

**Submission
No 111**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 8/08/2014

Partially Confidential

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the home schooling inquiry. I am a home educating parent with 6 children, 2 of them currently within the BoSTES age range for registration. I prefer to use the term home educating as it is not my aim to replicate school at home but to educate my children. I would like to see an improvement in the general understanding of what home schooling is, and a simplification of the procedures for registration.

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

(a) the background of home schooling including comparison of practices with other jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand,

Although I have no personal experience with registering in other states I believe the registration requirements in NSW are currently more onerous to the parents than those required in other states of Australia.

(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 eldest daughter has excelled in the home environment for her learning both academically and socially. Although she is now 17 and no longer qualifies for registration as a student she continues to study each day as she has a love for learning. During her years learning at home she has been able to follow her passions and she has developed skill as a photographer. She has recently started to offer family and baby photo shoots, and has had several paid sessions. During her time at home she has also learnt how to manage a home and care for younger siblings. Due to this experience she also has a part time job as a home help. The young girl that was very insecure and struggling at school has developed into a delightful, mature and responsible young lady. I could not be happier with the outcome of her education.

Two of my children have completed several online study courses offered by Australian Universities. They have had no difficulty in doing these and the opportunities for more study by Open Universities Australia is there if they so desire.

(ii) financial costs,

My husband is the sole financial provider in our family. As a qualified physiotherapist we have chosen to forgo considerable income to invest in the education of our children regardless of any financial implications. When my daughter turned 17 we were no longer eligible to receive Centerlink payments for her even though she has continued to study. Children enrolled at school doing a similar work load are eligible to receive these payments. As someone who is saving the education department thousands of dollars by taking on the responsibility and financial costs of educating my children I would like to see the financial support continue. This would be simply by allowing registration to continue after the 17th birthday if the student wishes to continue study.

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

Our initial reason to home educate was due to my daughter not thriving at school. She has dyslexia and was struggling to learn in the school environment and her self-confidence was being destroyed. The school would not recognize her need for help; she wasn't bad enough yet for that. After looking at the various options for extra tutoring we felt it unfair for a 7 year old to spend all day at school and then come home and spend more hours learning the things she hadn't understood at school. We said if only she didn't have to go to school and waste all that time there. We then decided to bring her home and teach her myself. Our initial plan was to home educate for a year and half, and get her back to grade level and put her back in school at the start of year 4. At this time I also had a daughter in kindergarten.

She remained at school all this time. Interestingly it was the AP (authorized person) who told me I would never be happy with the school system again once I had home schooled. I assured him I only needed registration for this time period.

At some stage during that year and half we decided that the benefits of home educating were huge and it was a life style choice that we wanted to make. After sending 3 girls to school for one term in 2006, we started to home educate as a permanent choice. The reasons were many but we felt that the home environment is the best place to learn and the importance of family relationships can be nurtured. Learning can be personalized according to need; fostering a love of learning and the ability to follow passions and develop strengths. We also saw it as the best use of time and a way to ensure family values were upheld.

(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers,

No comment

(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children,

As already mentioned our daughter's learning difficulties and the fact that these were not catered for at school was where our home educating experience started. I feel each child has particular needs that can be best catered for in the personal environment of our home.

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

Home schooling is a misleading term in that it implies a replication of the school at home. Home education could be referred to as life education because the learning happens everywhere and all the time. As the children are with me all day they learn wherever we are. At school they talk about healthy eating and go on excursions to the local supermarket. We plan and cook our meals together after doing the grocery shopping together each week. At school they talk about building construction. We stop and watch them pouring cement for the foundations of a house or doing road works.

My aim is to instill a lifelong love of learning. Home education encourages this by allowing students to follow their interests. It is not realistic to expect every child to be interested in learning about a certain topic at a particular age. Distance education is really home schooling. It requires the reproduction of the school in the home environment. There is less flexibility for working at the child's academic level and allowing for interests to develop.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

(i) current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers,

During my time as a home educator the requirements have changed and the guidelines appear to be more prescriptive as to what to study when. Although I have never experienced any trouble with gaining registration for my children I find the process time consuming and stressful. I create a lot of paperwork that is of no benefit to me or my children's education.

(ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorized persons,

All the authorized persons I have dealt with have been supportive of home schooling. When I have mentioned a curriculum they are not familiar with they have expressed interest and usually been very happy with the standard of learning involved.

(iii) adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses,

Most parents who choose to home educate their children are generally concerned that their child's education is based on quality not quantity. Often studying deeper into a topic of interest will result in more actual learning than superficial covering of many topics. The new syllabuses appear to be very prescriptive, with particular topics having to be covered in a set year. A quality education is possible without strict adherence to NSW syllabuses.

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

The majority of home educating parents want the best for our children and we are willing to sacrifice a lot personally to teach them at home. Home education is not the easy option, but I believe it is the best option for my family. My children are all very happy at home and their memories of school are not. My children's best friends are their siblings but they also have many other good friends that they see regularly. We do not isolate our children. In fact our children are probably recognized in the community by more people than "school children" because they are out and about in the community, not behind school fences.

My children do not have to cope with bullying or peer pressure each day. They are free to develop their own opinions, values and beliefs in a safe and caring environment. My 3 eldest children are all mature, reliable, delightful young citizens.

(vi) appropriateness of the current regulatory regime and ways in which it could be improved,

No comment

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

No comment

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

As the BoSTES is the regulating body for home education in NSW it would be appropriate for the home educating community to have at least one representative on the board.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Yours sincerely