

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Why we chose to Homeschool our children

We both had relatively positive experiences at school and completed tertiary and post graduate studies. The decision to forgo one of our incomes was not a decision to be taken lightly. However, after our eldest went to school for a year at a local primary school, we were left underwhelmed. Our daughter lost her curious nature and she did not enjoy learning like she had before she entered school.

During a two week holiday towards the end of that first year at school we started to see glimpse of our curious child and the questions tentatively resumed. "How are waves formed?", "What holds up the roof on a house?" and "How does a snail shell grow?"

We asked our 5 ½ year old "We haven't had questions like this from you for such a long time! We have missed your tricky questions!" She responded with "Miss said that adults don't have time to answer children's' questions and not to bother them with them, so I have kept them all inside."

To put it mildly, we were disappointed our child was suppressed in the school environment. However, with 19 other children in the class, we did understand where the teacher was coming from. After a little coaxing, our daughter "spilled" 30 questions and was so excited that we showed an interest and wrote them down. We hung out at the library that afternoon, armed with a temporary library card (still o holidays) and looked through many books to begin to find the answers to her questions. Watching her face during her discoveries was priceless. That evening, she was most content and had a little bounce in her step. The light was again shining in her eyes. That was the day we decided to commit to home educating our children. Sacrificing one income seemed a small price to pay.

This homeschooling journey started eight years ago. Our two children are flourishing in every way. They love learning and the flexibility to pursue their areas of interest, whilst getting a great educational foundation across the key learning areas. We enjoy the flexibility of hours of study, broadness of topics and curriculum choices. For example, our son chooses to begin his study at 7am. We love the fact that he is enthusiastic about his learning. It also means we finish earlier than schools so we can pursue various extra-curricular activities, volunteer/community work and social opportunities.

They have a wonderful group of homeschooling *and* friends who go to school. In their broad homeschooling circles, they participate in many community group activities. For example: basketball, gymnastics and drama lessons. They have sung Christmas carols for local aged care homes. We join up with other families and the children present

speeches, run their own book clubs (studying different styles and genre of literature) and participate in art lessons together.

Last school holidays, we joined up with several families and ran Science Workshops from our home with 5 rotating groups of children they completed 5 different projects/challenges: building a strong 1metre bridge, electrolysis (separating hydrogen from oxygen), constructed an electromagnetic crane, investigated different pulleys and assembled and tested an electronic crystal AM radio. The children thoroughly enjoyed the learning and participating in the challenges, despite it being their school holidays.

These examples are just to give you an insight into our activities and to dispel any ideas that we don't venture out and provide social opportunities for our kids.

We are very keen to give them the best well-rounded education possible. We are not giving up an income to laze around. We would like to increase our children's opportunities, not limit them. We plan to equip both our children with an education that will ensure they are able to pursue any career path of their choosing in the future.

We also want our children to possess characteristics that ensure they are a pleasure to be around and that they will positively contribute to society. Obviously they are work in progress, but people in community settings are already sometimes commenting on how our children are great communicators, responsible and enthusiastic helpers, polite, encouraging to others and that they demonstrate strong leadership skills

Current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered homeschoolers

We are up for renewal of registration with the BoSTES soon and we must confess we are really concerned. We do not follow the NSW Board of Studies curriculum closely as per the 2013 Information Pack (2013 IP). We do not list the outcomes from the NSW or national syllabi. However, we do meet the Curriculum Guidelines and key learning areas (as per the 2011 IP) diligently and have always done so. We have never had any trouble registering in the past and the 2013 Q&A document states "*The updated information Package does not require parents to keep any more records than were required previously.*"

However, we have heard of many instances where the representative from the BoS (Approved Person, AP) has made the registration process a nightmare for the applicant. Comments such as: "Anything outside 9-3 does not count towards their hours" and that we must tick off every outcome for every child for every subject back to Board of Studies Curriculum. This would be incredibly time consuming and not add value to the education of our children. The 2013 IP even states and some BoS representatives have

insisted that we cannot teach outside our home nor have other people teach our children. Another 2013 IP stipulates that our children cannot work ahead of their school year without prior approval of the BoS representative (AP)! It has been a very anxious time for us as these regulations are not in the best interest of our children.

We know of many **unregistered homeschoolers**. There are various reasons for these families choosing not to register. I believe the common reasons are that they have a lack of trust in the BoS, some are even scared that the BoS will not approve them and that they would be forced to send their children to school. Many believe the BoSTES are too invasive and intrusive. However, we have found that these parents are just as committed to educating their children as the registered families. In fact if the registration process was easier, I imagine many of them would apply. However, the current 2013 IP is regulatory and prescriptive and implies that we should set up mini schools at home. This is not the learning environment we want to cultivate.

Curriculum choices and the New South Wales Syllabuses

We don't strictly follow the NSW syllabus. We have carefully selected curriculums that best meet the educational needs for our children. We have tailor made and developed curriculums to best meet each of my individual children's learning needs. We use a range of Australian and American curriculums. We have selected what we believe works best for each of our children in each key learning area. Both our children work ahead of their school year in different subjects. Their learning is suited to where they are at. As parents we should be able to choose the best learning tools for our children. After all, no one knows our children better than we do.

Support issues for home schooling families and barriers to accessing support

Home educating families have felt that they are discriminated against because of their educational choice. Some home educators would like to access support that is available to students in government and private schools but not to home educated children. Some examples include access to student travel passes, TVET courses, Open High School, School Sports Programs, Hospital School programs and support programs for students with a disability. In some other states home educated students are able to be part-time enrolled in school in order to access particular subjects, support or programs. There should be equal access.

Our issues with the current registration process

After comparing the state requirements for homeschooling, it appears that NSW is by far the most onerous. The 2013 Information Pack (IP) is not consistent with the Q&A supplement document. It is confusing and contradictory. The 2013 IP demonstrates a lack of understanding into the homeschooling environment.

We are not against regulation; we would just like to see it be a more reasonable process. Personally, we would like to see NSW's model similar to Tasmania's where homeschoolers report to an independent advisory council, responsible to the Minister for Education, but separate to the Department of Education. They also are not required to follow the National Curriculum. Their requirements are reasonable and trust has been established between the homeschooling community and the Tasmanian educational department because they have worked with homeschooling families.

Recommendations

That home schooling has an appropriate, consistent registration process that is in tune with the nature of homeschooling. We'd like to see an independent body set up to oversee, facilitate and support home schooling. We'd like to see the Information Pack (IP 2013) rewritten with people working closely with homeschoolers. The Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC) appears to be the most effective model in Australia. We believe their system has stood the test of time and encourages a higher rate of families to apply for registration. This would result in the best outcomes for our children and their education.

Thank you for taking an interest in this inquiry and reading our submission.

Kind regards,