

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Mr Guy Tebbutt

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I have been invited by Paul Green to make a submission to the NSW home schooling enquiry. I intend to make my submission according to the terms of inquiry as listed in the invitation letter.

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Preamble

My name is Guy Tebbutt and together with my wife, Debbie, we home educate our four school aged children. I attended a private, GPS school as a child and Debbie attended the local public school. We began home educating during December 2009 when we removed our three oldest children from a local private Pre-K to Year 12 grammar school. In December 2009 our three oldest children had completed Year 4, Year 2 and Pre-K. We commenced their home education in what would have been Years 5, 3 and Kindergarten in 2010. Our two oldest children had demonstrated that they were socially, physically and academically adept and fitted well into the school environment.

We decided to home educate based on several factors:

- We weren't too happy with the fluctuating performance of our children from year to year and we concluded that the all round performance and the general academic progress of our children were heavily dependant upon the character traits, teaching ability and dedication of the individual teacher that they were receiving tuition from.
- It was noted by us that there were many factors in the school environment that were detrimental to the psychological development of our children and that we could not adequately address these factors from home as parents that just drop our kids at school on a daily basis.
- It was apparent that the school system (even a decent quality school such as the one we were paying to send our kids to) was unable to adequately cater for the wide ranging abilities of the children in each class. Inevitably, the children that needed the most assistance and the children that were the most disruptive would receive the lion's share of attention from the class teacher, leaving the other children somewhat lacking in the personal attention that each child requires.
- We decided that we wanted to find a way that would enable our kids to have the best, most readily available resources to aid them in growing and learning as young children.

My involvement in the home education community of Australia:

Several months after we began home educating, I came across an opportunity to learn more about home education in Australia and to contribute to the community in a larger way. I responded to an advertisement requesting people to join the Home Education Association (HEA) committee. I quickly filled a vacant role on the committee and several months later became President of the committee, a role which I held for three years, then stayed on as Vice President for another year after that. During that time I was heavily involved in all HEA decisions and almost all HEA activities, including such things as general committee duties, chairing meetings, organising technology for the association, artwork and publishing of HEA magazines, official committee duties, communication with other bodies and authorities related to home education etc... I was also the Public Officer for the association for several years. Today I am still involved with HEA and offer assistance to the current committee and other volunteers.

My Submission

The contents in my submission is generally based upon both my experience as a home educator in NSW and my experience in my role with HEA where I have assisted and dealt with many home educating families.

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

I do not wish to submit about this topic of the enquiry as I feel it more important to directly address the current and future issues of home education.

(b) The current context of home schooling in New South Wales

(1) Outcomes of home schooling including in relation to transition to further study and work:

I have observed that there normally is a shortfall in the recognition that the educational system gives to home educators. This shortfall inevitably makes it more difficult for home educated students to find their way into higher tertiary studies. Often home educating parents and students end up going to great lengths to obtain entry to tertiary studies because the general educational system is not geared to recognise home educated learning. ***I recommend that there should be a higher level of recognition given to home educated students in tertiary institutions.***

(2) Financial costs:

Appendix A of this submission (downloaded from http://parentscouncil.nsw.edu.au/_literature_93221/Key_School_Funding_Facts) illustrates the amount of funding that various education sectors received during 2008 – 2009). Based on these figures, home educated families are missing out on between \$3300 to \$13600 of funding per student. The government invests billions into schools, but \$0 into home education, except for the costs of legislation and regulation. This represents a significant shortfall that home educators deal with on a

daily basis. The average home educating family must forego the income of one parent to enable that parent to stay home and school the children. ***I recommend that there should be some government funding and financial assistance given to home educating families.***

(3) Demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children:

There are many reasons why parents home educate, some are:

- Lack of faith in the general education system
- Bullying in the general education system
- Inability of the general education system to cater for individual needs
- Locational reasons
- Philosophical beliefs
- Religious beliefs
- Different learning abilities of students
- Lifestyle choices

(4) Extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers:

It's very difficult to detail the extent of unregistered home educators, but based on my observations, I'd estimate about 1 unregistered home educator for every 3 or 4 registered home educators. So, approximately 20-25% of home educators.

The reasons vary greatly for people that don't register. Some reasons are:

- Don't want to be governed by authorities
- Don't want to comply with the home education regulations
- Too lazy to register
- No benefit in registering
- No registration maintenance (no compliance / no renewals etc...) if unregistered

- Do not agree that education should be commonly monitored and that each student should have a unique education
- Religious beliefs

(5) Characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children:

In general, home educated children appear to be well grounded, mature, emotionally adept, generous in nature, willing to accept the differences of other humans, willing to be self reliant and are self motivated learners (particularly in later years).

The education needs of home educated children are the same as those that attend schools. They need support, they need resources, they need a safe and stable environment in which to learn and grow.

(6) Comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education:

I think there is insufficient research and evidence for me to make a direct comparison between home educated students and school educated students, so it's best that I only give my general opinion on this topic. I wish to just briefly address this by saying that in general, home educated students are very capable, especially in the academic arena, often more capable than their school attending peers.

(c) Regulatory framework for home schooling including

(1) Current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers:

It is my firm belief that the current NSW home education registration process should remain as it is. I think the current regulation strikes a good balance between the need to standardise education across the state (and across Australia

when the Australian curriculum standards are taken in to account), the need to ensure that safety of kids can be enforced if necessary, the need to have some sort of reporting to maintain the integrity of home education and the need to keep it simple enough that the average parent can achieve the standards if they wish to home educate.

It is my belief that the average unregistered home educator will not register because of their philosophical views. Not registering often gives them personal satisfaction that they are taking complete responsibility for the home education of their child(ren) and that no government body has a right to tell them how to raise their kids. My experience tells me that this topic is mostly black and white for home educators – that is, they either wish to register and meet or exceed BoSTES guidelines or they wish to do it their own way. There are of course, some people that are just too lazy to register because it requires effort.

(2) Training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons:

Generally the training, qualifications and experience of the authorised people (AP) in NSW seems to be quite well placed to meet the daily needs of home education inspections. During my time with HEA we occasionally fielded complaints from home educators about APs. The majority of these complaints were as a result of personal character conflicts between parents and APs. Parents are often on edge when an AP attends their premises to inspect their home education plans and records, as the AP has the power to recommend non-registration and various other things relating to the home educator, so this sometimes places the home educator at a psychological disadvantage if fear or other strong emotions take over during the home visit.

With the recent update to the NSW home education pack, a branch of the HEA requested people to write in with complaints and bad experiences that home educators have suffered when registering for home education. The HEA received a handful of complaints, many of which I found to be not based in fact, but mostly based in fearful emotions. We received about 8-10 written complaints. So, to put

this into perspective, I'll err on the side of caution and assume that there were 20 letters of complaint. ***There are approximately 3500 registered home educators in NSW. This means that we fielded a complaint rate of less than 1 in 175 home educators (less than .006 % of NSW home educators). I consider this to be an exceptionally low rate of complaint and I think that based on this, the current APs are doing an all-round good job, in what can sometimes be difficult circumstances.***

(3) Adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses:

On the whole, the Syllabuses in NSW are fairly good. The reality here is that most trained school teachers are unable to meet the guidelines. Home education affords more teaching time to adequately meet the guidelines. The aim of the syllabuses appears to be to promote an across the board minimum standard of education. There are some that meet these guidelines more easily than others. There are some that far exceed the guidelines and some that fall short.

(4) Potential benefits or impediments to children's safety, welfare and well-being :

There is always a potential for children's welfare and safety to be hindered by the adults that care for them. This is prevalent in all societies of our world in varying degrees and varying manners. I have not been involved in cases of child neglect so I can not adequately comment on this topic.

(5) Appropriateness of the current regulatory regime and ways in which it could be improved:

I think that the current regulatory regime strikes a good balance on the whole. I do think that some financial support and assistance for home educators would be a good supplement to the current regulations.

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

There are some ways that support for home schooling families can be improved. ***Financial aid, syllabus support and assistance with teaching methods are some important ways that support for home educating families should be increased.*** Support in these areas is currently lacking

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

Currently there is no official method of representation for home educators within the BoSTES. Home education is a legislated, approved method of education, therefore it should be recognised as such and there should be adequate representation on the BoSTES committee. There are representatives from other modes of education, however there are none that specifically represent home educators. ***Making room for home education representatives on BoSTES would be great way of ensuring that the voice of home educators is listened to at a regulatory level.***

Kind regards,

Guy Tebbutt

3rd August 2014