

Submission
No 74

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Why Home schooling?

It is always a hard decision to remove a child from the established schooling system, but it has proved for my family to be the greatest gift we could have given our children. I will explain why here.

My oldest son was the reason we even considered home schooling. He had started school well and was considered bright and sociable when in Kindergarten and through year 1, but there was a marked change soon after going into year 2.

My son started resisting getting up on a Monday morning, started wetting his bed on a Sunday night and became more and more closed off. Our lively, interested and well spoken boy became sullen, quiet and withdrawn. We knew something was wrong but assumed initially it was just a phase. When he admitted he was being bullied we went to the school who assured us it was not possible, but they would look into it. Things got worse and when we spent some time watching the play ground until we saw who was giving him a hard time. When we identified the group of boys the school admitted there was some trouble with them.

The school took action to stop the bullying and commenced counselling. By then it was six months into year 2 and my son had all but stopped learning. His confidence was gone and his interest in learning was barely there. We thought the problem had been solved, but now there was feed back that we had a teacher problem too.

Over two months of councillors and teacher/Principle meetings it was clear that the teachers he had were fed up with him. He was finishing his work ahead of the rest of the class and was then being expected to sit still and quiet until everyone else had finished. In summary our son was bored and wanting to do more, but the teachers had their hands full with the slower children. Their solution: "He must learn to be bored, because he will be bored in his job and needs to learn how to cope with it."

After hearing this statement in a meeting the decision to home school was easy. The change in our son was dramatic! The life literally came flowing back into him in the first two months of home schooling.

This is a summary of the greatest changes I have observed between our children and their friends who are at school:

1. **Attitude to learning.** Our children believe that learning is something that can happen anytime, anywhere. They see opportunity to learn all around them. For their friends still at school, leaning is something that takes place between 9am and 3pm. Outside of these times, their attitude is "I don't have to learn because I'm not in school". Some of our children's greatest discoveries have happened at night or on weekends. They are curios and

thirsty to learn. This is an attitude that will stand them in good stead for all of their life. This is the attitude of future leaders.

2. The second most notable gift from home schooling our children is their ability to appropriately communicate with other people of different ages. When an adult comes to the door, they greet them politely, introduce themselves and establish what the adult would like. If a younger child visits, they are equally able to adjust their communication to make the child feel welcome and at home. In contrast children I know being schooled are hesitant to talk to any age group but their own. Adults and older children are seen as someone to fear and answer only, while younger children are seen as inferior and not worth talking to. I relish seeing my children's self-confidence to talk to adults and include younger children in appropriate play. Again this respect for other people regardless of age is a gift they would not have learned in school.
3. The third significant advantage I have noted is that the actual time taken to work through the formal curriculum aspects of study for any one child being home schooled is many, many hours less than the time taken in a class of 30 children. We are able to pick up weak areas and focus on these. We are able to pick up on areas of specific areas of interest that each child has and leverage that enthusiasm into many different aspects of learning. If my son has a passion for Vikings, then we can easily tailor English, Maths, Geography, Art, Technology and History lesson around the Vikings. The result is an engaged and interested student soaking up knowledge at a far more detailed and higher rate than in a more set and inflexible schooling environment. There are some days when a child will settle better in the morning or afternoon and we can adjust when they work accordingly. Having to do a particular subject in a fixed way at a set time with 30 other children is simply ineffective. The additional time our children have in hand means they are able to be outside, running, cycling, climbing, trampolining and playing more. This physical activity is building a far healthier habit for life and means that they are more ready to focus and study when they need to be sitting down. I note that expecting children to sit still for hours is of little help in their physical and mental development.
4. The fourth advantage is the style of learning we are able to offer our children. Much of their learning at home is self-directed. In other words they are expected to research and discover for themselves. When they ask a question we are able to respond with a question and help them find the resources they need to answer the question for themselves. This results in deeper and more meaningful conversations and a set of skills to find answers for themselves. This empowers them to believe they can find answers if they do not know an answer. When I ask a public schooled child a question, they show no ability or will to find the answer. If they do not know the answer I just get a shrug followed by an expectation that I will tell them the answer anyway. Our children rush off madly to see

who is the first to find the answer. In a world of problems we need people who are thirsty to find solutions rather than accept limitations.

In summary of the benefits I observe, my children are more open to learning at any time of day or night, more willing and able to communicate with people of different ages/ backgrounds, live healthier more active lives and are more self motivated and equipped to find answers. There is no doubt in my mind this places them at a huge advantage to their peers at school.

What I would like you to consider

Costs and subsidies

Public schools are clearly under population pressure. Classes of 27-30 children are normal, but clearly this is the very upper limit a teacher can control in a class. It is not the optimum number for a teacher to teach. By taking our children out of the public schooling system we are reducing the pressure on over worked teachers. We are saving the government a significant amount of funding too. I believe it is reasonable that some of this saving is passed on to us to use in our children's education as it is in Canada. The school would get it if they attended, so why would we not have access to at least some of it when we take the responsibility and time to home school them?

Ease of registration and compliance

As a parent I expect there to be some structure to ensure we are able to deliver a suitable environment and some basic teaching content to our children and that someone occasionally checks to see our children are happy and well cared for in their home schooling. It is a reasonable safety measure for government to put in place. This structure however needs to be simple and unrestricting of teaching and learning styles. Often children who do not fit into the public school system need less standard and restrictive learning environments and parents must be free to choose a system that suits their children's' individual needs over complying with a ridged and imposed system. It needs to be simple and quick to comply with where inspectors work with parents as enablers not inhibitors to home-schooling.

Recognition of the value we contribute as a home schooling community

Home schooling families form communities that provide for child interaction and socialisation as well as support for parents facing the sometimes-daunting responsibility of educating their children.

The community is also able to offer the specific skills of its members to other children. One parent may run English classes another Art classes. The group may come together for sports such as tennis, ice-skating or horse riding. This has distinct benefits all round. Support for such group events and activities could be encouraged through access to state owned learning or sporting facilities when they are available such as in school holidays or evenings.

Home-schooling is never going to be an option for all families. Not everyone is able to dedicate one parent to the process of teaching, either following a set curriculum or in an unstructured way. Where parents have made the decision they should be recognised for their contribution to the education system, not as

an inconvenient anomaly. The reasons for home schooling are varied but include having children with learning difficulties or special needs. Far from isolating these children, home schooling offers them a chance for more one-on-one attention and lifts the pressure otherwise placed on schools.

Every parent wants the best opportunities for their children. I believe home schooling delivers this to our children and I would like to see this time, cost and outcome contribution to Australia recognised and supported, not hindered.

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