

**Submission
No 168**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 8/08/2014

Partially Confidential

The Director
Select Committee on Home Schooling
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

We are a homeschooling family with three children, one of whom is of compulsory school age in NSW. Our homeschooling journey began the day our eldest child was born. We spent many years researching not only homeschooling, but also public and private education. Through our research we discovered a great group of people who had chosen to home educate their children. Many of these families were more than happy to share their experiences. We discovered an abundance of information from people we had met, as well as books and research papers. We have chosen to homeschool our children because we believe it allows them to work at their own pace and where we can encourage them each step of the way. Our children are able to learn with and from not only children their own age, but children of various ages and the many adults they interact with. We are exempt from registration, but still go through the registration process.

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

As part of our research into homeschooling we joined a few online groups, including an online chat group that was moderated by a homeschooling mum from Victoria. Registration in Victoria was often discussed where we learnt that parents in Victoria who wish to homeschool need to sign a Statuary Declaration to say they take on responsibility for their child's education. As part of this process there is a minimum requirement that must be taught. There is the opportunity for children to enrol part time in a school setting. We have found that Tasmania has the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC). This Council is directly accountable to the Minister. We believe that ultimately a child's education should be the responsibility of the parent/s where possible, be that through homeschooling or other forms of education.

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

(i) outcomes of home schooling including in relation to transition to further study and work,

We are at the start of our official educational journey and already we can see what future benefits will be. Our children are part of the community, a community from babies to the elderly. They are not just learning for the future, they are also learning for the present.

We would like our children to have the opportunity for tertiary study in the future if they so wish. We have no way of knowing what future career opportunities may arise. It is likely in the future our children will be applying for jobs, that are yet not invented, or perhaps they will invent one of these jobs as entrepreneurs. Home education will allow our children to think differently and to approach problems from another point of view, with an emphasis on creativity and be resilient to change.

Homeschooling is allowing our children to learn together and build strong family relationships. Our children have many friends outside the home through homeschool groups, church and related activities, dance and sport. It is with each other they have the greatest friendship. Within all their relationships, they are learning negotiation skills, flexibility and compassion. It is however from the sibling relationship that they learn the most.

(ii) financial costs

Homeschooling means at least one parent is not in full time paid employment. As parents though we believe the benefits of teaching our children at home is worth this sacrifice.

According to The Department of Education and training
<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/statistics-and-research/key-statistics-and-reports/financial-information/education-cost.pdf> ' In 2009/10, NSW spent \$12,540 per full-time primary student in the classroom. As homeschoolers our children do not benefit from this expenditure. They do though benefit in a variety of other ways including an education that is rich and varied with many opportunities. It would however be helpful to be supported financially in ways such as with travel costs or some form of rebate on educational expenses. Our expenses for homeschooling include yearly subscriptions to Reading Eggs, Maths Online, Study Ladder and any textbooks as well equipment that is needed including printing costs, stationery, art supplies and other resources.

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

We have previously mentioned some of our reasons for homeschooling our children. It may be worth us mentioning each of our backgrounds and in a way the start of our motivation to homeschool our children. My Husband and I both attended public schools in NSW for both Primary and

High School. My Husband completed his HSC, did not attend University, but is now well known in his field and completed many certificates. I completed my School Certificate (year 10), completed a few courses and as a mature age student gained my Bachelor of Teaching. My teaching qualification has given me the opportunity to see the benefits and disadvantages of both public and private education in NSW.

We believe that there are many paths our children could take in their future, and we want them to know they are a valuable part of their family, church and greater community - whether they are stay at home mums or have high paying careers. We believe the main benefits of our children receiving an education at home, are that we can teach them from a Biblical context, they can be treated as individuals, they can learn in a time efficient manner, can learn at their own pace and we can help them individually through learning problem areas., strengthening relationships between siblings and to parents, learning from regularly interacting with people of various ages, encouragement and feedback and the use of many resources.

(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers,

Our registration process was a positive, constructive and encouraging process. Unfortunately we have heard many examples of other families who have not had this positive experience. We believe this is due to inconsistency with the Information Package (2013) and although we had a positive experience perhaps part of that was due to the support we received from very experienced homeschooling families, including having a support person with us during the AP visit.

Registration can be a stressful period, with the only benefit is to receive feedback. It would be wonderful if registered homeschooled or those exempt from registration could receive the same benefits to those given to children in schools. This would clearly act as a way to increase the number of registered homeschooled.

(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children

We believe that children (and adults) learn differently- homeschooling allows our children to learn in an environment that allows them to use whatever particular learning style that is most suited to them at the time for a particular task.

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

As a trained teacher who worked as a teacher in NSW schools, I have had the privilege of seeing the wonderful work teachers do each day often with 30 children in a classroom. I know that many teachers really care for the children in the class. As a homeschooling parent I have the advantage of seeing where my children need further assistance, and adjusting our program accordingly. Our days include swimming lessons, dance lessons, volunteering, visits to a nursing home, church and related activities, visits to museums and galleries, homeschool art groups, picnics and other regular activities. As part of learning in the community my children are able to learn hands on, they do this through interacting with the people they meet, and learning in day to day activities.

It is interesting when so much learning happens outside the home that the Office of the Board of Studies (OBoS) restricted homeschooling to activities that occur in the home. The 2013 Handbook for Authorised Persons says "*Registration for home schooling requires that the educational program be delivered in the registered child's home. In assessing an application for home schooling registration, an Authorised Person must be satisfied that the education of the child, as required for registration, including for all key learning areas, will occur in the home.*" As you can see my children engage in many activities outside the home and I am pleased that the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BoSTES) has moved away from this requirement.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

We believe that some form of registration is important in knowing who is being homeschooled. We believe more families would register for homeschooling if the Authorised Person(s) (AP's) were more supportive, and did not come into homes to judge, but to offer advice when needed. We believe that everyone should be working together to achieve the best educational outcome for each child. Setting up an independent board for homeschooling similar to the one in Tasmania, could see more families registering their children, since it would seem to be less adversarial.

(ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons

During our first homeschool registration we met our Authorised Person and was pleased that she had much knowledge in regard to homeschooling and so was supportive of homeschoolers. During the visit our daughter was happy to talk with the Authorised Person and share her photo album of the things she had done over the past year. Our daughter felt safe to do this and did not feel judged. We know of many families who have not had the same experience. There are those who have been refused registration even after many years of homeschooling. It has been suggested that Authorised Persons should have a greater understanding of homeschooling and we agree with this position. Surely an Authorised Person, who is supportive of homeschooling would be one, who is there to assist the families they meet, rather than being there to make sure they tick all the boxes of a checklist.

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

The NSW we believe could be used as the basis of our curriculum, and therefore we should have the freedom to move ahead of what is prescribed for each stage or if needed spend more time in a particular area. As parents we have the responsibility to educate our children. One of the key principles on which the NSW Education Act is formed reads: "*the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child's parent.*" Education Act, Part 2, 4(b)

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

Recently we came across a poem/song titled 'To This Day'. It was written by Shane Koyczan. To This Day can be found at www.tothisdayproject.com/the_poem.html. Some people have concern for the welfare of children being homeschooled, yet as I read this poem I think of many children at school. Homeschooled children still come across bullies, and so are not immune to bullying, but they often have the confidence and skills to deal with it. If they don't the parents are there to help guide them and teach the skills needed and give them the confidence to meet any challenges they might face.

We understand that sometimes it is important for children to have someone outside the home/family to talk with. We often see our children engaged in conversation with other children, youth and adults. Our children are in no way shut off from the outside world. We have mentioned some of the activities our children are involved in. These

activities are extremely important for their social development and overall education. Some of these activities include; visiting museums, libraries, art galleries, gardens, and many more.

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

Preparing for registration is an arduous process. The program of study that we produced for registration was close to 30 pages. This was for a first time registration. We received a one year registration which is the maximum for first time registrations.

One of the benefits to homeschooling is the opportunity to travel. It is not possible to be registered for homeschooling and travel. The current Information package says that homeschooling must occur in the home, yet the Question and Answer page on the BOSTES website contradicts this.

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

Parents, for the most part have a choice where to send their children to school. These options may include, public, private, independent, catholic, distance learning and homeschool. Each of these is a valid form of education, however when it comes to support, this seems to be not the case. I would ask that Homeschooling families be granted the same support, through initiatives such as open high school.

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

We believe that there is no representation for homeschoolers within BoSTES. We strongly believe this situation needs to change. Who else knows the needs of homeschoolers than someone who is/has taught their children in this way? The number of homeschooling families is growing each year, and therefore this person(s) would be representing a large number of students who are currently not being represented.

(f) any other related matter.

The 2013 Information package says:

'Home schooling does not provide for a child to be eligible for the award of the Record of School Achievement or the Higher School Certificate. To be eligible for either of these awards, a child must

have attended a government school, a registered and accredited nongovernment school or a college of TAFE in order to complete the prescribed study, assessments and examinations for the awards.'

If homeschooling families are expected to teach the same syllabus that is taught in NSW schools, we expect the same opportunities as those completing the HSC. Further it would be wonderful if one day, homeschooling students may receive the HSC through sitting the same exams as those students at school and submitting course work.

In conclusion we would respectfully ask the committee to consider making the following recommendations:

1. That NSW adopts the model, similar to that of Tasmania, where a dedicated committee reports directly to the Minister of Education.
2. That the Information Package is rewritten to address the significant issues relating to its inconsistencies and ambiguities.
3. The registration process be re-engineered to specifically address the concerns raised within this document
4. Homeschoolers receive some form of assistance such as with travel costs and some form of educational rebates.
5. There is a benefit to registration and not a fear. Perhaps part of this benefit coming from point 4.

We are confident that the committee will improve the homeschooling experience for many families in NSW, as a valid form of education in NSW.

Kind Regards