

**Submission
No 245**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the home schooling inquiry.

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

In a brief comparison, the major differences between NSW and other States and Territories are:

- NSW requires adherence to the Syllabus, which no other state or territory requires. Thus NSW has the lost subscribed approach in Australia.
- NSW is the only state which specifically does not allow travel outside school holidays. Learning opportunities are thereby limited to the environment the child lives in. Schools are allowed to travel –even overseas- for educational purposes.
- NSW is the only State that specifies the child needs to be taught at home. This is a severe and impractical limitation. Home educators need access to libraries, gyms, playing fields, classes, halls, museums, shops etc. No school is required to teach wholly within the school grounds. Even if they are large and well-equipped, schools use community facilities to engage in learning and home schools should also be able to do so.
- NSW is the only State that specifies that it does not give an interim registration period and will deem the child truant between the time of application and approval for registration if the child is of school age. This causes problems where children need to be removed from school, or when a family returns to NSW after a period of being away.
- NSW offers the least access to resources of any State or Territory. The only resources are Scootle and Naplan. Other States offer templates, newsletters, medical services, travel concessions, sports, ready access to TAFE (in NSW an Authorised Person must sign the application form), language schools, distance education resources, online education resources and partial enrolment in school.ⁱ

NSW is the most restrictive and the least generous State or Territory in Australia with regard to home education. I hope the inquiry will bring about changes so that the government departments are working in support of home educators.

(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,

My older children are aged 19, 23 and 26. They have successfully transitioned to work and tertiary studies. My eldest is a Web Designer, the second is studying Business and working in administrator, the third is studying Health Sciences.

In my experience, home education produces good citizens. They are conscientious and independent learners. They find avenues to work and have mature attitudes to life. In 21 years of home educating I have never seen a homeschooler become engaged in delinquent behavior.

However, I have always found the transition period between home education and tertiary study to be the most difficult. At 14-18 years of age there is a need to access learning outside the home while continuing with the same mode of study and group of friends. I would like government to make this transitional period easier by providing access to resources such as Distance Education, Online Courses, and partial enrolment in school, TAFE and TVET.

The model that I think is most appropriate would allow students would have access to audio-visual presentations and teacher assessment with weekend schools for practical subjects. It would have non-compulsory subject selection(because home educators use many different approaches to teaching even one child). In this technological age the number of distance education providers that have similar methods of delivery is constantly growing and has had successful results.

(ii) financial costs,

Home education is expensive. Many families, including my own, forego a second income and spend most of their spare money on home education expenses. We have not been able to purchase a house, we think twice about what we purchase.

We do this willingly, however, if there was an opportunity for financial assistance I would take it. Monetary investment in home education would result in better educational outcomes as more resources and opportunities are made available to our students.

One big problem for our family has been the cessation of Centrelink Payments when our children have turned 16. Home schoolers are not eligible for the Newstart or Family Tax Benefit Allowances from the age of 16. This has meant that finances have been extremely tight at that time and my children were compelled to enrol in educational institutions before they were academically ready. Changing the legal requirements for Centrelink payments or providing a flexible alternative to school would solve this problem.

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

No comment.

(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers,

No comment.

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

Every child has a particular way of being. This extends to the way that they learn. Home education provides child-centred learning, which is the best way to provide for the educational needs of the child.

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

Compared to school, these are the things I appreciate most about home education:

- Flexibility and opportunity. We can learn very interesting things in an interesting way and take opportunities as they arise. Home educators make use of industry professionals, artistic performances and small group learning. They find workshops with universities and

community organisations. They observe and talk about things. And they do these things and formal study due to the inherent flexibility of home schooling.

- **Community.** The home education community is extremely supportive. Parents and children know each other well and problems are able to be sorted before they become issues. My daughter is at school and I don't know many of the people she is with on a personal level - her friends, her friends' parents or her teachers. At her school there are social issues- such as punch ups, drugs and bullying that we don't experience in home education.
- **Stability.** Because children are with mature people they grow up to be emotionally and socially stable. When my daughter began school she commented that many of her peers were very insecure.
- **Maturity.** Very often home educated children are commended on their behaviour as compared to schooled children – whether at excursions or among other groups of people. My friends and I have experienced this time and time again. The home school environment produces mature children. They still have fun, but they seem to know where the boundaries lie.

These characteristics are very important in determining success in life.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

No comment.

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

Some home educators have had very negative experiences with an Authorised Person (AP). The AP must understand the diverse approaches to home education and how to assess the child for their achievements. If a school inspector approach is taken there will be no satisfaction for either party. Homeschooling is not school.

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

I personally don't mind adhering to the NSW syllabus, but I find it restricts what we learn. We tend to go deeper than the syllabus. For example, when we learnt about natural disasters, we examined the cause of weather, examining how wind and clouds form, what causes storms etc. If a parent can demonstrate that they have created a syllabus for their child that covers all the KLAs, that should be enough for registration purposes.

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

If I had to decide which is safer- school or homeschool, I would say home school. Home education offers the opportunity to avoid many problems that occur in schools. There is no problem with bullying, verbal abuse or physical harm. I am not concerned about my child travelling to school and getting abducted. I do not worry that their peers will influence them to take drugs or alcohol or be engaged in sexual activity. Home educators (including parents) rarely smoke or swear. In this environment it is easy to form strong friendships and to allow children to be at other people's homes without concern. Social issues still arise, but there is the scope for conflict resolution.

Child protection is a current concern of society. A few months ago, children were assaulted at a school near to where I live. Home educators have an advantage over schools in that they are not usually far from their child/ren and parents are more able to detect and avoid problems.

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

1. I understand the need for a regulatory framework for home education. The implementation of that framework, however, needs to work within the home school context. Home schooling is not school and the same strict requirements are not necessary.

The regulatory regime needs to be:

- Flexible – to allow for many different styles of education
- Attainable – so that a mountain of paperwork does not hinder efforts to educate
- Understandable – registration requirements need to be written up in a way that make sense to all people

2. The definition of home schooling in the *Education Act 1990* needs to be changed. Presently, Home Schooling is defined as:

“home schooling means schooling in the child’s home, other than distance education provided by a government or registered non-government school in which the child is enrolled.” (Part 1, section 3)

Instead of “schooling in the child’s home” the definition should be changed to “the education of the child is facilitated by the child’s parent/s or carer.” (or similar). This would give more scope for flexibility and remove the ridiculous requirement to do everything at home.

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

There are many inequities that home educators are subject to in comparison to school. We don’t have access to psychological assessments, school counselling, sports programs, special needs help, or distance education. In some states or Territories there is an option of part-time enrolment or online programs that is inaccessible in NSW. All these options should be made available to home educators in NSW.

In my experience, there is an increased need for educational support as the child gets older. Subjects become more specialised and the student begins to prepare for a career. I would like access to school courses through an online, accredited provider from the ages of 14-18. I would also like to have available the option to do a certification such as the HSC and access to part time enrolment for high school students.

The relationship of BOSTES to home educators should also be supportive. In 2013, the Information Package on home schooling was changed to reflect the rollout of the future syllabus requirements, including reporting on outcomes. This was a new development in the approach to home schooling as syllabus requirements were not mentioned prior to 2013, only the KLAs. As a client of the Board, I would expect that I am promptly informed of changes that directly affect me. I never received an email or letter until my next registration was due to occur. BOSTES needs to develop a supportive role. This could be done initially by producing a newsletter that informs home educators about

events and matters that they are interested in, such as science week, selective schools tests and changes to regulation. Important changes should be communicated to the homeschooler so that they are well informed and can do their task of educating their children to the best of their ability.

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

No comment

(f) any other related matter.

No Comment

Key Points

- NSW is the most restrictive and the least supportive State or Territory in Australia.
- Home educated students become successful adults, transitioning to university and work.
- Home educated students need accessible and flexible pathways to higher education from ages 14-18.
- Home education can be financially demanding.
- Centrelink payments of Newstart or Family Tax Benefit should be available to home educators from ages 16-18.
- Home education has advantages over school in flexible approach, community focus, and students developing mature and stable personalities.
- Authorised persons need to be aware of the diversity of home education approaches.
- Children in the home school community have welfare and safety benefits over schools.
- The definition of “home schooling” in the Education Act 1990 needs to be changed.
- BOSTES should be more concerned with supporting home schoolers than regulating them.
- Greater access to resources should be made available, especially for high school students.

It is a privilege to contribute to this inquiry. Thank you for investigating home education in NSW. I look forward to the results.

Esther Hughes

ⁱ ACT http://www.det.act.gov.au/school_education/home_education
NSW <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/home-schooling/index.html>
NT <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/parents-community/schooling/home-education>
QLD <http://education.qld.gov.au/parents/home-education/index.html>
SA <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/speced2/pages/default/homeeducation/?reFlag=1>
TAS: <http://www.theac.org.au/registration-process/>
WA <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/homeeducation/detcms/portal/>