

**Submission
No 156**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Organisation: Home Schooling Encouragement Network and Support Group
(HENS), Southern Sydney

Date received: 8/08/2014

Submission to the Homeschooling Inquiry

By **HENS** (Homeschooling Encouragement Network and Support Group – Southern Sydney)
Recommendations:

1. *That a new system, an independent body is set up to oversee, facilitate and support home education (based on the proven Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council model - THEAC)*
2. *That registration is managed by the above independent body. Registration not regulation.*
3. *That home educators have notification and equal access to educational support services, resources, opportunities and any initiatives which are available to children in the school system.*

HENS Submission Overview

- A. *Introduction of our Network Group*
 - a. *Benefits of homeschooling to our children*
 - b. *Outcomes of homeschooling within our own group*
- B. *Regulatory framework for homeschooling:*
 - a. *Our Group's Experience*
 - b. *Families on Trial*
 - c. *Adherence to the NSW Syllabuses*
- C. *Appropriateness of the Current Regime*
 - a. *OBoS conducts a Homeschool Study in 1999*
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 - e. *Increased Lack of Trust*
- D. *Ways in which the Registration Process can be improved (THEAC)*
- E. *Support Issues for Homeschooling Families*

Conclusion

APPENDIX: Submission to the Homeschooling Inquiry (longer version)

A. Introduction to our Homeschooling Group

As a group of home educating families, we, the Homeschooling Encouragement Network and Support Group (HENS) would like to present this submission to the Select Committee on Home Schooling. The Homeschooling Encouragement Network and Support Group (Southern Sydney) (HENS) is a group of families who have educated over many years. The experience in our group ranges from those who have home educated for 20+ years to those who have just begun. As parents, we like to meet regularly for support and encouragement (monthly discussion nights where we educate ourselves, discuss educational philosophies, approaches and day to day experiences, and answer questions for new homeschool families,) as well as gather socially as families. We also use this network as a way to organize activities, joining together to form sports groups, art classes, gymnastic classes, teen debating / book discussion times, drama, dance, and many other experiences that come up and are advertised among our network community.

This submission has been prepared to outline the views that are supported within this Homeschooling Encouragement, Network and Support group.

This discussion has arisen due to the updated Registration for Homeschooling Information Package, (IP) 2013. This IP has made a significant move from being a document which seeks to assist parents who desire to register for home education to one which is regulatory and prescriptive. It does not reflect an understanding of how home education works, nor does it provide flexibility for differing educational approaches.

Writing this submission allows us as a group to outline what homeschooling means to us, and we will present our concerns, facts, opinions and recommendations.

Some Reasons and Benefits of Home Education to our children

Within our support group there are a mix of reasons to homeschool. They range from a strong belief in parental responsibility, to the view that home education is better for our children due to the strong parent/child relationship, one on one attention, an environment where the love of learning is cultivated as well as reasons pertaining to removing children from difficulties in the school environment.

Most of the time, our families teach their children independently and our children learn to work alone, within the context of the family. However, being a part of a Support Group (as is the case with other homeschooling support groups), our children have many and varied possibilities to join specialist classes to teach a skill or subject area such as Science, Drama, Dance, Choir, Basketball and other sports, Gymnastics, Thinking Clubs, Debating, Book Discussion Groups and more. We also have a framework for socialization (e.g. monthly picnics, park play etc)

Outcomes of Homeschooling within our Group

Of the families represented here, many children have already graduated. Several children have gone on to study at TAFE, University and other Tertiary Institutions, complete trades and/or run their own businesses and are effective in contributing to their communities.

B. Regulatory Framework For Homeschooling

Our Group's Experiences with the Registration Process

Quite a number of our homeschooler support group have educated for 20 or more years. We have seen how the governing body progressively imposed more and more regulation. The data clearly demonstrates that there were significant regulatory changes taking place since 2011, and these changes have had a direct negative impact upon the home education community. It created anxiety among our own community of homeschooling families about the next registration visits and more of our time is now spent in discussing process as well as re-assuring the group.

Families felt as though they were on Trial

The language used in the 2013 IP made us feel as though we were on trial. That is why so many of us are anxious about the registration process. That is also a reason why some choose not to register. One important introductory statement was changed in the 2013 Pack has proved to be indicative of the fundamental change that occurred through many different parts of the IP.

"Home schooling, also ~~called~~ referred to as home education, ~~allows~~ requires a parent to ~~integrate~~ deliver the NSW Board of Studies curriculum ~~with the learning processes that occur naturally in the home throughout a child's development.~~"

Adherence to the delivery of the NSW Syllabuses;

As far as our educational approaches to homeschooling, our group is hugely diverse. Most of our families are eclectic in their approach and use many different resources and approaches to teach their children. All of the various approaches have been accepted by the Board of Studies and most of these families do not consult the

NSW syllabuses when choosing their approach. The minimum curriculum requirements were met and exceeded by home educating families.

C. Appropriateness of the current regulatory regime

The Registration Process that homeschooling families need to go through to home educate in New South Wales, does not currently reflect an understanding of Home Education. The points below show the progression towards more regulation and the increased lack of understanding of Office of the Board of Studies from 2000 onwards.

The Board Commissions a Home Education Study, in 1999

In the past, the Office of the Board of Studies seemed to understand what home education looked like and was willing to engage, consult and consider home education as a separate entity. For example, in 1999, an independent research company, was commissioned by the Office of the Board of Studies to conduct a process for consultation with home educators on the suitability of the requirements for registration for home schooling and whether regulations would be desirable. 1493 registered home educators completed the survey and one of the findings of the Home Education Consultation Report, 2000 revealed that 84% of the respondents favoured guidelines in favour to regulations.

The Board Takes Note of the Research ... for a Time

We believe that this report had an impact on the registration of home educators for years. We have worked according to guidelines (rather than regulations) and specific Key Learning Area curriculum guidelines were listed for our benefit in each of the Information Packages until 2013.

Positive Regional Meetings Held to Allay Fears in 2005

There seemed to be a degree of understanding and support that even when changes occurred in the Education Act in 2004, a representative from the Board of Studies held regional meetings to clarify and assure the home educating community that the changes would not affect home educators. (They still felt the impact of the research paper in their minds.)

Information Packs Created in Consultation up to 2006

Another example of this top heavy approach rather than supportive role, is the fact that Information Packages were created in consultation with experienced home educators in 1998, 2004 and 2006 and feedback was welcomed in 2004 and 2006, but not in subsequent Information Packages (2010, 2011 2013)

Lack of trust due to many contradictory statements

The current Information Package was released on the 26th of August and because there were such significant changes, many letters were written voicing disagreement and real concerns. Members from the HENS group wrote comprehensive comparison charts to show these changes. However, the Office of the Board of Studies continually refused to acknowledge that their 2013 IP had been changed significantly. This continual refusal and the fact that changes were seen on ground level as Authorised Persons began to regulate homeschool families differently, has led to a lack of trust in the Board of Studies.

D. Ways in which the Registration Process can be improved

The BOSTES has shown over the years and in especially in recent times that they are wishing to regulate home education in the same way as the non-governmental schools. We cannot work under a system which is not willing to support us and does not have our interests at heart and continually creeps to the place of more regulation. Increased regulation does not mean better quality. The model which has proven to be the most effective in Australia is the Tasmanian model – Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council. We believe that this model recognizes the democratic right to freedom of choice in education by providing a body which understands and gives validity to home education and shows due diligence to oversee, facilitate and support home educating families.

E. Support Issues for Homeschooling Families

Home educating families have felt that they are discriminated against because of their educational choice. Many educational services are not available to us.

Conclusion

It is our hope that, as servants of the people, the Government has the best interests of all children in mind, and of all educational methods and choices available. We believe that freedom in education is a choice and that

choice and diversity brings excellence. We want to provide our children with the best education possible and we want this educational choice to be seen as a valid alternative, supported by an independent Advisory Council. We want registration to become fair, pedagogically-blind, philosophically-blind and respectful. We do not believe that the Office of the Board of Studies has our interests at heart and is not motivated by a desire to support and encourage home educators and thus we firmly believe that a new model needs to be formed.