

Submission  
No 152

## INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to comment on the following aspect of the Terms of Reference:

**(iii) adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses,**

I am a former primary school teacher who was employed as a teacher with the NSW Department of School Education for a total of sixteen years. I resigned from the Department for the purpose of educating our children at home after we determined that it was in their best interests to do so.

I write from the perspective of someone who fully intended to implement a school-at-home regime, but discovered that teaching in a classroom of 30 children who belong to someone else, and teaching your own children at home, are two entirely different things. I write to share my experience as a teacher turned home educating mum.

We first applied to home educate in 2008 for the 2009 school year. I prepared a program according to the NSW Syllabus documents for each of the Key Learning Areas. We were visited by an Authorised Person (AP) from the (then) Board of Studies (BoS). The AP looked over my program and commented that it was a great “starting point”. I was surprised as it I thought it was a comprehensive program of study and I’d been teaching for 16 years – I knew what I was doing. He indicated that as time went on I might need to modify the program somewhat as it may not fit with the home educating experience. I didn’t understand. I was a teacher, I was bringing our children home to teach, I was going to recreate the classroom in our house – what was the issue? I discovered very quickly that you cannot take a one-size-fits-all, developed-for-group-instruction syllabus and apply it in the context of a home. They are two entirely different things.

Schools are restricted in what they can teach, when, and for very good reason. The average child in NSW has seven different teachers for their primary years, and up to twice as many as that every year in high school. The curriculum has to be set and followed rigidly so that nothing is missed, and nothing is doubled up. This year's teacher has to know what was taught last year. It's the way schools work.

Home doesn't work like that. A home educated child has one teacher who knows everything that the child has learned, and usually has some idea about everything the child will learn. It doesn't matter if the home educated child learns about Antarctica in Year 4 instead of Year 6. It's irrelevant whether the child learns about People in the Community in Year 3 instead of Year 1. The home educating environment has a flexibility that schools can never have. A home educating mother should never have to say to a curious five-year-old, "No, darling, I know you're very interested in butterflies, but I can't teach you about them until you're 7 because Minibeasts is a Year 1 topic and you're only in Kindergarten." If that sounds ridiculous, it should, because it **is** ridiculous. An 11 year old who develops a love of Shakespeare should be encouraged in that interest, not prevented from following it because Shakespeare is for high school. You cannot regulate the home environment like a school because it is **not** a school and never will be. School is an artificial environment created for the purpose of educating many children at once. That artificial environment cannot be replicated in a home, and indeed should not be.

When you have 30 children of mixed ability in one classroom with one teacher for a limited number of hours every day, outcomes are imperative. They are necessary so that teachers can measure progress of multiple children in order to report to parents. On average a classroom teacher spends less than 10 minutes a day with each

individual child.<sup>1</sup> In this setting outcomes are critical. Home, however, is not school. A home educating parent is with her children 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If she needs an outcome to tell her if her child is progressing there must be something wrong with her. If an AP can't tell that a child is making progress by simply looking at work samples, then there is something wrong with them. Outcomes may be a useful guide in the home education environment, but their purpose as a reporting tool is redundant as the parent **is** the teacher.

The BOSTES' insistence on compliance with the syllabus documents, and outcomes, and regulation indicates that they have no idea about home education and how it works. They are trying to force a school based model into an environment that is as far away from school as can be imagined. The entire syllabus is written with group instruction in mind, with the idea that every child is learning in a mixed ability group with a teacher in the middle of it trying to make sense of it all to everyone. Home education is about individualised instruction pitched at the child's precise point of need. Surely that is the gold standard where education is concerned. I tried to do school-at-home but it doesn't work. The environment and the conditions are just too different. There is no dividing line between home and school in home education as the two blend together. There is no "teaching to the middle," no waiting for the rest of the group to catch up, and certainly no behavior issues. So much of school is predicated on large groups of children and their management and control. These issues don't exist in the home education environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated on a maximum of five hours face to face teaching per day (300 minutes/30 students=10 minutes per day). In reality face to face time is far less than this.

The amount of time that a home educating parent needs to teach a child is vastly different from the time needed for a classroom teacher. As a classroom teacher the weekly spelling test could take 40 minutes, depending on the age of the children. There has to be time allowed to hand the books out amongst 30 children and to have them ruled up and checked. Then reading out up to six different spelling lists, stopping to check that everyone is on the correct word, double-checking for the children who had missed a word, and then finally collecting the books up at the end. As a home educating mum with two children, the same activity takes five minutes, including marking. A reading lesson takes only 15 minutes as there is only one child to read, not six groups of kids to wrangle. A maths lesson is at least 60 minutes plus of solid work as again no time has to be allowed for group management. Far more can be accomplished at home in that time frame than can be managed in the classroom.

By rigidly insisting on timetables, lesson plans, and endless pages of documentation the BoSTES demonstrates that even though it has the oversight of home education, it doesn't really understand what it's all about. The BoSTES is dominated by people who only know one way to educate. Their only experience is in the four walls of a classroom, and they seem to think that if those walls aren't there no education is taking place. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As our first AP said to us, the syllabus should be a starting point for learning, not the end result. The syllabus for the home educated child should be a guideline to help parents make sure that all bases are covered. It shouldn't be a stick with which to beat home educating parents. It ought not to be the limit of what parents can do. Teachers are limited to four walls and a smart board, from 9am to 3pm Monday-Friday 203/365 days a year. Home educating parents have a whole world to explore

with their kids all day, every day. Just because it doesn't look like "school" doesn't mean that it isn't education.