

Submission  
No 231

## INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am presenting this submission to the committee established to inquire into Home Schooling in New South Wales.

I have two home schooled grandchildren, a boy of 13 and a girl of 10 years. Both parents are university graduates and are pursuing further qualifications in their areas of expertise. They are intelligent and creative and both are active in the home schooling process.

I am a retired teacher, having worked in Victorian and New South Wales high schools for many years. In the light of my own positive experience as a teacher in Sydney's inner west, I have been a close observer of the evolving process of the education of my two grandchildren. I support unconditionally my daughter and son-in-law's decision to home educate and am impressed with what has been achieved educationally for their children. I welcome this Inquiry. I am sure it will find a rich diversity in this well established network of learning, thus challenging some biased and uninformed views often expressed in the wider community.

My grandchildren's education was already happening before the age of five, as is common in many families, but the more formal application of the home education process began after my grandson started in kindergarten at the local public school. The decision to home educate came after some negative experiences here and a dramatic slump in this bright boy's interest in learning. Because I am intimately involved in their lives, I have been able to observe at close quarters their intellectual, creative and social development. Every point I make in this submission derives from that close observation. I will not cover all areas of the curriculum in my account but will select some examples to support my own observations.

Firstly, I can say that I have seen outcomes achieved quickly and solidly because teaching has targeted the individual needs of each child. My grandchildren have very different ways of learning and different strengths and weaknesses. They have been taught with techniques that target these differences. Home education has enabled tasks to be set for each child at their level in the different subjects being studied. This has allowed for extension of learning beyond their grade level where the child has a particular aptitude, ensuring they stay interested and are challenged, and has also provided an opportunity for more time and individual attention to be spent on other areas where this was required. This sort of individualised teaching is not easy in a large classroom.

Secondly, I have seen great scope for innovation and creativity, and many instances of their application. The parents have been both imaginative and structured in their teaching, and these qualities have developed with time and experience. They are always devising new ways to approach topics. This creates an environment that encourages a lively, innovative, purposeful way of learning. Over the years, the children have studied a number of dramatic works, often chosen because of what is being performed in Sydney's theatres that year. Even though they are young, the children have thoroughly enjoyed studying some of Shakespeare's plays. *Romeo and Juliet* became quite a big comparative study. They watched selected parts of the Baz Luhrmann film, complete performances of Prokofiev's ballet, and *West Side Story*. They read the play

together, had a picture book version, a graphic novel, and a flick book, and finally went to see a live performance.

I have also observed the ease of integration in cross-faculty learning. For instance, the integration of language skills across curriculum areas is easily applied. I have watched successful individual lessons in the use of language, teaching the use of correct grammar, spelling and language devices such as simile and metaphor, and I have then seen these skills being reinforced, where appropriate, in other subject areas such as science writing and history projects. Additionally, literature studies bring up historical and social context. This is of course common in a school, but in the home there is flexibility to really pursue an issue. The books *To Sir With Love* and *Little House On The Prairie* led to discussions about prejudice, the civil rights movement and women's rights. They have also studied Australian Indigenous texts with a similar emphasis.

I am aware of a lively and rewarding interaction in a diverse, dedicated community of home educators, both local and widespread. Much of the children's learning is not done in isolation. Field study outings are done in groups, children share lessons and the expertise of parents and other interested teachers in the community. They come together for sport, performances and a display of their work. Adults receive moral support and share ideas, and the children learn from each other and develop friendships. For example, a number of families worked together on a presentation of a "claymation" stop-motion animation, based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and set to Cleo Lane's song of the same name. This followed attendance at the play performed for schools by the Bell Shakespeare Company.

There is flexibility for active involvement in events and teaching offered in the wider community, such as in the arts, history, sciences, technology and life skills. This is an important part of their lives. They have had, for example, guided bush walks, visits to the Australian Museum, the Powerhouse Museum and Parliament House, all relevant to history, science and geography studies. They go to live performances in theatre and music and combine it with study that approaches their levels of understanding. For example, they went to an abridged version of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* presented for schools, and followed this up by going to a performance of the complete opera at the Opera House. They were well prepared and they loved it. Also, my grandson participated in a massed choir performance at the Opera House, organised by Opera Australia.

I have been particularly interested to watch their social development, because of an often stated negative view that this would be stunted without participation in a school environment. Firm friendships have developed, not only in their own age group, but also with children in a range of ages. They have learned social skills to understand personality differences. They are confident in dealing with adults. I have also observed the development of an understanding of problems that can arise in people's lives. For example, one home educated child they have a regular connection with is a foster child who has had an extremely traumatic beginning in life. This child feels secure in their company and in their home.

Finally, they have had outstanding opportunities to explore individual interests in depth, the outcome of which is that they demonstrate an evident love of learning. This stimulates intellectual development, which is experienced at their own level of interest and understanding. This happens in both the more formal curriculum studies and in everyday family life. I will give you a few examples.

My grandson has always loved maths, and he has regular lessons with a maths teacher in the neighbourhood, thus being able to work effectively at his level. He expressed an interest in economics and is covering some elements of this with the same teacher. He likes cooking and can cook a family meal. He sings in a choir, competes in chess, learns the piano and trains in a swimming squad. These all enrich his life and develop the discipline needed to manage the week's activities. My granddaughter has always loved animals and nature. She is responsible for the family hens and is allowed to sell the eggs. She is registered with Wildlife ARC and more than once has looked after an injured animal. After a recent visit to the museum she has devised a research project of her own choosing, a project related to archaeology and history. She wants to compare sizes and shapes of skeletons, has already located relevant books and has asked for another museum visit. Her parents are guiding her along the way. She has already carried out controlled dissections of animals in science studies and may do this again as part of her skeleton project. She also is in a choir, swims, learns piano, sews, cooks, and so on.

I taught in an outstanding public school where a great amount of meaningful learning occurred. Teachers who moved there from other schools would say how wonderful it was to be able to teach without the need for a focus on classroom management. In this school, each year there was a Gifted and Talented program offered to a small number of students. Mostly, students were nominated by the staff. The students worked out a topic, planned it, and when it was completed made a presentation. This was a fine activity, and to my mind, my grandchildren have the opportunity to work like this on a regular basis at their own level. At the same time as working on all syllabus requirements, they also achieve meaningful outcomes by pursuing many individual projects in depth.

My family's educational experiences have helped to produce two children who can think for themselves, manage their time and think creatively. They are also confident to speak for themselves, both in the family and in the wider community. Even though their learning is structured, they have the freedom to make decisions and to follow an interest that presents itself. Their self-esteem is excellent and much of this is based on applied effort and achievement, participation in a wide variety of experiences, and responsibilities set as part of family and community life.

For my daughter and son-in-law, educating at home grew from a perceived need and a wish to satisfy the learning needs of each child in a much more refined and direct way. I respect the commitment and skill they have exhibited to achieve such a degree of success. I am aware that there are many different models at work in the home schooling community, and many arise from a real need for a child that is not being addressed by the school system. Some home

schooling may be less successful than others, just as some schools seem to be more or less successful than others. I hope that my grandchildren, my daughter and son-in-law and in fact all our family, will be able to continue to be enriched by this experience. They do not operate in isolation and the value of family, other families and the wider community sharing this experience cannot be underestimated.