

Submission  
No 184

## INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

I am a former classroom teacher and have been homeschooling my son for three and a half years. My husband and I are both university educated and thrived at school. We had never anticipated that one day we would have a child who we would homeschool but our wonderful and bright child did not thrive in the school system. It was a difficult decision to homeschool as it is not the "normal" path and friends and family expressed many concerns about his social needs and how these could be met outside the traditional school setting. We have found that he is much happier, has more like minded friends and a richer social life than was possible at school. Through regular homeschool activities (dance, drama, pottery and social gatherings) and cultural events, such as plays and concerts, as well as science excursions and sports carnivals we have met families from various parts of Sydney and from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds which has enriched our lives and our son's educational experiences. I have always been impressed with the level of expertise demonstrated by other parents and with their passionate pursuit of the best educational outcomes for their children. The knowledge of educational theory and the level of research undertaken in the homeschool community is inspiring. I am discovering how much learning occurs when children have the opportunity to engage in real life situations and the time to experiment and then reflect on their observations and discoveries. Unfortunately time constraints and an ever expanding curriculum in schools limits these opportunities. I am also realising that schools offer a very efficient way to educate a broad range of children with a basic level of understanding across a broad range of subject matter at a pace that accommodates the needs and abilities of the average child but the system is not a very effective way to meet the needs of an individual child with specific learning capabilities and/or limitations. Many children identified as gifted crave the time and opportunity for more in depth study and others need more time to practice a skill or engage with an activity than the average child. Both groups can become discouraged and disengage from learning. My son was identified as gifted and was withdrawn for G&T groups at school yet was falling behind in many areas. The school had not recognised that he had some auditory processing issues that required more time on the essentials such as spelling and grammar rather than less. As he fell behind his peers we had no choice but to take him out of school and rebuild the foundation. Homeschooling provided the opportunity to create a program to best meet his needs.

While we have found homeschooling to be a positive experience that has revived our son's love of learning I have, like many others, experienced some frustration with the registration system to homeschool. Initially I found that there was a lack of clarity as to precise expectations and requirements on the website and each visit by the Authorised Person raised a new previously unmentioned requirement. Discussions with other parents exposed that what I had been told was at odds with the things required by their Authorised Person. This lack of clarity and consistency creates confusion and leaves some parents feeling that they have been treated differently to others. I know many families who were once registered but simply didn't reapply due to negative experiences with the process or due to the stress created by the reregistration process.

When reregistering: a letter is sent to remind parents that they need to reapply. This letter informs parents that they need to reapply three months before the registration runs out and requires parents to say that their program is in place when they put it in (3 months before the registration expires) Parents have found that if they return the letter they often have an immediate phone call by the AP to arrange a visit even though they have a couple of months left on their registration. Thus parents are feeling pressured to have a program ready for review three months in advance even though they are in the middle of a term already planned and approved that has not been completed. This seems to be an onerous requirement. When I was teaching I utilised the holidays to prepare for the following term and provided a term overview at the commencement of each term. We were not required to plan for a whole year or for a term ahead of implementation. The system seems to discriminate against homeschoolers and leads to parents not applying to reregister. If a registration for a year has been granted then a more effective system would be to assume parents are homeschooling and arrange to revisit at that time the following year. This would remove unnecessary paperwork back and forth and remove the pressure to plan months in advance. I know parents who have been focussed on the current term and have put the reapplication to one side and then simply not returned it and have continued homeschooling unregistered and have never been phoned or followed up. Assuming homeschool continuation, unless informed otherwise, would immediately prevent registered homeschoolers from becoming unregistered homeschoolers by default. Affirming that registration for a year means a visit will occur at the end of that year would help parents plan for a regular visit.

Having said that my husband is from Victoria where a register of homeschoolers is retained but students are not visited at all and I know a Queensland family who homeschool and are only required to provide a review of the years work and some work samples in order to be registered. An initial visit to meet parents and students and assess the learning environment is essential but maybe ongoing visits could be replaced with a submission of plans, reviews and work samples.

To meet my son's needs we currently spend more time on the basics than required by the curriculum which can then limit time for 'everything else' and we paint on the weekends! Schools seem to cope with the expansive curriculum by skimming the surface of topics in weekly bite sized lessons but in the home environment hours can be spent at a time in one area or days at a time on a topic and this provides an important advantage and point of difference with schools that the AP's work hard to mitigate with their insistence that you work to a timetable. I personally feel that the insistence on timetables demonstrates that the AP's misunderstand the nature of homeschooling. It is not schooling at home and it is not pretending you have the constraints of a school environment when you don't. The advantage is that you can cover the subject matter in a more flexible manner. It is more important to know what will be covered than when it will be covered. This timetable requirement is restricting and detrimental to the process of home education and is one of the issues parents have with becoming registered. Others say that they simply make one up and then don't follow it; a pointless exercise.

One specific issue I have with the current process is that registered students under the authority of BOSTES are not treated as bonafide NSW students. These homeschool students do not have access to funding or benefits available to other students yet must follow the NSW curriculum. Why is it that Steiner and Montessori schools can follow their own curriculum? Why can't homeschool families follow alternative or online curriculum? Despite being under the authority of BOSTES and adhering to the requirements to be registered our children are treated a second class students by BOSTES. They are not treated equally nor are their educators.

According to the ACARA website each state board has the responsibility to provide support and training for teachers to implement the new Australian syllabus. As home educators of registered students why are we not provided with support and training to teach the new curriculum? We are required to teach it but are denied training. I recall the hours of inservice sessions each week I undertook at my school in the mid to late 1990's as each of the new syllabus documents was introduced. I know from friends who are teaching that the same in-servicing is occurring in schools today but homeschool parents are expected to implement the curriculum without assistance. This is not a reasonable situation. Homeschool educators are being discriminated against. It seems that BOSTES wants to have all the control without any responsibility.

In other countries such as some states in Canada funding is provided for computers and books for homeschoolers. We have spared no expense in providing our child with the very best ergonomically designed furniture, books, technology and equipment to enhance his learning environment and we are meanwhile saving the government money by educating our son. We are making every effort to adhere to the requirements of BOSTES in order to meet legal requirements to be registered but is BOSTES meeting its obligations to all the students under its authority?

The parents I know who do not register seem to see no real benefits for their child in the process of registration or have experienced the stress of registration which has been damaging for their child. I think the registration process could be streamlined and simplified and the requirements clarified to remove inconsistencies. I also believe that more parents would register if they felt that: the process was designed to support them; the AP's adequately understood that the benefit of homeschooling is a flexible and dynamic learning environment; the curriculum could be modified to best meet the specific needs of their child and that BOSTES would provide assistance to implement the new curriculum.