

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

Date received: 8/08/2014

Partially Confidential

7 August 2014

Select Committee

NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Home Schooling

When my daughter and son-in-law announced that they would opt for home schooling their children after some years at regular school, we were very concerned that our grandchildren would be educationally and socially disadvantaged. We were fearful because all we knew was “regular school,” the standard way by which education is rolled out.

However, we took the view that nothing would be lost if after a year, when the home schooling experiment failed, our grandchildren could go back to regular school. However after five straight years of home schooling we have seen its value and benefits. Our grandchildren, all five of them, are exposed to an above average level of knowledge and understanding in any of the given subjects. We look forward to reading their project books. Aware of our interest in their education and their various project books, we suspect that they are quite motivated to work a bit harder as regards to the content and presentation, knowing that Pop and Nan would be taking an interest.

We have noticed that the parents, who are quite savvy with the internet, are able to expose our grandchildren to this medium in a controlled and age appropriate way. We are amazed at the range of curriculum resources, like Text Books, Teaching Aids and workbooks that support them in educating our grandchildren. These are high quality texts and resources that are educationally current, obtained from both Australian and overseas providers.

We had the privilege of studying in the USA at tertiary institutions at post graduate levels. We are thrilled to see the opportunities and experiences that are now a normal part of their education. We have been moved by poetry, listened to speeches, been amazed at the scene set by their narratives, attended the symphony and Opera House with them, watched them perform plays and sail through the air on the flying trapeze, etc. Parents who are considering home schooling and who may be initially fearful, can take heart that they have exposure to valuable resources and opportunities that go beyond what is possible in regular day school. Perhaps this is one reason that home schoolers often perform above average.

Our biggest concern was the isolation of our grandchildren! Many of our friends who had little or no firsthand contact with home schooling were sceptical, fearful and negative. After carefully observing the process and progress over five years, we find that our grandchildren are certainly knowledgeable on a wider range of topics, both academic and life-related. They are not backward in coming forward with responses to discussions that ensue in the lounge room, in the street and in society at large. We have observed that what they learned in the course of their “home classroom” tended to flow naturally into conversations and discussions with people of all ages and backgrounds.

Our grandchildren are by no means isolated or disadvantaged. On the contrary, they seem to have contact with a wide range of people – other young children from Youth Club, Church families, summer camp, home schoolers, specialist instructors, music teachers, local community centre, and the like. On their own initiative, they visit a nursing home each week to talk, play games, paint nails, etc. These opportunities are possible given the fact that the home school timetable and weekly program is set up in a way that the daily schedule is maximised.

We are thankful that our grandchildren have wonderful support from their Home School associations. Not only do these children interact with a wide range of other home schoolers but the parents form bonds and encourage a sense of community because they have a common goal and a vital interest in the education and care of their children. As a result of the camaraderie they share, the many group outings and excursions are highly enjoyable social events for our grandchildren. They particularly love the Opera House shows, the Power house Museum (Questacon, Scienceworks, etc.), ANSTO tours and talks, Science workshops, Concerts and Musicals (standard and educational), the arts (visual art, drama and Hip Hop), Sports (basketball, gymnastics, sabre fencing, etc.) and the monthly home education picnic in Cronulla.

We have been concerned with the onerous requirements now imposed on home school parents to increase recordkeeping and get involved in more paperwork and reporting. Necessary reporting and records are needed for good order and accountability but when the balance is changed it is destructive and diminishes the real task of quality education. It is a distraction. It undermines the primary task of education because valuable time is eroded.

It is necessary to understand that parents who choose to home school do so for very good reasons. They pay a price. They have dedicated their lives to the education of their children. Many have

suspended their career objectives for the nurturing and education of their children. They make sacrifices and work closely with their children to make their children knowledgeable, competent, productive and socially well-adjusted so that they can be holistically equipped to enter main stream life.

We observed that when the new regulations were put forward it had a negative effect on our daughter. As the main home schooling person, she was significantly burdened by the new requirements to the extent that her teaching time was affected. Being a conscientious person, it began to affect her peace of mind and it caused undue stress that brought on migraine headaches. She was relieved when it became known that this matter was being reviewed and that a better system may replace the ineffective and burdensome current one.

We would like to see a good and fair assessment by the Senate Select Committee that recognises the Home Education Program as one that has many merits and worthy of support. Both regular school teaching and established curricula also have long standing deficiencies that are of concern. This would be true of the Home Education enterprise as well. It is only fair that there is an even handed approach by regulatory bodies so that the perceived bias is removed and recognition be given to those who for good reasons take on the Home Education program. The Home School Associations need to be represented at the decision making level so that polarisation will be avoided and better outcomes celebrated by all those interested in education.

It is well known that the Home Education option is not for any and every one. People who enter it choose carefully because their own children are at stake. Parents in the Home Education program need all the support and encouragement that is due to them from every level. Their freedom to choose this option must be guarded while sensible and reasonable compliance standards are put in place without prejudice or bias. An enlightened public would welcome this and we will all be the richer for it. It is also known that the one size fits all approach is inadequate, especially when we all recognise that parents know their children best and make unusual sacrifices to make sure that their own children receive the best education possible.

Yours Sincerely,