

Submission
No 232

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Mrs Lyndell & Mr Andrew Clark

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Partially Confidential

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Andrew and Lyndell Clark

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Dear Committee,

We are home-schooling parents from the city of _____ in NSW. We have been home-schooling our two children (ages 13 and 9) for the past 7 years. We thank you for the opportunity to submit an application to the Inquiry.

It is our opinion that home-schooling is a necessary safety net for those children that do not fit a standard school environment – whether this is for a social, psychological, medical, or any other reason. Regardless of funding, it is impossible for schools (and teachers) to accommodate each student that presents with unique/complex needs.

We would like to comment on the following terms of reference:

(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 wish to bring to your attention the exploits of “Project Bucephalus”, a team of home-schooled children from Wollongong. For the past four years, this team has been competing in the *FIRST* LEGO League (FLL), an international science and robotics competition for children aged 9-16. Some 25,000 teams are expected to compete in the FLL in 2014, around 300 of them from Australia. The official FLL website can be found at www.firstlegoleague.org.

Since 2010, the children of Project Bucephalus have regularly performed well in Australian competition, winning awards in Regional and National tournaments and earning a reputation as one of the premier Australian teams. In addition, for the past four years in a row the team has been selected to represent Australia in International competition. This has seen the team travel to the Netherlands, USA, and Canada where they competed against the best in the world with excellent results.

Participation in this event has been done with the children raising all necessary funds through work in local schools and the community, running robotics programs for other children. The team has even trained other teams, including several international groups.

We believe the results of this team clearly show the excellent outcomes that are possible from home-schooling.

(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children,

Our son has been diagnosed with Sleep Apnoea, and displayed Gifted qualities from a very young age – particularly in reading and science. He started “normal” schooling through a local independent school, where the Sleep Apnoea symptoms soon caused difficulty.

In our opinion, the School and Teachers did an excellent job, but it was not possible for them to keep up with the combination of Gifted and varying Sleep Apnoea symptom strengths whilst also meeting the needs of the rest of the class.

Home-schooling has allowed us to tailor our son's education to his needs as we manage his medical condition. He has thrived, and so has our daughter.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

We wish to address the idea that home-schooled children are vulnerable to abuse because they are not in school and therefore out of regular public/formal observation.

We wish to make the following points:

- A brief perusal of recent crime and law reports quickly refute the idea that simply being in school allows abuse to be detected and acted on with any kind of reliability. Whilst it is true that teachers and school staff are on the front-line in the fight against abuse (and should therefore be admired and supported) they are not equipped to carry out observation to the level which is implied.
- The kind of risk referred to by Dr John Kay would only apply in cases of extreme isolation, when the child is isolated from community and family members. This is far from being the norm.
- In our experience, home-schooled children are active in the community in every role enjoyed by school students: sport, Scouts, church, and other interests groups. They are most definitely observed and interacted with by community members on a daily basis.
- There is no statistical basis to allow a conclusion that home-schooled children are more vulnerable to abuse than any other children. We draw attention to the Child Abuse and Neglect statistics from the Australian Institute of Family Studies (dated May 2013) – there is no mention of home-schooling as a characteristic of children who are the subject of child protection reports.

We hope that we have been able to contribute to the discussion on the importance of home-schooling and the value it provides to children.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Andrew & Lyndell Clark