

**Submission  
No 207**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

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# SUBMISSION TO NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO HOMESCHOOLING - Lynda Newnam – August 2014

## Background

I home educated 3 children and was registered with the NSW Board of Studies(BOS) from 1994 to 2011.

## Context

Homeschooling<sup>1</sup> was recognised in the Education Act 1990<sup>2</sup> (referred hereafter as *The Act*) – principles(Section 4) as follows:

*(a) every child has the right to receive an education,*

*(b) the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child's parents,*

*(c) it is the duty of the State to ensure that every child receives an education of the highest quality,*

*(d) the principal responsibility of the State in the education of children is the provision of public education.*

and **Section 5(d) of the Objects: to allow children to be educated at home**

The Objects which apply for administration of the Act:

*(a) assisting each child to achieve his or her educational potential,*

*(b) promotion of a high standard of education in government schools which is provided free of charge for instruction and without discrimination on the ground of sex, race or religion,*

*(c) encouraging innovation and diversity within and among schools,*

The Review and subsequent Report<sup>3</sup> that underpinned *The Act* highlighted the importance of choice, diversity, and the rights of parents in exercising choice. The Committee of Review of NSW Schools, 1989, was chaired by Sir John Carrick. One of the outcomes of the Review was the establishment of the BOS.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I prefer the term Home Education as it encompasses all experiences from birth onwards but for purposes here use the term homeschooling.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/ea1990104](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/ea1990104)

<sup>3</sup> Summary of *The Carrick Report* -

<http://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/curriculumproject/Reports/download/NSW-1995-CarrickReport1989.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Since January 1, 2014 - NSW BoSTES

## Terms of Reference

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

No comment

### **(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**

I cannot comment on experiences of others. My eldest child undertook studies at TAFE, was self-employed, then worked full-time and is now at university full-time and working part-time. My middle child enrolled at a selective school to undertake HSC and is now at university full-time and working part-time. My youngest child enrolled at TAFE to undertake HSC and is now at university full-time and working part-time.

#### **(ii) financial costs<sup>5</sup>**

There is no financial assistance provided by the State Government despite responsibility under Section 5(d)(a) of *The Act*. By comparison per student funding (State and Federal) of state primary schools in my area ranges from around \$10000 to \$25000. There appears to be no analysis of outcomes.

#### **(iii) demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children**

I cannot comment on others. In examining all possible<sup>6</sup> options for compliance under Section 5(d)(a) of *The Act* my husband and I judged homeschooling the best option. Regular reviews of this decision were undertaken for each child.

#### **(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers**

I cannot speak for others. However over the years I homeschooled I did interact with unregistered home schoolers when undertaking group activities. Their motivations for not registering did not concern me. I registered because I considered there was value in the Authorised Person's (AP) visit. It was a learning experience for my children and an opportunity for me to talk about my children and education in general. I was fortunate to encounter people who were passionate about education. My first AP was a retired inspector. I recall a conversation where we discussed the need for specialist teachers in primary schools. This gentleman had tried but unfortunately failed<sup>7</sup> to convince decision-makers to act. My last AP was a former High School Principal and equally

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<sup>5</sup> It would not be relevant to estimate foregone income or discuss ongoing financial impacts as this was a choice, however it should be noted that the financial burden is a major barrier.

<sup>6</sup> It is recognised that options vary from family to family, particularly because of financial constraints.

<sup>7</sup> He was someone who understood the State's responsibility under Section 5(d)(a) of *The Act* I imagine there are many like him who were/are equally constrained.

impressive. By then I had two years experience<sup>8</sup> as a high school parent and was interested in other high school cultures.

As stated previously I have not homeschooled since 2011 however my contact details are available on the Home Education Association(HEA) website as I field telephone and email enquiries from potential homeschoolers. In the past year I have maintained contact with some HEA members and I did attend a Community Cabinet held at Hurstville this year at which the Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli, was asked questions about homeschooling<sup>9</sup>.

More recently there have been changes to the way the BOS/BoSTES engages with homeschooling families. In September last year I signed a Change.org petition supporting greater/appropriate consultation. I have a strong interest in community consultation so when told of the release of revised guidelines without prior consultation I rang the BOS and the Minister's office and wrote to the Member for Coogee<sup>10</sup>. Don Carter from the BOS returned my call<sup>11</sup>

#### **(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children**

I think profiling is irrelevant. The Inquiry should consider *The Act*. Parents have a duty to ensure that their child receives the education most appropriate to his/her needs. Parents are constrained in their choices by many factors including finance, location, personal abilities. Notwithstanding there will be parents who will know that the best option for their child is homeschooling but decline to homeschool because they judge something else to be more important. Homeschooling parents are regularly required to defend a decision to homeschool but the same does not apply to the schooling decisions made by non-homeschooling parents.

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<sup>8</sup> Experience of P&C, Music Committee, Sports, Canteen, Teacher interviews, etc.

<sup>9</sup> One question related to outsourcing music lessons which he failed to address. He was also asked a question about the downward trend in OECD rankings. The questioner stated that he had been a teacher for over 3 decades and was concerned about a 'packed' curriculum negatively impacting learning outcomes. The Minister talked around the question, at one point suggesting it may not necessarily reflect poorer outcomes in NSW but improved outcomes in other countries. He also failed to acknowledge the experience of the questioner- it fell to the Premier to do so. I relate this in the context of the importance of leadership.

<sup>10</sup> He is not my local MP but geographically the closest government MP.

<sup>11</sup> Notes I wrote to file: "He said the changes came about because of the changes to syllabuses. I said that was separate from consultation on guidelines. He said that there would be more formal consultation in future with SHEN and HEA. Spoke as if all this was new. I reminded him that I had been involved from 94-2011 and that SHEN and HEA had been around for a long time. I suggested it would have been obvious to anyone with an ounce of common sense to have contacted them before embarking on a re-write. I got the impression that he has been given the message loud and clear."

**(vi) comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education**

There are a range of differences but paramount for me is the 'freedom' for broader educational experiences and greater participation, captured here -

**Home Education Alumni**



**(c) Regulatory framework for home schooling including:**

**(i) current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers**

See b(iv) for general comment.

**(ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons**

See b(iv).

Recommend that HEA representative be part of selection panel for APs.

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

No comment

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

There have been attempts to link to child welfare.<sup>12</sup> The State has measures in place to monitor child welfare. It could be argued that children are most vulnerable in the years prior to entering the school system yet there is no surveillance in place. The State fails to adequately monitor some 'at risk' children who attend schools. There are cases of children committing suicide as a result of being bullied in a school environment. There are examples of paedophiles operating in schools and it has been suggested that such people are attracted to the profession because of the availability of vulnerable children.

<sup>12</sup> Examples of this are contained in Submission 1 by unknown person who states that he/she is a teacher [http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parliament/committee.nsf/0/6e42e04689a6b568ca257d2c000e9172/\\$FILE/0001%20Name%20suppressed.pdf](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parliament/committee.nsf/0/6e42e04689a6b568ca257d2c000e9172/$FILE/0001%20Name%20suppressed.pdf) and echoed by Dr John Kaye <http://johnkaye.org.au/unregistered-home-schoolers-under-the-spotlight>

The paedophiles, abusive families and extreme bullying are exceptions in our society. The overwhelming majority of parents will seek what is best for their children. Sir John Carrick and others on the 1989 Review Committee recognised this and framed their recommendations accordingly.<sup>13</sup>

**(v) appropriateness of the current regulatory regime and ways in which it could be improved**

I make 3 recommendations:

- (i) HEA representation on the BOSTES
- (ii) HEA representation on selection panels for APs
- (iii) NSW Auditor-General performance audit of BoSTES

**(d) Support issues for home schooling families and barriers to accessing support**

In discharging his responsibilities under *The Act*, the Minister should ensure that there are no barriers to participation for any child be it for attendance at regional sports, testing, music events or anything else available to children attending schools.

**(e) Representation of home schoolers within Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BoSTES)**

See c(v).

**(f) Any other related matter.**

(i) Prejudices against families not participating in recognised schools.<sup>14</sup> Some of these are illustrated in this video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxZEEBiTp-s> and in Submission 1.<sup>15</sup> Opponents fail to recognise the different needs of children, the differences between school cultures, and the different skills required for managing classroom behaviour and communicating with large groups compared to one-on-one and small group learning opportunities.

(ii) NSW Plan 21 commits to *Access to and Participation in High Quality Education*.<sup>16</sup> A debate on the best way to educate/to learn is long overdue. Start with a productivity audit of the School Systems and identify the contribution of parents (including procurement of tutors) to student success.

As a society we should be asking:

Is this the best we can do given the challenges our children face, the opportunities that new technologies present<sup>17</sup> and the \$billions provided in assets and recurrent funding?

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that Sir John Carrick was and continues to be particularly interested in early childhood education.

<sup>14</sup> At one extreme this extends to those who would prefer that education was delivered solely by the State.

<sup>15</sup> The video features pioneer in USA Homeschooling John Holt. Although shot more than 3 decades ago it still has currency.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.2021.nsw.gov.au/education>

<sup>17</sup> particularly communication technology