

Submission  
No 146

## INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the inquiry into home schooling in NSW. We are registered home schooling parents with two children, a thirteen year old girl and a nine year old boy. We have been home schooling for seven years. I have a Diploma in Applied Science (Nursing) and work part time as a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Emergency Nursing. I also hold tertiary qualifications in Health Services Management (UNSW), Writing (UTS) and Expressive and Performing Arts (UNSW). My husband works as a Senior Sales Consultant for higher educational publishing and has a Bachelor of Science, Statistics (UNSW).

I would like to raise two main points. The first is that our choice to home school was largely made because we were not satisfied that a safe environment was being provided for in either the public or the private school we sent our first child to. We also wanted to provide rich and varied learning experiences tailored to our children's individual learning styles, interests and giftings. The second point relates to our daughter's recent month long admission as an inpatient at Sydney Children's Hospital, where we were informed that the hospital school has a policy which excludes home schooled children and that this policy was endorsed by the Board of Studies. There are multiple problems with this policy, which we would like to see addressed. We will also briefly address a couple of other points of reference.

Our daughter suffered anxiety including separation anxiety at the age of four. Her distress was such that during her waking hours she rarely swallowed her saliva. Even whilst distracted and playing with other children, it would fall out onto the ground. After various physical examinations, she was referred to a child psychologist at Sydney Children's Hospital who recommended that we send her to school to help with the separation anxiety. This psychologist said she thought that the home schooling option was not available to us and only available for children with medical conditions or who lived in remote areas. I think that this example shows that awareness of homeschooling as a legal, viable and equally meritorious option is not at the level that it should be, even amongst professionals dealing with children and giving advice to parents.

On the advice of the hospital child psychologist, I enrolled my daughter in the local public school and she commenced when she was four years and eleven months old. She had a friend starting the same year and we thought this may help her transition. Her transition to school was traumatic. She would cry hysterically and grab on to me so hard that the teachers could neither coax her nor pull off her grip. One teacher from another year noticed and intervened, and attempted to physically restrain my daughter. With this attempt, she seemed angry and used a loud and disapproving, frustrated voice 'Well I can't hold her down, she's too strong for me!' At that point I became glad that my daughter was too strong for her. Although I wanted my daughter to stay, I did not want to see her so distressed, and I certainly did not want physical force or violence to be the thing that kept her there. Every day my daughter would follow me out as I would go to leave, at which point I would take her back in. Usually

by the end of recess, or lunch, albeit reluctantly and mostly through tears, she would agree to stay.

On one occasion, on the third day of school when there were two assistant teachers for the group of approximately twenty children, a small child from my daughter's class left the back of a line she was in as they were touring the school. She had followed my daughter to the side gate of the school, who had followed me in her usual style. The class was out of sight and around the other side of the school grounds. We were the only people in sight. I walked to the other side of the school, located the group and took her back. The staff had not noticed.

On another occasion within the first few days of school, my daughter asked to go to the toilet. One of the two teacher's aids had refused her this right, saying 'It's not toilet time yet'. My child was shy, and would not have asked unless she needed to go. Another mother told me this had happened to her child also, and that he had defecated in his pants as a result.

On another occasion, as I was in the playground at recess, I noted that two teachers on playground duty were sitting next to each other chatting. Two boys in approximately fifth grade were fighting and violently kicking each other in the grounds behind them. The teachers sat there unaware.

My daughter was fortunate to have experienced a lovely and understanding kindergarten teacher who helped coax her gently into the classroom and allowed me to stay at the back of the class with my newborn baby every morning. After one term of this, we moved house and decided to home school. It was difficult to leave the school after all the effort her teacher had put in, but the process was exhausting and her anxiety not abating. The principal was supportive of our choice and welcomed us back at any time. The teacher from the other year who had tried to restrain my daughter, however, stopped me in the corridor to voice her utmost disapproval 'I hear you are going to home school. Shame, shame.' Then she softened her tone somewhat 'I have marked some of the home schoolers work in at the Board of Studies, they do quite well actually' and then back to a condemning tone 'but shame, shame (accentuating the word *'shame'*), she is going to miss out on all of this!' pointing to the children lined up in the corridor in uniforms. That only gladdened me that she would be missing out on that.

Prior to leaving to home school, we had applied to a Private School that was given good references from friends, one which allegedly encouraged parental involvement. We were offered a place in this school the following year, for kindergarten, so I stopped homeschooling as much, so that my daughter would not be bored when she went to kindergarten the next year. My husband told the school principal of our previous experience and of my daughter's separation anxiety. He was told by them that they would not kick me out of the class room. On the first day at this new school, after an introduction, myself and a couple of other parents were sitting at the side of the classroom. There was then a solid announcement 'It is now time for all the parents to leave'. The principal of the infants' school sat behind my child on the ground and grasped her wrists so hard I could see the white marks on her wrists. My child yelled and screamed and cried as she tried to break free as I obediently left the room, too upset and incapable to talk to stand up for her.

There were many safety issues at the school, one being the toilets the infants' school shared with adults using the adjoining and shared church hall. Prior to attending the school, we had been attending a church run public playgroup at the adjoining church hall, to help our daughter become familiar with the school grounds and venue. The Infants' School Principal often attended this playgroup. On one occasion I needed to use the toilet and asked the Principal where the adult toilets were. The reply, to my shock, was that we use the school toilets. I was told these were the only ones available. When I went in there, a small child of about kindergarten age came into there during class time unaccompanied. (The same thing happened at other times that we used these toilets during playgroup.) I brought up my concerns immediately to the Principal. She informed me that it was a shared venue and tried to reassure me of the safety of this, explaining that the only groups using the toilets during school time were a playgroup, prayer groups and Alcoholics Anonymous. She then added that she knew everyone in all the groups that used the church hall and knew that none of them would abuse children. Perhaps she was unaware of the statistics that show it is most often those closest to us who have easy access that carry out abuse. Why give people such open access to our children, who are by fact of being children, in a vulnerable position?

Prior to attending this private school we brought up our safety concerns to both of the School Principals, (Infants' and Infants' through Secondary) including the toilets and the low fences with the gate latch that was not easy to close and often left open by people using the church hall. The reason we were given for not addressing them was money, but they also did not seem to see a necessity for change in these areas.

We had many conversations with the Principals regarding these issues, in particular the kindergarten children being allowed one or even two at a time to the shared toilets. These toilets were tucked away behind a wall in a section between the church hall and the school, in the playground, but with the entrance hidden behind the wall and not visible from either the school, the grounds or the church. The Infant's Principal told me that that they were always sent in pairs. I informed her that this was not happening, as I had seen tiny children coming to the toilets alone during class time when I was using them for playgroup. I explained that I didn't think two small children could ward off danger, and expressed my belief that having adults use the same toilets was putting the children at risk. She told me that they had not had a problem with the toilets in 21 years.

I phoned the Board of Studies for advice and was advised that their ought to be separate toilets for infants. (This had also not been the case at the public school we attended the previous year, which had outside toilets shared with both infants and primary students.) On my first call to the Board of Studies, I had been asked the name of the school, but did not give it. I told them I wanted to keep it friendly and address the issues directly. I was told to call the Board of Studies back if they 'sloughed me off'. So, when I was 'sloughed off', I re-called the Board of Studies for further information and advice. I was asked the name of the school and was told that unless I put anything in writing, that the Board of Studies could not do anything anyway. I was told that I needed to give the name of the school so that I would know which umbrella they fell under, so that I could voice a complaint there. It happened to be the Christian Schools' Association.

The Principal of the whole school (infants, primary, middle and high) had said to my husband that he thought we were being overly anxious, so my husband suggested that if that was the case, could we put it to the governing body, the Christian Schools' Association, for an outside and independent assessment of the situation.

So, as agreed, we contacted the Christian Schools Association. The next day, members from the Board of Studies as well as the Christian Schools Association visited the school. When I tried to follow up a week later with what the outcome was, the Christian Schools' Association representative was terse in her interactions and would not give any information 'I am sure Mr \* will let you know'. Mr \* was the Principal of the entire school. (Keeping names out of this to give honor where honor is due - hence the \*.) Whilst he remained friendly, the principal of the infants school did not. We were not informed of the outcome of the visit, and did not feel comfortable to ask as it had become an obvious sore point for all. However the Infants' Principal declared to us that an existing single toilet in the same block (right next to the girls toilets' entrance, both of which were hidden behind a wall and out of view) would be the separate toilet for adults to use. This was not labeled, except temporarily with a piece of paper stuck to the door on an open day, and I did not think that this measure was adequate or safe either.

Although we were not informed, the toilets were changed to a *somewhat* more satisfactory level of safety after two terms, the same holiday period we chose to leave. On meeting with the Principal overseeing the entire school (infants through to secondary) regarding our leaving, he was very gracious, and pointed out that we left the school in a better condition than we came to it.

We visited the school a couple of months later to watch friends in a book week parade. During this visit, the Infants' Principal informed me that she thought we had gone above them and notified the Board of Studies behind their back. She looked genuinely shocked when I told her we hadn't. She knew that the Christian School's Association would be contacted, but apparently my call to the Board of Studies was the catalyst for the visit the next day and the changes that had to be implemented. This explains why the Christian Schools' Association representative was so terse with me (them perhaps being responsible for having approved the facility for so many years) and why we were singled out so often at school and not given the same privileges as other parents. I understand that the Board of Studies was just putting safety first, and that is honorable, but I would have preferred honesty to go along with that.

I believe that my daughter and our family were singled out and discriminated against on various occasions in the private school our daughter attended. I have outlined some of this in point form on the next page, along with other issues that contributed to our decision to exit the school after two terms, and to home educate.

In summary, we found that whilst at this private school there was:

- quenching of creativity and individuality
- inflexibility

inconsistencies

- discrimination

safety concerns

bullying

signs that our daughter was withdrawing more and more socially

signs that our daughter was staying stagnant academically, or declining; not learning anything or being extended or challenged. Little left over quality time to practice or extend previous learning at home.

In more detail:

- Every other parent than myself was allowed to walk their child into class or at least into the hat room to help hang their bag. I was not allowed to do this, nor was I allowed to even say hello to my daughter whilst passing through on the same grounds to the hall to attend playgroup with her brother.
- I was asked not to let my daughter wear a particular wrist-watch the principal had noticed in assembly. Watches were allowed, but it was thought that this one was 'a little, well, you know, well, too obtuse!' This was a child's Lego watch, predominantly blue with a small amount of red and yellow on it that I had given my daughter for her birthday. She was in kindergarten! She was learning to tell the time and loved the gift so much she had previously said on a number of occasions that she never wanted to take it off! Other children wore jewelery such as necklaces, which were not allowed, and their parents told me nothing was ever said about it.
- The school maintenance person/cleaner who was also the Pastor of the adjoining church during a conversation at the school one day informed me that he he had found used condoms in the toilets some mornings. Fuel to our fire!
- After being bullied in the playground one day, my daughter did not mention it. The next day she didn't want to go to school and was crying hysterically, fearing going back. It was then, after much questioning, that she told me through tears about the incident. I was required to fill in a form stating my reason for being 20 minutes late, so I wrote the reason. The assistant teacher then came to speak to me regarding it, and I told her the reason. I explained that I would be at the playgroup on-site, and that I had told my daughter I would see her at recess to see if she was okay. I explained that this was the only way I could coax her into going to school. (What I didn't tell the assistant teacher was that I had added to my daughter that if she wasn't okay, I would write a note and give it to them and take her home.) I was told that I could not talk to her at recess, (even though I would be passing her on the small grounds) and that they would deal with it. I explained that it was a trust thing between myself and my daughter and that I would need to stick to my word, explaining that that was the only way I could convince her to come to school, and that I didn't want to break her trust. When recess

arrived, her actual teacher came to me and demanded that I not speak to her. I explained the situation and she kept me there for most of recess, arguing the point. She told me my daughter already spends too much time with me, at which I pointed out after school activities such as gymnastics as well as my weekend work. She eventually relented, as I would not give in, and so she then proceeded to tell me what I could and could not say. I was told to tell her that she was okay and that I was okay and that I was going home. I agreed and went up to my daughter. The teacher followed and stood by me whilst we had our conversation which involved asking my daughter if she was okay rather than telling her.

- Bullying in the school was ignored. Offers of help in supervising children in the playground from other parents were declined. The parents who offered were told that the strategy was that they would be buying new toys. This was their solution/strategy in dealing with exclusion. I don't believe that one teacher in a school of 90 children is enough on playground duty to ensure bullying is not occurring regardless of the amount of toys present.
- My daughter became sick at school one day, with a sore throat and fevers. She told her teacher who said to go to the toilets and wash her face. She was not sent to sick bay. When I picked her up I noticed how unwell she was. She had severe tonsillitis requiring antibiotics. Unacceptable neglect.
- There were a lot of issues I could have spoken up on but chose to stay silent on. Eg: I let the following academic issues slide, as they were less important to me than keeping her safe. I also knew that whilst my daughter felt she had wasn't learning anything at the time, that eventually she would be taught new things.
- Being refused extra spelling word lists when my daughter was already familiar with the current word list. 'The others don't come out until next term.'
- My daughter was refused to be allowed to learn the piano at school because the staff presumed she couldn't read. I was told on the first day that students had to be able to read first. I informed them that she could already read. Still, they did not permit her to learn piano.
- That her mid-year report showed that they did not realise my daughter could read! She could read from the age of three. Other children who could read were being extended.
- I was informed that my daughter would be extended in maths. This was never done.
- Creativity was being squashed. Whilst the children's art works were lovely, my husband commented that they all looked the same. And indeed they were prescriptive. When I complimented my daughter on an aspect of one of her exhibited paintings, she informed me that the part I complimented had been completed by the teacher whilst she was away.
- That the Infants' Principal threatened to cancel an excursion to Symbio National Park if I insisted on

going! This was despite the fact that:

1. Other parents were attending.

I was providing my own separate transport.

The educational part of the excursion was open to the public!

My offer was to help if they needed it. I also offered to stay in the background if they preferred, that I just wanted to be there as an extra set of eyes for my child's safety, as it was an open public venue and the children were very young.

- The Infants' Principal phoned my husband to tell him to tell me that if I wanted to speak to my daughter's teacher in future, that I would need to go through the school counselor! I had **never** been disrespectful in speaking with my daughter's teacher, had always approached the teachers and principals in a friendly manner, and had only questioned issues regarding safety. This demand to go through the counselor for any communication came after I had asked her teacher details regarding an alleged incident where children from the school had been found playing on the road. I had not been accusatory. I had asked about it initially out of curiosity. She told me a version of the story. My husband mentioned it to the Principal when discussing the Symbio excursion, who told him a different version. So I had asked my daughter's teacher again to clarify, and to ask if she was the one who saw it. She said yes, and then proceeded to tell me a third version of the story.

I thought having to speak through a counselor every time I wanted to speak with her was ludicrous, so I decided not to bring anything else up with her. I even stayed away from parent teacher night, and instead, sent my husband to it. The teacher there, without prompt, brought up the mistake in the reporting on our child's reading ability, and apologized. The reason given was that 'Some of the quieter ones slip through the net.'

On the last day of second term, I went into the classroom at the end of the day, when the children had just left the room and gave this teacher a box of chocolates. I asked her if she thought I was accusing her regarding the children on the road. She said yes. I apologized and explained that that was not the case. I said I thought it was a systems error (my thoughts being likely due to the fencing and gate issue) and told her that if anything, she was to be praised for noticing and saving them from harm. I informed her that I only asked a second time as the Principal's version was very different from hers, and I only wanted to know if she was the one who saw it, to clarify what actually happened. She then thanked me for the chocolates and went on to give me **yet another version of the event! A fourth!** I suspect they were attempting to play it down, fearful we would notify the Board of Studies if they told the truth! After this, she abruptly turned and left the conversation and the classroom. We were the only ones in the room, so I was left standing alone in disbelief! As I exited, I saw that she had settled in another room in conversation with someone, so I did not ask her any more regarding it.

- After sitting with my daughter during recess one day whilst playgroup was on (shared grounds), her teacher had pulled me aside to tell me that I was not permitted to talk to my daughter when on the school grounds. Other parents often sat with their children at recess or lunch and the school had a reputation for being parent friendly and involving parents, inviting them in at any time, which is



one of the main reasons I enrolled my daughter. The Principal always stood at the gate allowing children out at the end of the day. It was last day of term. As I exited I asked the Principal to clarify whether or not I was allowed to talk to my daughter in passing when on the grounds. She said 'Oh of course! Parents are always welcome to come into the classroom – anytime!' I told her I did not mean the classroom (I had already been obviously excluded from that), but just in passing. She said 'Of course! When I told her that my daughter's teacher had told me not to, she changed her tone and response, and agreed with her adding 'Well she must have a reason for that.'. As we left the school gate, the Principal said goodbye to my daughter, told her cheerily to 'Have a lovely holiday and make sure you come back!' I replied 'We'll try!' That conversation with Principal happened immediately after her teacher had given their fourth version of the road incident and had left me mid conversation in the classroom. It was during that holiday break that we made a firm decision to give up a term's fees, not to return, and to home school

I am presuming from that summary of our experience in the general school system that some of our reasons for home schooling may be being heard. In summary, **safety and communication**, or the lack thereof, were of primary concern. Our decision was not so much reactive, but an informed choice. We had tasted what was on offer. We understand that there are many wonderful, creative, talented and caring teachers within both public and private schools and hope the school structures are able to support them and are flexible enough to be progressive and keep up to date with educational research findings. We indeed experienced two wonderful kindergarten teachers; one in the public school, and one in a week's orientation/trial in the private school at the end of the year prior to our daughter's enrollment. We also have dedicated friends who teach in both public and private schools and admire their skill, energy and dedication to the children they teach. We understand that we possibly experienced more obstacles and troubles than most do in the general school system, and understand that homeschooling also comes with challenges. Ultimately though, we chose to deliver a personal educational program to our children rather than have them be taught in a classroom with a new teacher each year, and with a focus that needed to spread across thirty or so children and which required a lot of attention to crowd control. We also chose not to have our child's educational experience be determined by such varying and seemingly uncontrollable factors in unsafe environments. I don't believe the education of our children should be like a lottery draw.

**What we love about home schooling** is that our children can learn at times when their energy levels are up, they can learn in styles and ways that best suit their learning needs, and can pursue their areas of interest. We attend many and varied outings and 'excursions' and connect with other home schoolers on a regular basis. We are a part of a nurturing and brilliant home schooling network. Learning is not boxed in. We have many traditional resources, but also like to try to think outside the box a little, and teach our children to do the same. We want to develop confident self learners and instill a love for learning and life.

Our goals for home schooling are to facilitate:

- creativity
- a love of learning

rich and varied cultural experiences  
close family relationships  
socialisation with diverse groups of people of varying backgrounds, interests and abilities  
a strong sense of community  
positive learning environments customised to our children's needs and interests  
learning at a pace and in a style tailored to the individual child  
close connections with other parents who are passionate about their children's education  
flexible learning options, open to change and growth as our children change and grow

I hope that this inquiry helps raise awareness of the legitimate option of homeschooling. On many occasions, people are surprised and full of questions when they find out that we home school. Many do not realise that this is even a legal option in Australia! I recall being surprised myself years back when a friend said she home schooled. It was the first time I had heard of it in the city, and I was also guilty of an ignorant and ill informed response declaring I thought that it was 'weird'! We had a good relationship and I said it jokingly, so the friendship survived, but I did think that!

At my workplace in a major Sydney public teaching hospital, I have often been challenged to justify my reasons and chastised by Nurse Managers for home schooling my children. When I mentioned bullying, one manager said that bullying is a normal part of life, and that children should be exposed to it. Other health professionals around and overhearing the conversation agreed. He added that he went to school and was bullied and that he turned out all right. Debatable. Our department had an independent inquiry a few years back that found that within the nursing division there was a dominant culture of bullying. Another Nurse Manager repeatedly asks when I am going to 'let' my children go to school. My children enjoy being home schooled. Many of their friends who attend regular school voice that they would like to, and ask their parents if they can be home schooled. Many parents say that they would like to, but that financial pressures and the need to work to provide for their families prevent them. I think it would be beneficial, if, as in New Zealand, a payment was made to home schooling families to help offset the costs of education. After all, home schooling families save the government money by not enrolling their children for education in the government or private school systems. Private schools receive much government funding. Why should there not be funding for the education of home schooled children?

Regarding the policy allegedly endorsed by the Board of Studies and held by The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Sydney Children's Hospital, which excludes home schooled children from receiving tuition from the Hospital Schools, this is our testimony.

My daughter was admitted to Sydney Children's Hospital in April this year just prior to school holidays and was extremely unwell, having been diagnosed with an eating disorder and at very high risk of re-feeding syndrome, which is life threatening. She was required to stay as an inpatient for over four weeks. The experience was traumatic, and the programmed treatment plan inflexible to adapt to individual needs and the visiting hours for parents extremely restrictive. We were initially informed that my daughter would need to engage in the hospital school program once the school holiday period

was over. My daughter was in a room with 3 other young girls of high school age ranging from 13-15, whom she became friends with. When school term resumed, these children attended the school. I was told by nursing staff that someone had come to the bedside whilst I was not there, asking me to sign a form so that my daughter could attend the Hospital School and that they would return the following morning. When I arrived the next morning I asked about it, and they said there had been a mistake, that my daughter was not permitted to attend the hospital school after all because she was home schooled. The following morning I received a phone call from a nurse asking why my daughter was not at the Hospital School and I was again asked to come in to sign a form. I explained what had happened. When I arrived, I was again told that she was not allowed to go to the hospital school because she was home schooled. Their lack of knowledge as to what was going on neither surprised, nor bothered me. There were too many other concerns regarding their rigid programming for me to bother arguing over school accessibility.

My daughter was in the adolescent unit and the program for her condition had frighteningly rigid visiting hours which demanded that parents leave at meal times and for one hour after every meal, and half an hour after morning tea, afternoon tea and supper. Maximum visiting time was a few hours of an evening. Although our daughter's first Consultant and her relieving Consultant could not provide us with any evidence based research to support their parental exclusion clauses in their program, they persisted in demanding it. Yet their own system failed them. The nurses did not want my daughter alone on the ward, they wanted her in school with the other children with the same condition. It was fortunate that my daughter arrived in a school holiday period as the visiting regime relaxes a little in school holidays and also as the child's condition improves. This inflexibility of parental and sibling visiting rights on the program in the ward, combined with the school exclusion policy, would cause many problems for home schooled children and parents. Children could be left for weeks or months without access to education, the Hospital School teachers not permitted to educate them and parents being refused access to their own children due to parental exclusion policies on the set treatment program. No deviations from the set treatment program are allowed. It is an either accept the program in it's entirety and listen to lies or be threatened with DOCS involvement! But THAT is for another inquiry!!!

The program for eating disorders at Sydney Children's Hospital often transfers children to a locked adolescent mental health facility with an internal school which I was told is run by the Hospital School and governed by the Board of Studies. With no funding for psychological services on the ward at this hospital due to funding transfer when this unit opened, the only way to receive psychological support is by accepting a transfer to this locked ward. We chose not to progress to that restrictive part of the program, where parents were only permitted 2-3 hours of visiting per day, of an evening. Again, their exclusion policy would leave a child uneducated for an indefinite period of time if admitted here and the anti home schooling policy adhered to.

With regards to our situation, remaining on the ward for medical treatment, I spoke with the Acting School Principal who was kind and apologetic and showed me around the school venue. She told me that the policy which excluded home schooled children was endorsed by the Board of Studies and that

home schooled children were not allowed in as their schooling did not depend on a location. I explained to her that whilst it would be lovely if my daughter was allowed in, that it was not essential as I could home school her with her brother on the ward. There were other options for her brother should the ward buck his presence in the empty room whilst the others were at school. We also discussed how this policy may make it very difficult for people with more children, especially if from the country, for a parent to school all their children whilst one is in hospital. With such archaic and restrictive visiting hours for parents in the ward for the 'program' we were on, home schooling with a parent as the teacher would not be permitted either, so the child would end up alone in a room, as my daughter did on occasions. The acting Principal was understanding and said that she would look into whether or not she could accept my daughter. She kept me informed daily and remained apologetic. After a few days of speaking with relevant people, she expressed to me that she could not see the reasoning behind the exclusion policy and so chose to allow my daughter into her school despite it. So after a few days she accommodated my daughter into her school, stating that she had the vacancies at present, with not too many high schoolers enrolled, and could not see the reasoning behind the policy. She also told me that she had her 'knuckles rapped' from the Hospital School Principal of The Children's Hospital at Westmead who was allegedly not happy that she had allowed my daughter in and gone against the policy. She told me that she had asked her to inform me that if we were transferred to Westmead, not to expect that our child could attend the school there, because she would not be allowed. We had been requesting a transfer to Westmead, which never occurred, but I presume there was a lot of talk between managers and schools. Just for the record, I would never want or allow my child to attend a school where the Principal had such an attitude.

Both hospitals are part of the same Sydney Children's Hospital Network and operate (theoretically) together. I am convinced that their policy needs to be reviewed and updated. One of the other reasons given for the policy was that home schoolers do their own thing and that the teaching may interfere with the home school curriculum. In the hospital school, much of the work is sent in by the teachers, and tutoring on the work provided is given as required. It is not beyond a home schooling parent to provide text books and work books for the various subjects, just as a school would, and just as I did. I think this is a case of serious discrimination which could have detrimental effects on our children's education. I also believe that Home Schoolers should not be forced into the Hospital Schools when in hospital, but given options that suit the circumstances.

Thank you so much for reading my submission. I hope that this inquiry leads to a better understanding of the needs of home schoolers. I believe that the Board of Studies, teachers and the community only have the best interests of the child at heart in their questionings, as do home schoolers in their desire and choice to home school. We believe that the home schooling option is able to provide a rich and varied educational program to suit the individual needs, interests and learning styles of each child. Any unnecessary restrictions and limitations placed on home schooling families could lead to a less diverse education and less quality family time, both of which are highly valued. Extra bureaucratic requirements also adds to family stress and pressure and takes away time which could be spent facilitating learning.

Australia has a valued reputation as a wonderful and free country. The freedom to educate in a variety of ways is a part of this, and is to be treasured. It would be tragic if we were all forced to spit out clones.

Sincerely,