

Submission
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INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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The Director
Select Committee on Home Schooling
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Our family has been home educating for 7 years. My eldest son was halfway through year one, when we pulled him out, and started to home educate. My son is bright, and was one of those children who would ask a million “why” questions in five minutes. School squashed his curiosity and his desire to learn. That is the reason we started to home educate. (His desire to learn quickly returned, after we started to homeschool.)

My second child is our daughter. She is hyperactive and dyslexic. School would not have been a positive experience for her. Home education allows us to spend time on the areas that need to be worked on, at a rate that is appropriate for her to succeed. Through a one on one home learning environment, my daughter is now reading at grade level and she is performing strongly in maths.

We are involved with a number of activities outside the home, including squad swimming, gymnastics, a weekly Scout-like group and church activities.

Comparison of practices with other jurisdictions in Australia

Our family has exclusively home educated in New South Wales. During this time and particularly over the last 18 months, the relationship between the Board of Studies (BOSTES) and the home educators of New South Wales has become very strained. BOSTES is claiming that their actions have not changes over the course of time, however this is clearly untrue.

	2011	2012	2013	% increase 2011-2013
Rejections	10	13	73	630
Withdrawals	184	278	342	86
3 mo	4	32	85	2025
6 mo	102	208	377	270
12 mo	401	611	1131	182
24 mo	1308	1367	1134	-13
Total	1815	2112	2452	35

One of the problems with the Board of Studies (BOSTES) is that in REALITY, it is allowed to carry on unchecked. (Who is auditing them and determining if they are carrying out their duties according to the powers invested in them by the Education Act 1990, and other legislation?) They are the judge and jury and desiring to become the executioner of homeschooling, which they have no interest in, yet have ultimate authority over. (Home education is a legal option throughout Australia, in which BOSTES is trying to bully into a minimum existence.) Their desire is for power, and not for the educational wellbeing of the child. This is evident from their change in policy from a looking into whether education was happening in the home to a “if you tick these boxes, we will pass your registration” mentality.

Terry Metherell, the then Education Minister, created the Education Reform Act 1990 (NSW) and the NSW Board of Studies to enshrine into legislation the key learning areas that were to apply to curriculum in NSW. It also represented a shift in curriculum leadership away from the Department of Education and its Director General, as any future amendments would require parliamentary debate. Dr Metherell said “any change will be made by Parliament, in an open and democratic manner with full public accountability, not in background discussions between interest groups or bureaucrats.” Second Reading Speech NSWPD, 29/3/90
Deju vu! Decisions are being made in the backrooms again, in a hidden and undemocratic manner! THE SYSTEM IS BROKEN!

A system that seems to work better is Tasmania’s advisory council. The Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC). The Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council was established to advise the Minister of Education and the general public on matters to do with home education and monitor individual home education programs.

The Council is not part of the Department of Education. It is an independent advisory council established and directly responsible to the minister.

THEAC provides a reference point for queries, responds to community concerns and maintains liaison with other agencies about home education.

THEAC is made up of seven voluntary members, three of whom are nominated by home educators, and four appointed by the Minister from the wider Tasmanian community.

I believe that Tasmania has the highest percentage of homeschoolers who are registered with their state educational body, compared with other state and territories within Australia.

This model is independent, understands how homeschooling works, supports homeschooling, has elected members of Parliament, answers to the Minister of Education, and can respond to community concerns. Looking at this system as an outsider, this system seems to be a WIN-WIN for most people concerned. (BOSTES will not allow a homeschool representative on its board. There has been a lot of wars and conflicts throughout history over the fact of taxation (tyrannical requirements) without representation.)

Homeschooling is increasing somewhere between 50% - 70%, in a three to four year period, within Australia. It is a bit difficult to have an accurate figure, because the federal government has up to this point, refused to put the option of "home education" as an educational option in the census. No matter what the exact figures are, homeschooling is increasing at a greater rate than the birth rate or population growth. This trend is not decreasing in the near future. How it is handled will determine the percentage of those who homeschool and are registered, versus those who homeschool and are not registered.

Outcomes of home schooling

We Australian are a very creative people. Our creativity goes beyond Vegemite and the Hills Hoist. Australians have shown creativity in all fields and endeavours. We created Wi-Fi, the black

box recorder, ultrasound, the bionic ear, electronic pacemakers, dual flush toilets, solar hot water, the surf ski, and let's not forget the refrigerator.

We are creative and innovative, without having a lot of money thrust upon us, such as the inventors from the United States and Europe. We are world class and we need to continually think outside the box and strive for excellence.

It is interesting to read in the newspapers of schools who are doing things a little bit different, and getting praise from the community, parents and even the education department! These schools may be offering more individualised teaching, something that is culturally relevant to its students, changing a teaching method or organisation idea. Homeschooling offers individualised teaching that tries to make the learning interesting and relevant to life.

All students do not learn the same way. A home learning environment allows the parents to adapt the material so that the student can learn. If a child is more hands on, than more hands on materials and curriculum can be provided. The same can be said about the child who is an audio learner or visual learner. There is SO much material out there, due to the millions that homeschool worldwide, that the options for student learning is infinite.

Not all children learn at the same pace. Both my children do maths relatively easily, and yet writing is very slow and painful. A home learning environment allows children to MASTER knowledge by learning at their own pace. They just don't skip ahead to the next subject until they have a good grounding in the subject at hand. Children can learn at their own pace without the fear and worry of being made fun of. This actually speeds up the learning process.

Large group learning environments are not ideal. Throw in kids that don't listen to or respect their teachers and their fellow students, kids that are coming from really rough situations, kids that have been eating far too much sugar, artificial flavourings and colourings, and kids that just don't want to be there, and you end up with a very poor learning environment. Today's teachers are doing their best they can. A home learning environment is different. It offers small classes with a good teacher to student ratio. It offers individual attention to the child's need. In a home

learning environment, questions can get answered immediately. Large group learning environments are not ideal.

This next point does not apply all kids across the board, however we do not necessarily want our children to learn a lot of what their peers have to teach. The stories I hear from parents of local primary school students, much less high schools students, of what is said and done at the schools, or online after school, are really very appalling. Having children interacting with only their own age group is not healthy. If we want our children to really excel in something we have them learn from those who are older and wiser than they are. Home education encourages children to interact with not only their peers, but with younger children, older children and adults. We like to encourage our children to learn from experts. Our family can also organize “field trips” to put us in contact with those who are experts. Showing interest, curiosity and good manners, we have found experts love to share their expertise.

Home education allows us to teach our children to become self – starters and be responsible. If our children have questions, of course they come to their parents, however we also encourage them to look things up in books, on the internet, talk to adults we know who may be an expert, or try to work out how we can get in contact with someone who is an expert. We also encourage our children to be responsible through chores and how they treat other people they interact with. They usually have more available time, because they can do the same work as a school student, in a shorter amount of time. This allows them to develop their interests and gifting. (Boring things can be done more easily if the child knows they can do things that interest them later in the day.) A home educated child has more of an opportunity to manage their own time. The child is learning to make decisions by themselves, learning to act on those decisions and experiencing the consequences of those decisions. We want to teach our children to be self-starters and responsible, as there isn't always going to be someone telling them what they need to do in the future.

Home educated children are given time to develop their interests and talents. The experts say you need to invest 20,000 hours to become an expert. Homeschooling gives children a wonderful platform to start to become experts themselves, whether it is hours of instrument practice, sporting skill development and training, computer tinkering and programming, cooking and all sorts of skills

and training. As I mentioned before, a child can get through the “boring” subjects if they know that they can do things they love to do.

Strong Family ties. We want our children to be good friends. (It is a process.) We also want to enjoy a strong relationship with our children. Friends can come and go, however siblings and families are for a lifetime.

Barriers to accessing support

Although homeschoolers are saving the government a lot of money per year, \$15,768, according to *The Australian* newspaper article “Public schools fare worst in funding” 28/1/14, we are being discriminate against in regards to getting access to many programs and services.

TVET courses for students wanting to pursue a trade
Open High School for languages
School regional sports carnivals
Hospital school programs for ill children
Travel passes for older children
Free vaccinations that have moved from GPs into schools

New South Wales Syllabuses

Australia, as slightly touched on before, does not perform in the top few positions in international competitions for maths, science, english or other subjects. The NSW Board of Studies (BOSTES) is trying to allude that we do. To make things even more complicated, although there is a national curriculum, NSW does not follow it. It follows its own NSW’s version of the National Curriculum. The ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) is responsible for the National Curriculum. It has approved alternative frameworks, including Montessori, Steiner and the International Baccalaureate. BOSTES does not approve these alternative frameworks. We all know schools that practice under these philosophies, however they are not allowed to practice in a manner that was agreed upon with ACARA. Home educators in New South Wales are not allowed to home school under the Montessori, Steiner and the International Baccalaureate ACARA approved syllabuses. Many Home Educators use

Singapore Maths. Singapore always performs on top of the international maths competition. However, Singapore maths does not follow the New South Wales maths syllabus. Therefore because BOSTES loves power more than it does education, it would reject a Singapore Maths curriculum.

Excellence needs to be sought after. BOSTES may be able to stop the bottom end of the educational spectrum from slipping into a deeper uneducated state, however it is also stifling those who want to excel. Our children will not only be competing for jobs with those who live in New South Wales, they will be competing with those on a global setting. We need a global mindset when it comes to education.