased from politically correct school curriculums in the past two decades.

In that time girls have raced ahead of boys and the gender gap widens every year. In last year's Higher School Certificate almost twice as many girls as boys scored the highest possible mark and girls beat boys onto every merit list.

Women seeking university places in Australia now outnumber men by 40 per cent. If this gender gap is remarked upon, it is usually as a wonderful achievement for girls.

After boys leave school, they find they are guilty until proven innocent, just by virtue of their sex. A night at the pub is akin to entering a maximum security jail, with security guards, metal detectors and

identity scanners, all designed to control society's enemy number one: young men.

Practical skills that require traditional male abilities have been devalued. Social skills, empathy and communication, traditionally female strengths, are sought after.

For men whose identity is tied to their jobs, becoming irrelevant is soul-destroying.

The term "mancession" was coined during the GFC because a disproportionate number of men lost jobs.

The rise in female breadwinners is championed by feminists as another victory in the long war against male dominance, but harmonious family life is often the victim.

In politics, men are treated with suspicion, as if they are always on the verge of breaking out of a closet of misogyny.

But women are free to be as insulting as they like about men. Exhibit one: Senator Jacqui Lambie can joke on radio that she is looking for a man who is "well hung"; "They don't even need to speak."

It was a crass performance, but what raised her comments above the ordinary is that so many women rushed to defend her. Her "candour" was a refreshing change.

"I think men can take care of themselves when we talk about their private parts", feminist Eva Cox declared.

While that's true, the double standards are striking.

Young men are our sons, our daughters' future husbands. They are not the enemy.

Male energy is devalued and virtually criminalised