

Submission
No 48

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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Submission to Select Committee to enquire into and report on home schooling in New South Wales

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Background:

Our eldest son is now thirty. He was in school until the end of Year 2, at which point (twenty two years ago) he and his brother came home to be educated. Since that time I have been engaged in home-schooling our eight children. Four of these are still at home, aged from eight to sixteen. Our oldest son is a farmer, having obtained a degree in agriculture from the University of New England. Our second son is an electrician, working in the gold and copper mine in Cobar. Our daughter, who has a degree in the Liberal Arts from Campion College in Sydney, is working, and studying for a second degree. Our eighteen-year-old son is completing the HSC; he has been a student at Mary Mackillop College in Wagga Wagga for Years 11 and 12.

Outcomes of home schooling including transition to further study and work

As stated above, our older three children managed the transition to work and study without any difficulty other than the prejudice frequently exhibited towards those who have had an unconventional schooling. Each of them is hard working, self-supporting and successful in his or her chosen field. The two oldest are married with children. The situation of each is demonstrably one of well-adjusted, responsible social beings.

Other young adults from among their friends, who were also home-schooled, offer similar indications of success. Many are married with children; **all are self-supporting**. By occupation they include electricians, accountants, hairdressers, nurses, doctors, farmers, business administrators, full-time mothers, teachers, business managers, IT specialists, professional musicians, students, university lecturers, members of the Armed Forces, builders, fitters and turners, administration workers, governesses, seminarians, lawyers – this list is not comprehensive, simply those I can call to mind immediately.

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During his recent lecture tour in Australia, Dr Roger Scruton, an eminent British philosopher, remarked that when he was teaching in universities his most capable and dedicated students, whom he held to be notable because they were not peer-dependent but were able to think independently, had very frequently been home schooled.

It seems that homeschooling creates responsible and productive citizens, which is positive for both the individual and society. By Michael H. Romanowski, professor at the Center for Teacher Education, Ohio Northern University; *“Revisiting the Common Myths About Homeschooling, 2006”*

Financial Costs

The financial cost to the government of home schooling is minimal, since home-schooled children are not being funded by the tax-payer. The major cost to the government of home-schooled children is the self-imposed cost of maintaining bureaucratic surveillance.

On the other hand, the cost of maintaining a child in a state school, according the NSW government :

In 2009/10, NSW spent \$12,540 per full-time primary student in the classroom

In 2009/10, NSW spent \$15,136 per full-time secondary student in the classroom

Not only do home-schooled children receive no benefit in the form of educational expenses, but there is no recognition given to the **financial cost to the family** of the politically-unacknowledged contribution of stay-at-home mothers, for whom no provision is made in the taxation system.

Home-schooling mothers, who devote their time to educating and raising children to become responsible members of society, are frequently referred to as ‘non-working mothers’. This is illogical, given that if their daily tasks were performed by individuals paid to do so, they would mysteriously be transformed into ‘working mothers’! None of the home-schooled children I have known over the past twenty-two years who are now adult are reliant on government benefits for his or her living. Those who are married are almost without exception in stable relationships and

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bringing up children of their own (future taxpayers). This is a considerable financial benefit to the government.

Reasons for home schooling

Selected quotations follow from a paper taken from *Education Research and Perspectives*, Vol.27, No. 1, 2000; *Home Schooling: An emerging research agenda* (Anne Chapman, The University of Western Australia; Thomas A. O'Donoghue, The University of Western Australia)

The existing and limited research literature into reasons why parents choose home schooling reveals nine major reasons:

- (1) Dissatisfaction with traditional schools;*
- (2) Religious motives;*
- (3) The claim that schools cannot provide children with the personal interest and attention they can get from their family;*
- (4) Parental rights and responsibility over government regulations;*
- (5) Protection from unwanted influences;*
- (6) Negative schooling experiences;*
- (7) Maintenance of the family unit;*
- (8) Views on child development; and New Age influences.*

Categories of Home Schooling Parents and Family Characteristics

The response to the idea of home schooling is often that of a political stance, it being assumed that home schooling families must be radical, de-schoolers or anti-establishment. There is also a general feeling that home schooling is strange and abnormal. On this, Meighan (1984) points out that the 'analysis of the characteristics of the membership expose this view of home educators as wildly inaccurate' (p. 166).

In summary, Meighan (1995) states that 'the academic excellence of home schooled children has been repeatedly demonstrated in research in the USA' (p.278).

Meighan (1995) believes that few people dwell on the academic issue of home schooling; rather, it is the social education that they question. According to Lines (1987), however, the evidence for the social development of home schooled children is even more scarce than that for academic achievement. What does exist, suggests superior development. Ray (1989) reported on a US study that measured factors associated with social development in home schoolers and concluded that home schooled children were in no way socially disadvantaged or deprived.

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Our own reasons for home-schooling were initially prompted by three things: we were dissatisfied with the religious and social education being exercised upon our children; our second son is dyslexic; and I had greatly enjoyed having been home-schooled myself from Form I to Form V.

These reasons have changed a little over time. Rather than choosing to home school for negative reasons (dissatisfaction with the education provided by schools) we now choose to home school for very positive reasons: we do so because we have observed that home-schooling has been for us a highly successful endeavour, and we are very happy with the results this has produced for our children, spiritually, socially, emotionally and academically.

With regard to **demographics** of the parents, my husband and I are both of Anglo-Saxon origin, and English is our mother tongue. I hold a Bachelor of Arts and my husband a BA and a Master of Science. We are comfortably off, and live rurally. **However, this is by no means typical of those parents whom we know through home-schooling.** Some have tertiary educational qualifications; some did not complete high school. They come from and occupy many differing social and ethnic backgrounds. Indeed, what is remarkable is the diversity of parents undertaking home-schooling . What unites those whom we know is generally shared religious belief.

Characteristics and Educational Needs of Home Schooled Children

Anecdotal evidence garnered from the social interactions our children have with non-home-schooled children and their families – evidence which is almost universally expressed in positive terms, complimenting us on the good manners and easy social dynamics displayed by our children in such situations – is only that, anecdotal and limited. However, as quoted above and elsewhere, research does tend to indicate that home-schooled children fare better than average socially and academically.

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It seems to me from experience that there are a greater number of children with learning difficulties among the home-schooled population than I would expect to find in the school population, but on the other hand I have had little experience of schools over the last twenty years. Perhaps learning difficulties, particularly on the autism/Asperger spectrum, are more common in schools these days. On the whole, those parents whom I know who have chosen to home-school children with learning difficulties appear to be successful.

Comparison of home schooling to school education and distance education

As remarked above, I have had limited dealings with schools recently. However, our son is currently completing the HSC in school after having been home-schooled to complete Year 10. His observations are similar to mine, when I too was sent to school in Year 11, or Lower Sixth as it was then; that is to say, that children who have been educated within the school system expect a great deal to be done for them, find it difficult to regulate their own study, are very peer-dependent, are less mature socially and emotionally, and are culturally ignorant.

When I was sent to school in the late 1970s, I found that the specialist sciences – physics, chemistry, and mathematics - were better advanced among school students, but this has not been the experience of my own children.

In my experience, distance education for school age children impedes their learning. Children who have finished topics and wish to progress must wait and fit in with the timetable imposed by TAFE. The primary school State distance education programme seems cumbersome, including a great deal of 'busy work' apparently mostly aimed at producing paper evidence of supposed learning. The distance education programmes I have examined or experienced fall far short of the excellence of the old Blackfriars Correspondence School.

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Education within schools tends to be narrow and exam-focussed, with a disproportionate and unhelpful emphasis on the use of computers. Use of logic and the proper gathering and use of evidence in forming an argument often does not seem to be well inculcated, and school students are therefore at the mercy of fashionable but unverified theories taught as though they were fact by biased teachers and/or curricula.

There is an unhealthy agenda taught regarding sexual behaviour and mores (vide Dr Miriam Grossman, *'Unprotected'* Barnes & Noble, 2006), which begins very early, is taught without reference to the parents' opinions and values, and is enforced through bullying tactics.

By necessity, education within schools requires a good deal of time is spent in crowd management, which time is not required for home educated children.

It was concluded that the homeschooled children who took part in this study are not suffering academically from their homeschool experience... It appears that the overall phenomenon is not inhibiting the youth who are taught at home from matching or excelling average conventional school achievement. Maria A. C. Watkins, Department of Educational Psychology, Edmonton, Alberta. 1997. " Are there Significant Differences in Academic Achievement Between Homeschooled and Conventionally Schooled Students?"

An article in the Sun Herald, 1st June 2014, on page 5, entitled 'Rise in Homeschooling Spurs Parliamentary Inquiry', led to the report that *"Some parents might be able to educate some children in a home setting, but there is no evidence that adults without professional training can provide quality instruction."* This statement is inaccurate, representative of prejudice, not of evidence.

There is a great deal of evidence from numerous studies which demonstrate that parents without professional training can provide very high quality of instruction; should this be doubted, the best response would be to conduct a thorough and unbiased investigation among young people who have been homeschooled.

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Current Registration Processes

The ease of the current registration process depends upon the individual Authorised Person dealing with each family. My experience has been generally positive, but recent changes in the process seem to have been directed at making registration as difficult and intimidating as possible. **This is unwarranted discrimination against parents wishing to home-school.**

Parents are the primary educators of their children.

It is incumbent upon the government, as represented by the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards, to justify any intervention it makes in the decisions or processes of the parents of home-schooled children. Given that graduates of the state school system can, and do, emerge from twelve years of formal education illiterate, innumerate and uncivilised, (though of course this does not apply to every high-school student from every State school) the government is in no position to make any educational demands of home-schooling families, other than that no sedition is taught. In any event, the evidence is overwhelming that home-schooled children achieve very well in academic areas.

Using archival data, 408 students were evaluated based on their four-year secondary school type: 137 public-schooled students; 142 Catholic-schooled students; and 129 homeschooled students. Equally weighted criteria were overall SAT or ACT scores, overall college grade-point average (GPA), GPA by major, and core GPA. A statistically significant difference was found between homeschooled students and traditionally schooled students in ACT and SAT scores and overall GPA, showing value to the institution and supporting the literature with regards to the academic viability of homeschooled students in college. Marc Snyder, Ave Maria University, Florida

Parents do not have to justify to the government how they choose to educate their children.

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The supposed need for a national or state curriculum is a flawed concept, ideologically driven. If desired, a basic state-wide test of literacy and numeracy could be implemented for Year 12; other than that, the development of education should be left to the individual institution. Universities, which already complain of continually lowering standards, could institute their own individual admissions examination to test such necessary abilities as being able to collate facts, present an argument, and write clearly. Similar examinations could test the level of basic concepts needed for mathematics, physics, or chemistry, since the current HSC examinations often produce candidates lacking the proper level of knowledge.

Professor Barry Spurr (of the Department of English in the University of Sydney and a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators) has referred to the poor standards of literacy of many undergraduates from the NSW school system enrolling for university study in recent years. Often, they need to undertake remedial work in such as English expression and essay-writing to bring basic skills in these areas up to the standard which once would have been taken for granted from matriculants to one of Australia's premier universities, such as Sydney.

The University of Newcastle finds the poor level of competence among its applicants for engineering so great that it considered extending the degree by a year in order to provide remedial teaching in the first year.

This is no evidence that the imposition of a state syllabus has been effective in improving academic standards.

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Potential Benefits or Impediments to Children's Safety, Welfare and Wellbeing

The NSW Greens party candidate, John Kaye, is reported as having said that '*Without the watchful eye of teachers or regular inspections, some children could end up trapped in abusive settings or left without appropriate learning opportunities*'. By implication, teachers are reliable citizens, providing watchful eyes, and parents are not. However, this is not factual. Teachers have been known to abuse children physically, emotionally and sexually. School settings do not of themselves protect children from abuse by adults, nor from abuse by other children.

The curious assumption underlying the justification of BOSTE's attempted regulation of home-schooling is that the home is not the normal place in which to successfully raise children, whereas a school setting is 'normal' and produces 'normal' citizens. **However, the greatest indicator of vulnerability in children is not whether they are being homeschooled, and not whether or how that is regulated, but whether the children are from intact families.** Children not living with their two biological parents are at a much higher risk of all forms of abuse than children in intact families. This finding is repeated through many, many studies.

Academic aptitude and achievement have been reported to be inferior among children of divorced parents as compared with children of intact homes (Wadsby and Svedin, 1996). In a 1985 study in Wisconsin, Roseby and Deutsch found that deterioration in school performance was one of the most consistent outcomes associated with separation and divorce (Wadsby and Svedin, 1996). Bisnaire, Firestone, and Rynard found in 1990 that there was a "significant decline" in academic performance of one third of children from disrupted families (Wadsby and Svedin, 1996). Since divorce has such negative effects on children's academic performances, it should be no surprise that homeschooled students are above academic norms. Less than 2% of homeschooled students face divorce. Johanna Burns, 1999; "The Correlational Relationship between Homeschooling Demographics and High Test Scores"

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There is considerable evidence, both from scholarly studies and from private experience, to show that many children who have been home-schooled are well-adjusted, capable and competent, and have benefitted from their experiences.

The Committee could verify this for itself, by instituting a State or nation wide survey to establish the outcome of homeschooling for young people, collating anonymous details from people who have been homeschooled on the years for which they were homeschooled, their current situation as regards employment, and by what path they managed the transition from homeschooling to the workforce or further qualifications.

Appropriateness of Current Regulatory Regime

As observed above, parents do not have to justify to the government how they choose to educate their children. The government, on the other hand, must provide cogent and convincing evidence in order to justify any attempt it makes to regulate the education of home-schooled children.

Evidence differs from prejudice, and prejudice should not be accepted or offered as evidence.

Brian D. Ray and Bruce K. Eagleson, "*State Regulation of Homeschooling and Homeschoolers' SAT Scores*" in *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal* 6, no. 3 (14 August 2008) concluded that a study of over 6,000 homeschooled students' SAT scores nationwide (in the US) demonstrates that homeschoolers' overall academic achievement is **not** affected by the degree to which homeschooling is regulated by the individual states. Regulations differ widely across the States, for example from the situation in Alberta, where homeschoolers must follow a set curriculum and be placed under the supervision of a school, to that of Alaska, where all that is required is notification that the child will henceforth be home-schooled.

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The current regime in NSW is intimidatory and unnecessary. Should parents choose to educate their children at home, all that should be required is that they notify the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards that this is their choice. This notification could be renewed each year that the parent wishes to continue home-schooling.

The question of whether being home-schooled allows 'abusive situations' of children is more a question of whether the children's homes allow abusive situations. It is certainly conceivable that parents who have no intention of schooling their children in any way may claim to be home-schooling, and then make no provision for education; however, parents who are intending such neglect and abuse of their children are unlikely be capable or desirous of making the effort to ensure those children attend school each day, were that made compulsory. Regulations are unlikely to make much difference in either case.

The current regime provides little benefit to home-schoolers and is costly for the government. Most home-schoolers derive their support from local groups, and their resources from the huge variety available on the internet. This will pertain whether or not the BOSTES imposes the current, more lenient, or more rigorous regulations.

Conclusion:

There is a considerable body of evidence already existing which indicates that home-schooling is generally effective both academically and socially. This existing evidence includes the report by Talina Drabrach of the NSW Parliamentary Research Service in August 2013, entitled *Home Education In NSW*, (e-brief issue 7/2013), **There is no evidence to suggest that increasing the level of government regulation will in any way alter or improve the effectiveness of home-schooling.**