

**Submission
No 50**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Mrs Joanne Curtis

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The Director
Select Committee on Home Schooling
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

Please accept this letter as my submission to your committee with regards to the inquiry into home schooling.

The decision to homeschool our son came about following the difficulty he had in staying focused for even short periods during his days in preschool. It was clear to us that school would be a challenge and after searching numerous alternative schools, happened upon homeschooling by accident. After much research into this education option my husband and I, having no prior knowledge of homeschooling, decided we should give it a go. Looking back we are firm in our belief that this was absolutely the best course of action we could have taken for our son, who now at sixteen years of age, is confident, and a keen self-directed learner with diverse interests.

Our younger daughter was homeschooled until the middle of Year 8 when she entered high school through choice, as a means to spend more time with her peers. On entering high school, she was placed in the 'A' stream for all subjects, quickly moving up into the 'Honours' stream for English, for which she has a passion. She had a very productive year there, involving herself in creative extra-curricular activities and making many friends. However, the reality of school and how little time is actually available for socialising with her peers, and how little control she has over the educational content to be studied, has led her to the decision to return to homeschooling.

Homeschooling offers many opportunities to socialise with other children, though the number of homeschoolers does drop off a little in the teenage years, which is a main reason many homeschooled teenagers decide to attend high school. However, many quickly return to homeschooling once they realise the opportunities for socialising are not as abundant at school as they had expected.

One of the main benefits of homeschooling is the ability to tailor the curriculum to the needs and interests of the child. I have found this of particular importance in the high school years. Allowing the young people to make their own decisions as to which subjects they will study brings its own motivation to succeed, with the young person often learning beyond the limits of the curriculum in some areas. It would be beneficial if homeschool registration allowed, or even encouraged, this enrichment, so that children may study beyond their designated school year level in whichever

subject areas they choose, as and when those interests are pertinent to the child, and without further consultation with the Board of Studies Authorised Persons.

There is a wealth of experience and knowledge in the homeschool community, in many subject areas, and homeschoolers draw on this to provide learning opportunities to all of the children. This may be in the form of a one-off science session at a regular park day, for instance, or a regular group meeting for public speaking, drama, singing, or the like. It would be of great benefit if these opportunities could be recognised as legitimate learning experiences for the children, even though they are not provided within the child's own home.

I have been very fortunate in that the Authorised Persons with whom I have had relationships over the years have been both positive and mutually beneficial. I am aware, however, that my own style of homeschooling lends itself well to the registration process, and that those adopting a less conservative teaching method do encounter regular difficulties. The education of all Authorised Persons in the different methods of homeschooling would be of great benefit to them in their work registering homeschoolers. There is the possibility of more homeschoolers complying with registration if they believe their teaching methods are well understood by the Authorised Persons.

I note the terms of reference include reference to children's safety, welfare and wellbeing. In my experience, the needs of homeschooled children are always met, and usually exceeded, by their parents. Parents who choose to homeschool do not generally come to the decision lightly, but after great deliberation and research, including consulting with current homeschoolers and attending local support groups. People who put this much effort into their children's educational needs are caring people who have their children's best interests at heart.

With regard to the Board of Studies, it would be of huge benefit for the homeschool community to be represented on the Board. I believe this would give the homeschool community a feeling of empowerment and a true sense of belonging and legitimacy, along with the knowledge that their voice will be heard when it comes to matters that will impact them directly.

I look forward to seeing the results of the inquiry and hope that it provides a framework upon which the current relationship between the Board of Studies and the homeschooling community can grow.

Yours faithfully

Joanne Curtis