

**Submission  
No 133**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

**Organisation:** HENCAST Inc

**Date received:** 8/08/2014

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# HENCAST Submission for the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Home Education in NSW.

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## Introduction

HENCAST, the Home Education Network of Canberra and the Southern Tablelands (Inc) is a network of home educating families from Canberra, Queanbeyan, Bungendore and surrounding areas. We have members (both registered and unregistered) from all walks of life and with varying beliefs who are home educating their children in a variety of ways.

This submission represents the views of four member families who have responded to our request for input into this inquiry. All responding families reside in NSW and all are registered home educators.

To organise this response, we asked contributing families to address the following questions:

- Why did you choose to homeschool?
- Do those reasons still apply today? If not, why do you now homeschool?
- What are the positives of homeschooling in NSW?
- What are the negatives of homeschooling in NSW?
- If you are a registered homeschooler:
  - What are your experiences of the registration process?
  - Would you like to see the process change in any way?
- Do you believe you have been supported by the NSW government in your choice to homeschool?
- If you are an unregistered homeschooler:
  - Why do you choose not to register?
  - What would have to change for you to register?

The responses have been collated against each question. We hope this submission assists in the inquiry and that the outcomes are truly beneficial for the many families across NSW, and Australia, who have chosen the effective, beneficial and legitimate option of educating their children away from the state and private schooling systems.

Regards,  
Shannon Armstrong  
Hencast President  
3 August 2014

## **Why did you choose to homeschool?**

### **Response 1**

I was not overly impressed with our local school.

Our oldest child was already reading fluently in two languages and I didn't want him to be bored sitting in kindergarten learning letters and numbers again.

We are a bilingual family - I wanted to ensure our children will be fluent both verbally and in reading and writing in both languages. Our local school does not offer any such program.

### **Response 2**

When we moved to this new area we didn't hear any good things about either of the schools, and did not feel confident in the children's safety at these schools - emotionally and physically

The school system cannot provide for my children's sensory processing issues

We believe firmly in the Montessori method being the most effective system of education and it is not provided in any of the local schools.

### **Response 3**

I chose to homeschool as a short-term option as the school choices in our area were limited. I did not believe that my child would receive high-quality education at the local state school, and private school options were far from us and expensive. My child had been at a private Montessori school but we had had trouble with a teacher that was not able to be resolved so we moved to homeschooling.

### **Response 4**

No response provided to this question

## **Do those reasons still apply today? If not, why do you now homeschool?**

### **Response 1**

We now have three children who are homeschooled.

We are successfully continuing our bilingual education.

We have been homeschooling for six years now. My children are quite different in their learning pathways and their social needs, so our style of schooling has changed considerably over the years and continues to develop in line with the children's maturity and changing interests.

All three of my children are keen readers and enjoy learning.

The children have been able to experience a wide range of social and learning activities.

Being part of a diverse homeschooling group has meant that the children have been able to interact and enjoy the company of children from a wide range of age groups and to participate in educational activities that may have been outside their "year level" if they had been in school.

Being so closely involved with my children's learning, I know exactly where they are at and can pick up on any learning issues immediately.

Thanks to the fact that we can learn quite intensively one-on-one, we get through the academic program at a steady pace. This allows the children a lot of free time once they have done their work for the day. They don't have to wait around for others to finish. Instead, they have time to follow their own interests, enjoy unstructured play and creative time.

The flexibility of homeschooling means that we can fit school into our life rather than having to schedule life around school.

We have come to appreciate the social benefits of homeschooling even more than the academic benefits: the lack of peer pressure, the fact that the kids are able to develop their own interests, the kids feel comfortable with being who they are, and we have positive family relationships.

### **Response 2**

Yes all of the above. I have also found that the children are less stressed than when they were at the Montessori school where we last lived. They are much more confident, and their learning difficulties are becoming less of a 'problem'.

### **Response 3**

Since commencing homeschooling, my child has been more settled, confident and achieving at a higher level than when at school. I did not foresee these changes and was pleasantly surprised. I believe the highly stimulating, high pressure environment at school did not suit my child and, although we had not planned to, we have decided to continue to homeschool in the long term.

### **Response 4**

No response provided for this question

## **What are the positives of homeschooling in NSW?**

### **Response 1**

Living in a part of NSW that is close to Canberra, we have access to many national institutions and good libraries.

Being able to access resources such as “scootle” is useful. It would be great if homeschoolers could be given access to all such resources that schools can have access to.

### **Response 2**

Freedom to follow the child's interest while still meeting educational needs.

Ability to educate more broadly AND in depth than the required NSW ed board curriculum

Children are not rushed or stressed fitting to the normal school timetable

Children are allowed to develop to their full potential without limits of environment, expectations and peer pressures

### **Response 3**

As I have no other state system to compare to, I cannot say whether NSW is any more or less positive to homeschool in than other states.

### **Response 4**

No response provided for this question.

## **What are the negatives of homeschooling in NSW?**

### **Response 1**

I think it is a shame that the NSW government does not allow more interaction between homeschoolers and schools. The ACT and South Australia allow part-time schooling, why not NSW?

### **Response 2**

I resent having to report to the education department my curriculum plans and reports of what the children have achieved. If they were in a department school it is unlikely that they would have achieved anywhere near what they have at home. The time it takes me to keep mundane records takes me away from actual active planning and recording to provide a more flourishing curriculum.

### **Response 3**

As I have no other state system to compare to, I cannot say whether NSW is any more or less positive to homeschool in than other states.

### **Response 4**

You are required to follow the curriculum, and cannot teach above or below the year of school your child is registered for without permission. If your child needs to be removed from school quickly, this does not help! You'd have to move them to a new school and then apply to homeschool. All in all, it feels like they are actively discouraging you from homeschooling.

The requirements don't take into account the different methods for educating children, because you have to stick with the curriculum.

## **If you are a registered homeschooler: What are your experiences of the registration process?**

### **Response 1**

Our experience with the authorised person who usually comes for the home visits has been very positive. She has a good understanding of homeschooling and respects different learning and teaching styles. I have always found her comments helpful and I feel confident that she will treat us and other families fairly. On one occasion, the regular authorised person was on sick leave, and the home visit from her temporary replacement was a more stressful and less helpful experience.

I have heard of people from other areas that had negative experiences with their home visits, and it strikes me that the authorised person has a lot of power which could be abused by somebody who is not that well-disposed towards home education or who does not fully understand how home education can be quite different from school.

### **Response 2**

I am lucky to have had a positive and relaxed assessor on both of my registration visits. She has made the process easy for me.

However, I do not believe that her quick look at my records and plans justifies the need for them. I spend hours and hours formulating the reports that are received with a quick glance and a tick in a few boxes. My time is better spent working with my children than writing reports.

### **Response 3**

I have found the registration process onerous. I find the yearly inspections to be invasive and unnecessary. I spent a lot of time and energy attempting to fulfil the requirements of the registration board. I did not find the process useful in any way and when the inspector came she barely looked at it. The inspector gave me the impression that she just wanted to know I had done it. Therefore, if it is not 'inspected' and not useful to me for the schooling process, I do not see why it is necessary.

### **Response 4**

The registration process takes a long time (at least three months). Your child has to stay in school throughout the process and then be pulled out suddenly. I felt as though the Board of Studies (at the time) didn't want me to homeschool my children, but when our assessor came, she was very clear about our role and supportive of our choice to homeschool.

## **If you are a registered homeschooler: Would you like to see the process change in any way?**

### **Response 1**

The registration process is too onerous. I find I spend too much time writing up weekly diaries and school reports.

I do not think the higher level of paperwork required in NSW compared to South Australia or Victoria results in better outcomes for the children and I therefore question the need for the high level of bureaucratic oversight of homeschooling families in NSW.

### **Response 2**

I believe the process of registration can be simplified to exclude the need for parents to have to spend so much time doing paperwork, and more time being active in their child's ongoing education.

### **Response 3**

I would like to see the registration process change.

I believe that an inspection every 2-5 years would be more practical.

The board needs a broader view of alternative methods of education and should focus more on the outcomes of students than the plans for achievement that parents scribble out to please the board.

### **Response 4**

I would like the process to be quicker (maybe a grace period to try it out like the ACT has) and for there to be more choice in how we homeschool - more support for the diverse methods that people use to educate their children. I think there should also be a newsletter that tells of opportunities for homeschooled kids within the state and how they can get into the workforce after, like education fairs and VET resources, outlining the paths for various careers. Perhaps a contact person (like a VET co-ordinator for homeschoolers) in the state who can guide older children, like they do at school.

It would also be lovely (and wishful thinking) if there was some funding for education costs we could apply for, extra from the schoolkids bonus.



## **Do you believe you have been supported by the NSW government in your choice to homeschool?**

### **Response 1**

Our regular authorised person has been really supportive, but that has been the only point of contact with the NSW government.

I take the NSW requirements for homeschoolers seriously, but I have been disturbed by the changes made to the home education information package. My impression was that a generally supportive attitude that was expressed in previous information packages has been changed towards a more critical and negative attitude. While our authorised person assured me that all the basic requirements have remained the same, I still feel that the NSW government is now less supportive of homeschooling than before.

### **Response 2**

Yes I was given permission to home educate. However I'm not interested in permission from a government that I don't respect and who do not provide the highest quality of education in their own institutions. How can the minister decide whether my home education program is sufficient when he cannot provide a sufficient program in his own schools? It's irrational.

Better support would involve parents receiving payments for educating their children at home. Better support would involve facilities available FREE OF CHARGE to home educating families including sports and rec and the arts. Better support would involve community programs on educating your own children at home, to make the possibility more achievable by those who have been scared off by the school system and the red tape of registration.

Parents do not need to be governed in how to educate their children.

### **Response 3**

The board could provide more access, for homeschoolers, to resources that state schools have.

The option of part-time homeschooling would interest me if it could be made available in NSW.

### **Response 4**

I feel that the NSW government is trying to make sure that we maintain high standards without having to do anything to help us with that. I believe that in choosing to homeschool, it is my responsibility to make sure my children have a good education. I feel, however, that the NSW government tries to stipulate as much as they can of how I educate them, without having to provide any support at all.

I feel that better support would be to make sure we are educating our children in a safe, happy and supportive environment, without stipulating what we have to teach or how we have to teach it. I think providing the same resources that are provided to schools, such as guidance counsellors, opportunities for mass subscription options, courses in the holidays. Also the units and ideas for teaching things would be helpful, and maybe even teacher development information. I'm not asking for more funding necessarily, just access to the same facilities teachers have.