

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Mr Tim and Mrs Georgena Close

Date received: 9/08/2014

The Director
Select Committee on Home Schooling
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

Re: Submission to the NSW Legislative Assembly Select Committee Inquiry
into Home Schooling

Firstly we would like to thank you for this opportunity to express our thoughts, feelings and experiences as a home educating family in NSW. We have 4 children, one of whom is old enough to be registered. We plan to home educate all of our children right through their schooling career as we feel there are enormous benefits to a home-based education.

We have had the opportunity now to go through an initial registration and one re-registration with our eldest child. This experience and our home education philosophy forms the basis of much of our comments below. We feel that there are great benefits for families and NSW at large through the active support of the home education community.

We feel we are the very best facilitators for our children's education and are looking forward to the positive changes that will make the registration process of home education in NSW a positive and beneficial experience.

Please find below some of the areas we are concerned with as home educating parents in NSW:

(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,

Our daughter is 8 years old and has not had any experience in a conventional schooling environment. We feel this has been of great benefit to her intellectual development, imagination and creativity. As home educators we are able to explore topics and subject matter that is well beyond the current NSW curriculum. We are able to ensure the content she is learning is in context of her positioning within society and the world at large. We feel we are able to help her become the contributing citizen we need in Australia to help take us into the coming decades. While she is relatively early on in her educational journey we feel she will transition well into further study and our family's 'educational master plan' includes university and workplace education programs, depending again on her individual dreams and talents.

We feel she is learning what she needs to learn when it is important for her to learn it.

(ii) financial costs

We have chosen to home educate our children for the long-term education benefits they will gain. Financial considerations were not a consideration when deciding to home educate our children. Our children are the future leaders of Australia, the future Mothers and Fathers; you cannot put a price on that. They need the very best education we can provide for them and for us this meant home education.

Prior to our decision to home educate we had already committed to a stay-at-home Mother, as we believe this to be the most effective family structure. Yes, it does place more pressure on the bread-winner husband/father, but this is appropriately placed pressure. We believe the benefits of mothers in the workforce are far outweighed by the negative impact it is having on society at large. We know the family is the core unit of society and we are committed to doing our part in strengthening it.

Home education costs are flexible and comes down more to the creativity and connectedness of the family within the home education community. Here on the Central Coast we have a very supportive group that accesses numerous educations and cultural opportunities at greatly discounted rates.

We know our children and their education needs. With this knowledge we are able to invest our educational dollars where they will have the greatest benefit for each individual child and their learning style. Our children have been able to experience things above and beyond anything they would have been exposed to in a conventional school (public or private) and we know because we have attended both.

This is not to say that home educating our children is 'cheap or inexpensive', we would say it would be on par with a private Christian school fees.

The cost argument comes down to a dollar comparison of a public/private school child and a home-educated child. There really is nothing to substitute a one-on-one educational relationship with a loving parent/mentor.

Really for the amount of paper work and 'compliance' we are currently expected to produce, we should be allocated a public school teachers wage!

If the state believes in providing 'quality education' to all then the state should regardless of where the student 'sits' be given access to all resources like TVET courses, access to TAFE programs, student ID cards, hospital schools, subsidised swimming classes, language other than English classes, instrumental music classes and access to school band programs.

NSW currently pumps \$14.4 billion into education! No amount of money added *extra* into the public system is going to entice home educating parents to send their children to public school, but there is a lot that can be added to really make the home education registration process in NSW, a engaging and positive process.

Currently the figure that the government pays for education per student is roughly \$15,000 for public and \$8000 for private student each year! As home educating parents we are taking the full responsibility to educate our children and gain no financial help, while others abdicate their responsibility and get paid huge sums for it.

We feel the government is getting extremely good value from the home education community and the registration process should reflect this value.

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

Even before we had our first child we knew that we wanted the very best education for them. We took the time to research various schools and education philosophies. We drew on experiences of other parents and children, including our own educational experiences. This led us on a journey where we discovered that the conventional school system was lacking a lot of what we were searching for. We had met so many home-educated youth who we feel had many of the positive, lovely values that we wanted for our children and their examples let us to research home education.

Once we decided to home educate we have not looked back, and would not consider sending our children to a conventional school. The results and happiness of our children is testament to this fact.

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

We are fully registered and compliant with the NSW home school requirements, however we understand why some families choose not to register their child/ren. The registration process is onerous and requires a significant amount of time in 'administration', rather than time spent educating our children.

There will always be some that will slip through the crack but we feel that if the process was streamlined and fair, then there may not be quite so many unregistered families. The fact that there are a high number of unregistered families indicates that the compliance process is out of touch with the benefits of home education. If these were to be aligned, we feel that the current debate would become a non-issue.

(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children

Our children are healthy, happy and bright. We feel that the home education environment magnifies creativity, autonomy and learning on all levels. We believe these are characteristics that are being lost in the conventional school system and are necessary for the health of the future leaders of Australia.

We also have the unique opportunity to teach values and promote strong family bonds which leads to stronger, happier, morally based and grounded individuals who are hard-working contributing members of society.

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

Home education is dynamic and creative. It is outside the box. From the home educating families we know there is not much comparison to the traditional school system. Parents and children work together to learn, create and contribute to their communities. The success of home education comes from this creativity and the close interaction of parents and students. The educational style and content is individually tailored to each child to optimise their educational experiences. This is simply not feasible within a traditional school room. This is a significant difference that distinguishes home educators from traditional schools.

While many home education parents do not hold a degree in education they certainly have the advantage in commitment, love, energy and ability to individualise learning experiences for their students. Being outside the academic teaching environment gives home educating parents the creative edge that would be significantly dulled had they received an education degree.

We find learning experiences everywhere in everyday life. We learn when driving around in the car, going on bushwalks, playing with friends, doing chores around the house, gardening, cooking, helping with baby, etc, etc. Again, this comes down to creativity. There are words, numbers, people, shapes, and things all around us that we can draw on and learn. The classroom expands out of a dedicated room into the real world around our children and us. In the process they interact, engage and learn far more deeply than sitting in a classroom being told about something by someone who may have as much real-world experience in the subject than the students do themselves.

We wanted to have our children work on a farm so we went to Tasmania for the month and stayed at a working farm. We wanted to learn about boats so we caught the Able Tasman there and back. We wanted to teach them about our Australian heritage so we took them to Port Arthur and took them on beautiful bush walks at Harrington caves. Through all that we were able to meet so many people of all ages and countries and our children learnt from them all. This type of learning is not only bonding as a family but brings the world into their hearts and minds. This cannot be achieved sitting in a classroom with 30 other kids who might not even like boat or animals.

We want a world-class education for our children, and that means it *must* be individualised and personalised.

Home education allows us to individualise our children's learning, it doesn't mean that we personally have to do all the teaching. We use specially selected mentors, for example, we are not brilliant in art, but we have a dear friend who is, she is a virtuous young women (who is currently studying her Masters in Physio) who is a brilliant artist and she spends a few hours each week inspiring us all in art. This is something that just cannot be catered for in public schools where there is a 30:1 ratio.

As our children learn we, as home educators, learn with them, thus increasing a whole families education and ability to contribute within our communities.

Distance education is really just 'school at home' and is a completely different model of education than home-education.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

Many home educators have expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with the current home education regulatory framework and they see no benefit to being registered.

If the system of registration was appropriate and supportive we wouldn't have the need for this inquiry.

We would love to see the same system that Tasmania has in place as a base to be used in NSW- we would be happy to engage in such a supportive process. Then adding other effective points from other states like the Victoria registration system which simply requires a statement of responsibility to home educate and there is no assessment.

(ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons

There seems to be some inconsistencies with the training, qualifications and experience of the authorised persons (APs) and a lack of accountability for the APs. The Board of Studies and the AP's themselves seem to be a rogue organisation of their own; they are able to get away with whatever they want because no one is watching over their doings. We are aware of home educators being denied registration or given limited registrations with no acceptable explanation. At the very least a written report should be made for those given less than 2 years registration and details of practical methods they can implement in order to gain a full 2 year registration.

Currently there are families being denied registration but the Board of Studies seem to have no way of tracking why these are occurring. With more information the Board would be able to ascertain if there is a particular part of the registration process that is not clear, localities that require more support or APs who are consistently rejecting registrations. It is unfair to put the onus on the home education community when the Board itself does not even understand the state of the home education registration process

We are also aware of AP's who are rude and who do not even follow their own handbook and an AP's who thinks they know it all and have no regard for the rich learning that is available to home educating families.

We personally have spent sleepless nights preparing for our registrations and

it was all for wasteful paperwork, that really means nothing. Our children have not gained anything by us 'producing' copious amounts of 'compliance paperwork'.

AP's should have been home educators themselves. Having 'public school' experience is not helpful for home educating families. We are working with individualised students who we love and want the very best for. The registration system should support this.

The AP who has registered us both times has been friendly and prompt but he was only here to 'tick boxes'. The AP's in general don't seem to like home education, let alone have any thorough knowledge of this wonderful form of education. Home education is not 'school at home' and we believe to be about to be a qualified 'AP' you must have home education experience. This is why we recommend the Tasmania and Victorian models of registration.

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

According to the *The Education Act 1990* (NSW) clearly recognises that '*the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child's parents*'. The focus on adhering to the NSW Syllabus seems to remove this responsibility and place it on the state, which is somewhat contradictory. The changing condition of registration via the Information Packages has generated a lot of confusion amongst the home education community and APs. This needs to be resolved in order to gain whatever consistency the NSW government is attempting to achieve.

Home educators generally have a different approach to tracking education of students. Because it is such an individualised process it is difficult to maintain strict grade systems as it is in the traditional school system. As such the whole-of-child approach would be more relevant.

For example a child attending a public school may be more 'advanced' according to the NSW Syllabus in grade 2, but if we look at the overall education between the two students we may find the home-educated student far advanced by the end of their 'schooling career'. For example, which is better? A student who was reading at 4 years old, or a student who begins a university degree at age 16?

Rather than forcing a child to read by 5 years old we want to produce 15 year olds who study- by their own free will and choice- 10 hrs a day because they just loves to learn.

The whole life story of the child needs to be taken into account, not just their progress in one single year in relation to an arbitrary syllabus that has been designed for a completely different style of education.

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

We feel our children are safer and far better off being in a home education environment. We home educate our children so we can provide the very best education possible. This includes the safest and healthiest environment for them to learn, grow and develop in. They are able to develop values, respect and are protected from the bullying and sexual abuse that happens far too often in schools.

Unfortunately we are living in a world of shifting values and that can be seen in the 'health and sex education' that is delivered in public (and most probably some private) schools, the lack of respect and de-sensitisation. The books, literature and media that is allowed to be shown without parents consent is alarming.

How much better for a child to grow and have a wonder about the world and a great love and respect for things and to be taught through the classics, rather than 'dumbed down' literature and fast passed media.

We find it offensive to insinuate that our children's safety, welfare and wellbeing may be impeded because we choose to home educate our children.

If there is a concern on the safety, welfare and wellbeing of home educated children there is surely a better method to check on this than casting aspersions on the majority of honest, loving, caring home educating parents.

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

We would like to see appropriate, supportive regulation.

I am sure that you have been made aware of each other state and territories home education registration processes and their associated benefits.

Some of the ways we would like to see the current system improved would include:

Combining the Victoria registration system which simply requires a statement of responsibility to home educate and there is no assessment and Tasmania system where home education is regulated by a group that includes home educators and support is a part of the registration process.

We also feel that there is no need for continual surveillance of experienced home educators. After an appropriate time to get their grounding really there is no need for monitoring; just like when you bring a new baby home, you are visited by the early childhood nurse, she makes you aware of all support networks that you can access if you need, and then leaves you alone to do your mothering. The same could be for home education, and if the need arises that you want to access school for your child then you could inform through the proper channels and go from there. This is an appropriate form of

regulation.

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

For our family this is a 'nice-to-have', not a 'must-have'. We decided to home educate based on the merits of home education and have taken this on regardless of the support available. We are committed to making it work for our family.

But, there are many things that would be great to have access to in the future once our children are bigger like TVET courses, all school sport, student ID, ability to register for older years and hence still be eligible for FTB A, access to hospital schools (if the terrible need ever arose).

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

It amazes us that there is no home education representation within BoSTES! We believe that simply by including home education representation within BoSTES will alleviate some of the issues currently experienced by NSW home educators. The board member/s should be an experienced and committed home educator and able to provide real-world advice and training to other board members and APs.

(f) any other related matter.

We currently have the opportunity to take the very best that all other states and territories have and make a fantastic home education registration process for NSW.

This could include:

- Tax breaks for home educating families, yearly payments such as the New Zealand system or a Home Education Rebate as in Queensland, by way of the Textbook and Resource Allowance.

- Provisional registration periods- From the time a child is removed from school, until the time final registration is given - preferably six months as in the ACT.

- Greater levels of support - Having individuals with experience of home education be involved in the registration process as is the case in Tasmania.

- Different educational philosophies accepted. Understanding of various forms and philosophies of home education, is apparent in many other states, such as ACT, Tasmania, and Queensland.

- Being granted home education status until we inform you otherwise.

-Part-time schooling would be an advantage for students to access specialist resources, particularly as they grow older. This option is available in the ACT, Victoria and South Australia.

-Other support in various forms would be appreciated, such as linking with local home educating support networks, help with getting started in the practice of home education, provision of helpful information about activities, encouragement, access to online education options currently available to school students, access to sporting programs, provision of student ID card.

-Greater access to resources and services available to students in the school system in NSW, such as subsidised swimming classes, language other than English classes, instrumental music classes and band programs.

-Greater access to resources and services for children with a disability and learning difficulties such as through Special Education Resources Unit in South Australia and Vision Education in Western Australia.

-Funding for a NSW Home Education library of resources and books, allowing families to borrow books and other educational resources such as science supplies (online, by mail) with textbooks able to be borrowed for longer periods (e.g. 12 months).

-Easier access to Distance Education

Thank you for the time you have taken to read ours and the other submissions. We look forward to a positive outcome of this enquiry and your continued support of the home education community in NSW.

Kind regards,

Tim and Georgina Close