

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 26/07/2014

Partially Confidential

SUBMISSION to the HOME SCHOOLING COMMITTEE

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I began the registration process for the first time with my 5 year old son in January 2013. I was well prepared, I had read the BOS (Board of Studies) website thoroughly and discussed the registration process with my homeschooling friends. One of my friends had registered her child just 6 months before me. She obtained 2 years' initial registration and I was expecting the same because I had in fact helped her put together her plan and resources and I knew my plan was just as good. In my registration process, I had an interview with a BOS "authorised person" (AP). She was basically happy with what I had done and only suggested that I write a time-table "to keep the bureaucrats happy". I did argue that my time-allocation was consistent with the BOS website but she said there were "new rules" which began in January (2013, but these were not published on the BOS website until after my interview in August 2013.) However, she said that she could only give me the maximum initial registration of 6 months, despite the website at that time clearly stating that initial registration could be up to a maximum of 2 years as a number of my friends had received.

I was very upset because I know how to teach children as I am actually a qualified NSW teacher with 10 years' teaching and Subject Coordinating experience, with a Masters Degree in Education, and I thought I had prepared a detailed program which covered the BOS requirements. I rang and complained and a senior person from the BOS said that I could get 1 year maximum under the new rules if I only sent in a time table which I did. However, I still thought my program was worth the maximum registration of 2 years in accordance with the information in the then Home Education Information Package that the BOS had on their website. So I complained

again to another more senior person in the BOS and then began a nasty series of incidents. The officer of the BOS **denied** that there were any new rules and she said that the information on the website was current. She also said she would give me another chance to present my case by sending all my documentation in for a paper assessment. I confirmed with her which information and paperwork she required and I sent all of this in. Much to my utter shock and dismay, I then received a report saying that I only received **3 months registration** because the assessor said that I did not cover the requirements!

I was even more unhappy because the BOS gave me even less initial registration of 3 months and as I still believed I covered everything according to the BOS website with a 70 page submission. The BOS then offered me another meeting at my home with another AP. By this stage I had had enough with all the arbitrary ad hoc bureaucratic decision-making, the denial of the new rules that the first AP brought up, and the covering up of information so I withdrew my registration. Then I received a phone call from the Department of Education asking why my child was not in school and/or not registered. I was very upset because my child was still only 5 years old and 6 is the age of registration! It seemed I had no choice but to reapply for registration.

Upon receiving my application for the second time I was informed by the BOS that I had to be interviewed in my home by 2 Authorised Persons not 1 as stated on the BOS website. I found this very confronting and intimidating. The website does not refer to this process at all. When the meeting came, I found the APs very authoritarian and almost dictatorial in attitude rather than helpful and supportive in assisting the education of my child through homeschooling. The senior AP emphatically stated,

“We are here to make sure that you will comply with the NSW syllabus!” They asked me to do things at that meeting that were not mentioned in the BOS website at that time but were since published in August, which I think is unfair since I had initiated my first application in January 2013. For example, I was told my time table for my student had to have 25 hours of schooling per week to match up with normal schooling time of 9 to 3pm. I don't know of any homeschoolers who devote that sort of time to schooling for year 1. If I followed that kind of school structure, my child would complete the school curriculum and sit the HSC by early high school because homeschooling provides a highly effective and unique teaching environment of one on one tuition! In fact, I had already been "unofficially" homeschooling my oldest son, who was 5 at that time. He could read fluently, do Year 2 maths and was learning the piano. He could write clearly and was doing spelling tests. He was way ahead of any year one curriculum let alone kindergarten. One of the major reasons I am homeschooling is precisely because of its far greater efficiency over normal schooling. Think of it, in a normal class of 30 students there is only time for 2 minutes average one on one tutoring of each child per hour but in a homeschooled environment for 1 child there is time for 1 hour one on one tutoring per hour class time! Each homeschooling hour of one on one personal tutoring is 29 times longer than in a 30 student class doing the same activity!

This meeting went for about 2 hours and I felt I was having the BOS dictatorially “lay down the law” to me as if I was in some Communist country rather than in a western liberal democracy that adheres to the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights! My understanding is that according to the Education Act, the BOS should be supportive of homeschooling in accordance with the beliefs and skills and

attitudes of parents (in keeping with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) rather than directing in a "one size fits all" mentality. This time around, I received 6 months provisional registration as I had some things to "fix up" under the "new rules" which in fact they denied existed anyway.

My experience with BOS has been awful. There was complete arbitrary decision-making by bureaucrats, shown by them offering varying durations of initial registrations from 3 months to 12 months. The BOS Bureaucrats have acted without transparency, referring to "new rules" then denying them and then finally publishing them all the while acting with this hidden agenda in mind. They seemed more intent on protecting their positions, legalistic compliance and paperwork rather than on the quality of children's education, which is the aim of the Education Act. Surely, the BOS personnel are meant to be public servants not some kind of authoritarian administrators of a totalitarian regime! An enquiry into Homeschooling needs to not just focus on homeschooling parents but also on the actions and brief of the BOS bureaucrats who are meant to assist parents teaching their children with regard to the Education Act rather than bureaucratically controlling them according to the "letter of the law."

The decision making for duration of registration should be far more uniform, transparent and supportive rather than restrictive and draconian and based on children achieving the outcomes of the BOS syllabi rather than by legalistically and slavishly transplanting a school program into the home which would not necessarily achieve the same outcomes.