

**Submission
No 148**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

While I do not live in NSW, I was alerted to this inquiry by a dear friend, and wished to add some comments regarding my experiences.

I am a thirty-two year old mother of young children, who in my educational career have experienced many different schooling models (including state education, private Catholic school, home education and an independent community school). I am grateful for each and every one of these opportunities, as they have shaped me in positive ways, but I wish to comment particularly on my experience of home education as relevant to this inquiry.

This is particularly relevant in relation to:

(i) outcomes of home schooling including in relation to transition to further study and work,

I was home-schooled for part of Grade 8, and all of Grade 9 and 10, in Brisbane, QLD. This was a result of my state high school education being less than satisfactory in terms of social experiences. I was a straight 'A' student, well-liked by my teachers (they tell me!) and polite, well-mannered – no difficulties to anyone, really. However, I found in my three years of home education, I was given the ability to soar – to follow my passions and interests deeply, to delve into learning with enthusiasm and engagement beyond the curriculum I was being offered in my school environment. Further, free from the social pressures and difficulties of the large, impersonal high school I attended (over 2000 students), I was able to develop confidence and freedom from many anxieties. In many ways, I consider my home education years a 'break' that allowed me to find my character, connect with learning and return to the schooling system in Grades 11 and 12 (senior high school) as a happy, confident and successful learner. I achieved excellent results (gaining an OP 2), got into my first preference at university (a Bachelor of Arts in Drama at the QUT Creative Industries, which was based on both results, auditions and interviews) and completed both this course and a subsequent Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) with GPAs above 6.5 for both degrees (on a 7 point scale).

I convey these results not just as an example of educational success (evidence that home schooling can provide a positive platform for further work and study achievement), but because I truly believe that being home-schooled for some key developmental years gave me a safe, supportive learning environment which enabled my later success on a social level. Home schooling is very different for different families, but should be acknowledged as an important learning environment that benefits the needs of particular children and families at particular times in their learning journeys.

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

My mother was an educated woman, who was motivated to home-school me out of concern for my well-being. In many ways, it was her decision (which I am grateful for, as an adult). She recognised that the pressures of a large, impersonal school were eroding my sense of well-being – my physical health deteriorated, my emotional self was in turmoil. She put these concerns above all else, and also wanted to see me re-capture my 'love of learning' by participating in high-end curriculum experiences that intrigued and stimulated me on my academic level.

(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children

Home-schooling can provide a safe and supportive learning environment, especially for children who are feeling overly stressed or anxious due to the demands of the schooling system. Schools are populated with hard-working,

well-meaning and wonderfully trained teachers, who do the best they can for students, but parents who love unconditionally, support unconditionally and will go to the ends of the earth to stimulate curiosity, learning and excitement in their child's education and lives are just as well-meaning and hard-working. The environments they provide, not only in the home but in the community, are rich with learning. Many home educating parents that I have met in my years as a teacher and a student fit into this category, and my own family certainly did.

For my own journey as a home-schooler, I needed space to be free from negative social pressures (bullying), time to gain confidence in who I was and a curriculum that was more academically challenging, deep and rich than that provided in my state school education. I spent my years at 'home' involved in community projects, creating my own theatre pieces, writing and reading poetry and literature, working with children across diverse age groups, and participating in academically difficult projects designed by myself in conjunction with tutors, friends and my parent. It was 'usual' for my projects to include a written component of well-researched, referenced text of generally about 2000-3000 words. This was a jump from school where I was given tasks of 200-300 words, with little scope for high level academia. I was privileged to have a tutor who 'pushed' me to explore new topics and designed excellent projects for me, and this was possible by take a short detour from the school education system.

For gifted, talented or simply 'bright' children, home-schooling can provide the right kind of rich environment for learning.

Thank you for your time,

Mathilda Element