

Submission  
No 63

## INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry, which I believe to be very important for many of the children of NSW.

**Summary:** In brief, I am the parent of two children; one six-year-old, who is home schooled, and also a nearly nine-year-old, who remains in the public school system. We recently arrived at home schooling, as we felt we had no other option (at least for the time-being).

**Contents:** Commentary on many of the terms of reference (not all, as they are not all applicable to our situation), specific to our circumstances only.

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

***(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 six-year-old son is able to now have a fully individualised curriculum, learning at his own (advanced) pace, and to his ability. He was previously in the public education

system, in Y1, and unfortunately it was a poor educational fit *for him*. Eventually this resulted in increasingly bad anxiety, leading us to feel as though we had no other choice. Since embarking on home education, he has hugely recovered and is a joyful child again, who has rediscovered his once passionate love of learning.

As his talents and abilities (maths, music, science) have been allowed to now develop, he is soaring. This in turn has greatly improved his mental and emotional wellbeing. His self-esteem has been bolstered and he feels more confident. These elements contribute to a well-rounded human being, and in our view, are equally as important as academic achievement.

***(ii) financial costs:***

In the sense of our financial spending on home schooling, it is reasonably minimal, that being the costs of textbooks and programmes, excursions etc., and extra-curricular activities (however, we would be doing at least two of the extra curricular activities regardless). The main cost to our family, is my (as his teacher) loss of income. I was self-employed, working approximately 25 hours a week, but have had to cut that back to less than five. So the cost to us, in this regard, is substantial. However, our parental investment in our son and his education far outweighs this loss.

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

Our son is exceptionally/profoundly gifted. He also has an Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) and accompanying (quite bad) hyperacusis. His friends are generally around 4+ years older than him. In Kindergarten, both (particularly) before and after

assessment, he was misunderstood and only partially catered for. His self-esteem was damaged, and his love of learning dissipated.

Despite recommendations from both the educational psychologist (as of October last year), and developmental paediatrician that he be accelerated 1+ year/s . . . this did not come to pass. The psychologist warned that should he not be appropriately educationally challenged, that he would become disengaged, bored, frustrated and even disruptive. The paediatrician warned that he was at risk of anxiety and depression. Many of these things came to pass, and his anxiety at attending school became quite severe. He also began to underachieve.

Although he was finally (in Y1) accelerated to Y2 for maths, we didn't feel it was enough at that stage (he is doing Y3+ at home) and his anxiety had already gotten to a level that was of concern. We saw no other choice (we didn't feel that, at the time, changing schools would fix the immediate concerns) other than taking him out and home schooling, at least for the time being.

I hold a Master of Arts in Professional Writing, and my husband has a PhD in Software Architecture, and we feel entirely confident in our ability to educate our son. While we provide a solid foundation for the essentials of education (literacy, etc.), we allow him to also further extend his interests: maths, piano, chess and science (outer space, the natural world etc.), amongst others. We also do a lot of verbal learning (spelling, maths, etc.).

***(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children:***

We consider our son special needs.

Research (e.g.: [http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles\\_id\\_10028.aspx](http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10028.aspx)) has shown that those with a certain IQ level are more or less primed for success, particularly socially (without taking into account other factors, of course): that being at, or around, the 130 mark, or the 98th percentile (please note that the figures quoted in most of the literature are based on the old SB-LM, which is no longer used in Australia, and current IQ tests, have moderately/mildly gifted at 130 [WISC IV], or 125 approx [SB5]). However, the further beyond that, and the more standard deviations above the mean, the bigger the differences (just as for the opposite end of the spectrum). A child at 99.9+% is as different from a child at the 98%, as that child is from a child at the 85% (not precise figures).

There appears to be a minimal number of educators who have undertaken education (or professional development) in gifted, but particularly regarding those who are 3+ standard deviations above the mean. Most gifted programs/extension etc., seem to be pitched towards mildly/moderately gifted children, who can be (generally, certainly not always) catered for more easily in mainstream and are generally better understood. There is a lack of resources available for these very rare children and their differences are often not recognised. There tends to be a focus on supporting children who are seen to have disabilities, when including focus on those who have other special needs, including extreme giftedness, would be of great benefit (our children are our future).

Then of course, there is the GLD (gifted with learning disability) child. Our son's APD is a genuine disability that, for the most part, isn't well recognised or understood. His reading and writing ability were not up to the level of his intellect as a result (now addressed, though he still dislikes writing); his hyperacusis means that he hears everything much more loudly than most other people (talking, pencils scratching, air conditioners, etc., etc.), and he is for the most part unable to block out background noise. Obviously, home schooling greatly lessens this problem, though we feel if there were more money invested in helping and supporting children (and the understanding of them) with not only a wider band of disabilities, but in particular, extreme giftedness, then perhaps home schooling would become less necessary for some of us. (Certainly, it was not a decision we made lightly, nor was it our first choice, and we have no problem with the school system, per se; as noted, our other son still attends, happily, our local public school.) Our son, however, would need a very specific approach – particularly the support of very knowledgeable educators – and it has been recommended that this would likely include acceleration by 2-3 years during his educational life (though again, that would still require individualised curriculum, and not 'just' acceleration, if that makes sense), and so we are unsure if school would ever fully work for him (or allow him to reach his potential). It would be wonderful if there were more schools like St Ives North, with a full-time G&T unit (and teachers educated in the highly gifted), or schools fully dedicated to nurturing the amazing abilities of these children, as there is in America.

We make an effort to allow our son to participate in group and social activities, however, it is disappointing to us that he will now be unable to enjoy those school

activities and opportunities that he did previously, such as athletics carnivals and organised excursions (other than home schooling ones), and special art classes etc. We believe it would be of benefit for the home schooling community, particularly those with special needs children, to be able to access resources from within the school system.

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

As mentioned above, we provide a solid foundation for our son, using workbooks, whiteboards, discussion, the Internet: Brave Writer, Study Ladder, Khan Academy, and other programmes. However, we also participate in group activities such as pottery class, soccer, and chess club. Additionally, he has private piano lessons and piano is part of his daily learning, as is music theory, and he participates in group workshops and concerts. He also has a private chess coach, and all of this is very educational.

We maintain regular play dates across various ages and he is able to socialise with children with whom he shares common interests and abilities, rather than those who are simply within 17 months of him (as the age range can be in a single grade level), and he engages deeply with our community, such as staff at our oft visited library.

He is experiencing a rich and diverse range of learning environments, including; maths during shopping or banking, experiencing the natural world through visiting outdoors sites, history in regards to museums, etc. Additionally we have a tutor; a

teacher of 25 years, experienced in gifted, for an hour a week, to help keep us on the right track.

***(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:***

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

We are very new to this, so I don't have extensive commentary to provide. However, I will say that I personally do not have a problem with registering for home schooling, and found it an easy and comfortable experience. However, I do know of others who have had a much less pleasant experience, and sometimes the factor seems to come down to the particular AP and their own experience and professionalism.

I don't believe that registration, in itself, should be unnecessary, but the way that it is sometimes administered has made many people unhappy. Home schooling, by nature, may not necessarily be of such a rigid (and routine) format as some seem to expect; that would be somewhat against the principles and reasoning for why many people adopt the more flexible approach of home schooling. Children learn in a variety of individual styles that can be well catered for in a home schooling environment.

***(ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons:***

I was very happy with our AP; she was supportive, helpful, and truly understood our situation and reasoning. However, I understand that there is a large variation in authorised persons' (APs) understanding of home education and in their treatment of home education applicants.



It shouldn't be acceptable that some APs are (reportedly) unfamiliar with some common educational philosophies that underlie the educational programmes of many home educators (for example Charlotte Mason or natural learning). For an AP to be ignorant of many of the circumstances that lead to home education, such as disabilities (like ADHD, ASD, Dyslexia etc.), and high giftedness, would likewise, be inappropriate.

It would also be detrimental for any AP to believe that a child should be restricted to his/her 'school year'. It seems apparent that those assessing home educators should have an in-depth understanding of home education and be supportive of it as a legitimate form of education. I am unaware what specific training is undertaken, but it would be useful if APs were required to undertake specific, standardised training in the nuances and background of home schooling, and to develop a breadth of understanding regarding the myriad of possible individual family circumstances. This would undoubtedly be enhanced by the involvement of home-schoolers themselves, including having at least one home-schooling parent on any applicable interview panels.

An AP who presents with a negative attitude, could severely undermine a registration process, which in turn could impact on a child who is already experiencing difficulty due to previous educational settings, or a special need. I believe it's the children here, who are most important, and if a parent has neglected to provide a simple piece of documentation, that it should not necessarily justify the termination (or lack of

provision) of registration. Surely it would be a simple matter to offer some additional time for that parent to then provide the required material.

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

Our son's welfare, wellbeing, and safety has improved since beginning home schooling. The deficiency of adequate provisions addressing his special needs contributed to a detrimental effect on his mental wellbeing. It reached the point of him repeatedly leaving the class and chasing me down the school driveway in floods of tears, begging me not to leave him there, having him peeled off me over a ten minute period, having to trick him in order for me to get out of the classroom, to actually leaving the school grounds entirely, walking the way to the end of the street, in search of his father (who he knew was coming back with something that had been left in the car, so not entirely related, but of great concern, nevertheless). He is safe at home. He is happier, better adjusted, learning more, better focussed, and thriving. He is no longer having nightmares, he is not needing to go to the toilet every five minutes (literally) and he is calmer.

Again, I want to point out that we believe the school system is generally fine, or indeed, often excellent, for *most* children, but there are those who are square pegs trying to fit into round holes, who can get damaged in the process, without the school being *able* to adjust and offer provisions for those particular children's specific needs.

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

There appears to be minimal support and it would be beneficial if there was a much more structured system of support for home schooling families. Home schooling is a legitimate educational choice, and as such, should be supported by the government, just as other educational choices are.

We do not receive any external support in the home education of our child. Many home schoolers would like to access some of the support that is available to students in government and private schools, but currently not to home educated children. Some examples might be access to TVET courses, Open High School, School Sports Programs, Hospital School programs and programmes for students with a disability or special need (including giftedness).

In some other states, home educated students are able to be part-time enrolled in school in order to access particular subjects, support or programmes, but this is not possible in NSW. We feel part time enrolment may alleviate some of our problems and would be a viable option. In fact, we certainly would have tried this first, had it been available to us.

NSW also has a lack of support for new home educators in that the regulatory system has no built-in support. We had not seriously considered home education until the circumstances demanded, and initially the necessary paper work seemed daunting. I feel that my profession helped me manage this, however, I understand how others may seem completely overwhelmed regardless of how committed or capable they are. It would be useful if there were better support in the system to help parents make a

successful transition to home education. There are various bodies and groups available, such as SHEN and HEA, and other support groups, but one must be aware of their existence in order to make use of them.

***(e) representation of home schoolers within Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BoSTES):***

BoSTES currently has members who represent a variety of organisations, groups and areas of expertise related to education. However, as I understand it (and to my surprise), there are no members on the board representing home educators. Given that BoSTES is responsible for the regulation of home education in NSW, shouldn't it be required to have at least one member to represent the home education community?

As previously mentioned, we feel that those dealing with the regulation of home education within BoSTES should have a demonstrated understanding of, and support for, home education.

***(f) any other related matter:***

As a final point, I just wanted to comment on the necessity of weekly recording. For me, it is really not too much of an issue, as I am only home schooling one child, however, we are able to show all the work we are completing, both in hard format, and on the computer, regardless. For other families though, particularly where there are three or more children being home schooled, I can only imagine that the requirement of recording would be extremely burdensome, and take up valuable time that could be otherwise spent on lesson planning etc.

Finally, many thanks for the opportunity to share my family's perspective, and for taking the time to read my submission.

Kind regards,