

**Submission
No 109**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Mrs April Webber

Date received: 8/08/2014

To the Select Committee on Home Schooling,

Below is my submission to the Homeschooling Inquiry.

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

NSW

NSW is currently widely known as the most draconian state to register to homeschool. This is off-putting to people migrating to Australia, and even to Australian citizens moving within the states.

NSW requires registration at the age of 6. It involves:

- A “home visit” which requires “inspection” of your home and of your learning program for registering child, and visually sighting your child by an Authorised Person (AP) – all highly intrusive to say the least.
- You must follow the NSW syllabus, which covers Outcomes, Content and Stage Statements, and link to the syllabus in your learning program. Please note, there are 72 Outcomes for one Kindergarten child, many which are pointless for a parent to program for, such as “the child communicates with peers and known adults...”
- You must also show how you will record ‘learning experiences’ and document ‘progress.’ The detail, though, in these registration requirements has become more restrictive and onerous of late, and the burdensome task of excessive documentation is compounded by a lack of communication and consultation by the BOSTES with homeschoolers and the inconsistent instructions being given by APs during home visits.
- If you are successful in your application and home inspection, then you may be recommended for registration by the AP, for a period of 3 months up to a maximum of 1 year for an initial registration and maximum of 2 years for a re-registration – all at the discretion of the AP.
- Every re-registration follows the same process and is accompanied by a home inspection each time. Please take a moment to consider how this impacts large families who may have initial registrations and re-registrations happening each year. Not only does the BOSTES-required documentation create an arduous task for large families, but the repeated inspections and visits from government appointed Authorised Persons are invasive and

disturbing to the family atmosphere. Note: homeschooling parents regularly create their own records and plans which are actually helpful and beneficial to the home-learning environment in addition to the BOSTES-required documentation – which exists only for the benefit of the APs.

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/parents/pdf_doc/home-edu-info-pack-13.pdf

VICTORIA

VIC registration processes exhibits a much improved understanding of the nature of homeschooling requiring parents to submit an application form stating they will “*substantially address*” key learning areas and “*will be consistent with the principles underlying the Act, being the principles and practice of Australian democracy*”. Registration is required when a child turns 6, and parents are to notify the VRQA annually that homeschooling is continuing. The VRQA does not require parents to follow any particular syllabus.

The VRQA states in their Support Guide: “*There is no requirement in the Act of the Regulations for home schooling parents to provide a copy of any curriculum, program or other related materials to the VRQA at the point of initial registration, or annual notification.*”

http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/Documents/homeschooling-registrationsupport_1.pdf

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand requires parents wishing to register their child at age 6 for homeschooling to demonstrate that:

- “*their child will be taught at least as regularly and well as in a registered school*
- *their child, if they would otherwise be likely to need special education, will be taught at least as regularly and well as in a special class or clinic or by a special service.*”

The parent is able to “demonstrate” this individually and uniquely by ‘*describing in their own words*’ in their application thing such as their:

- broad curriculum (parents are not required to follow any curriculum)

- learning goals
- resources
- methods
- how they will use their community and environment and provide for social contact
- description of typical routines or timetable to show commitment to regularity

This is done only once during initial registration. Parents complete a statutory declaration twice each year stating that they are continuing homeschooling.

Parents also receive a Homeschooling Supervision Allowance as follows:

The annual amounts paid are:

- | | | | |
|---------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
| • first child | \$743 | second child | \$632 |
| • third Child | \$521 | subsequent children | \$372 |

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/AllAges/EducationInNZ/Homeschooling.aspx>

It should also be noted that New Zealand stopped their 'home visits' several years ago after research conducted found homeschoolers to be a very 'low-risk' group that produced highly successful results, and therefore the Ministry of Education could not justify the expense and funding of numerous home visits.

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

I homeschool my children. I could attempt to dazzle you with the degrees and accomplishments that belong to both my husband and I, or to impress you with the awards and successes of my children, or how advanced they are in their academic studies compared with their school-going peers, but the truth is that these things matter not. Homeschooling is a perfectly legitimate and legal method of learning and the onus is not on parents to prove the validity or efficacy of homeschooling.

(c) Regulatory framework for home schooling:

There are many reasons why the current framework needs to be repealed and reconsidered:

- (1) The current requirements are excessive. They are not in line with the practices of other states in Australia or New Zealand.
- (2) The requirements and continuous home visits are intrusive and there is no substantiation showing that these measures are beneficial to the child, to the parent, or to homeschooling. Rather, New Zealand has offered evidence that home visits are a waste of tax-payers money. When schools are already struggling for funds why is the BOSTES setting themselves up for disproportionate numbers of home visits?
- (3) These requirements were instituted without consultation with homeschoolers or homeschooling bodies. The BOSTES offers no rationale or evidence for why they have chosen such excessive requirements.
- (4) Authorised Persons do not and are not required to have experience with homeschooling nor do they have an understanding of homeschooling styles or methodologies, and yet it is given at their discretion who will pass home inspections.
- (5) Homeschoolers in NSW are currently bound to follow the NSW syllabus. Many children have been removed from school due to the fact that the syllabus or teaching methods were hindering them in their learning, whether due to special needs or giftedness or other concerns. To require homeschoolers to follow the same syllabus they may have sought to be free from is disadvantageous and undermines the freedoms and flexibility of homeschooling. Homeschoolers should not be required to follow any kind of syllabus. Only parents who intimately know their children's abilities and needs are able to decide what learning outcomes will benefit their child most, and parents should have the freedom to do so. A one-size-fits-all curriculum does not work for children in schools and it does not work for homeschooled children either. It impedes the progress of children who would otherwise excel when given the autonomy to do so.
- (6) There is no representation of homeschoolers within the BOSTES, and this would not be tolerated for any other minority group.
- (7) The Education Act 1990 states that; "(b) the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child's parents." The governing bodies in this state would do well to

uphold this law and honour the child's right to be home educated by rejecting policies that make parents accountable to a state education board. Schools, teachers, and education departments are accountable to parents, not the other way around.

Parents make major career, lifestyle and economic changes and sacrifices to homeschool their children, and this is never a decision that is made lightly. Parents spend extensive hours reading, researching, and consulting about modes of learning that will meet their child's needs; organising, supervising, observing, and recording their children's learning to ensure they are progressing; initiating, organising and funding homeschool excursions, clubs, classes, groups, meet ups, sports, and workshops to facilitate their children's learning, talents, and social experiences.

Those in the position to recommend changes to homeschooling requirements ought to consider the impact of these heavy-handed policies on homeschooling families. I urge you to make recommendations in line with the needs of homeschooling families.

Regards,

April Webber