

**Submission
No 177**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

I am a mother of three children, two of whom are currently registered for home schooling, and one who is not yet school age.

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

(b) the current context of home schooling in New South Wales including:

(ii) financial costs,

The biggest cost for our family would be the loss of a second income so that I can be at home with the children. As well as this reduction in income, we have increased costs associated with homeschooling, in order to provide our children a quality education – excursions, books, subscriptions, instruments, art supplies, sports equipment and regular activities outside the home, to name a few.

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

My husband and I chose home education for our children because we want to foster a lifelong enthusiasm for learning. While this is certainly possible within the school system, we believe that home is the best place for this to happen for our children, where they can be given the time and resources they need to explore the world around them. We strive to create a rich atmosphere in which our children are always exploring and discovering new things.

One of the things we love about home education is the ability to learn things in context. Our children's education is full of hands on experiences. For example, when my oldest son was five he decided he wanted a particular Lego set. He cut the picture from the catalogue with his target amount of \$35, and then set about running a cookie business. He took orders from family and friends, baked and packaged the cookies, then we went on a delivery run and he ticked orders off his handwritten order sheet as he received payment. This was real world mathematics, relevant to his life, and has stuck with him much more effectively than filling out worksheets about money. Our days are filled with these sorts of experiences, and this is the kind of learning our children internalise best.

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

My son is a fairly typical six year old boy. He is bright and bubbly, full of energy and he loves to chat. All these are qualities I love about him, but they would not necessarily serve him well in a typical classroom. At home I can tailor his learning to meet his needs – he can bounce on the trampoline while recalling facts about the human body, or dig in the dirt while he listens to me read aloud. He can ask me questions without fear of disrupting other students, and know that together we will find out about the things he wants to know.

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

The homeschooling community in our area is large and vibrant, with a growing number of weekly activities and classes available to us, as well as one-off outings and events from time to time. While it is not possible to be involved in everything, we enjoy being able to take part in the activities and events that meet our needs and interests. As well as this, our children are involved in activities outside the homeschooling community – church groups, dancing, swimming, gymnastics, singing – to name a few. These activities are just as important to their education as what they learn while they are physically at home, so I do not believe it is appropriate to suggest homeschooling only counts if it takes place at home. Learning can happen anywhere.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

I have experienced two registrations so far and I am currently preparing for the third. I find the current registration process to be burdensome and of no benefit to our family. Instead of the process being helpful to our children's education, I would say it is actually a hindrance. Hours and hours of work go into putting together the documentation to satisfy the registration requirements. These hours are time taken away from my family; time which would be better spent facilitating my children's learning. The weeks leading up to a registration visit are very stressful, first because of the effort of all the paperwork, and then the visit itself, allowing a total stranger into our lives and our home, to assess whether what we are doing is good enough to satisfy the stringent requirements.

It seems to me the current registration process is more concerned with ticking boxes than actually looking at the child and the quality of their education. As an example, at my first registration visit in 2011, I was given two years registration for my six year old daughter. At my second registration visit I was applying to re-register my now eight year old daughter and to newly register my six year old son. Based on the strength of my program and the records of our learning, the Authorised Person told me he would be recommending I receive two years registration for both children, but that it was unlikely I would receive two years for my son as he was a new registration. Sure enough, when the documents arrived in the mail my daughter's certificate showed two years registration, but my son's only one year. Although I had two years successful homeschooling already under my belt, the repercussion of this policy is that I will now have annual registration visits, as my children are no longer "lined up" in when their registration is due for renewal. I do not want the stress of going through the current registration process annually, and to think that this has happened purely because "that's the policy" is incredibly frustrating to me.

I firmly believe that homeschoolers should be consulted about changes to the registration process, and am disappointed that this did not happen before the last changes in late 2013. I don't doubt that if the registration process was less burdensome, more families would register.

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

While I have not had any overly negative experiences with APs, I strongly believe it's important they have a good understanding of homeschooling, and that it's not a "one size fits all" approach. I don't think it's fair to homeschooling families to have somebody assessing them who is unfamiliar with homeschooling, and whose main educational experience is with schools.

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

I have no problem with using the syllabus as a guide only, but I do not agree with the need for strict adherence. One of the reasons we home educate is so that we can tailor our children's education to their needs. We can accelerate them where they are doing well, and spend longer on things they struggle with. If my child wants to learn why she has red hair when neither of her parents do (an actual question that came up recently), do I need to tell her she has to wait until she's 14 to learn that because it's not in the Year 3 curriculum?

It is my belief that during the registration process, the most important thing is ensuring children are receiving a quality education. Sometimes this will line up neatly with the NSW syllabus, other times it might be ahead, and still others it might be behind. What is truly important is that parents are providing lots of learning experiences and opportunities for their children. Whether or not it matches up with the dozens and dozens of outcomes should not be the focus, as long as quality learning is happening.

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

I truly believe my children are thriving here at home. They have the opportunity to socialise with people, of a wide variety of ages, on a near daily basis. They are not bound only to children their own age, as they would be at school, but have friends of varying ages.

The idea that home educated children are vulnerable to abuse is rather offensive. On a weekly basis, our children are seen by dozens of people – teachers of their various activities, church friends, extended family, their peers, and members of the general community. Besides this, I think the fact that we are willing to put ourselves through this registration process, and under such intense scrutiny, shows that we truly have our children's best interests at heart.

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

I would like to see more appropriate regulation in NSW, and I believe the Tasmanian model is a great example of what this could look like.

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

If the goal of the NSW government is a quality education for every child, then providing adequate support to homeschooling families is essential. The current system is punitive, and seems to be trying to dissuade families from homeschooling, rather than supporting them in what is a legal and valid educational choice. Where a family falls short of the requirements, rather than simply being told they will not be registered, I would like to see them given adequate support to be able to meet those requirements. All the home educating parents I know truly have their children's best interests in mind, and I would love to see this acknowledged and supported, rather than feeling like we are being fought against.

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

I firmly believe home educators should be represented in BoSTES. If BoSTES is to be responsible for the regulation of home education, it is imperative that home educators be represented within its membership.

Conclusions

I hope that this Inquiry will help show that home educators, while quite varied in motivation and methodology, truly want a quality education for their children. I hope to see more appropriate regulation, and adequate support for families who choose this method of education for their children. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my views.

Sincerely,

Tammy Drennan