

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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Vanderkolk Submission to the Homeschooling Inquiry

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ATTACHMENTS:

- Comparison Chart of the Information Packs from 1998 to 2013
- Nathanael's Story

Introduction to our Family

My husband, Gerald and I have home educated our six children for more than 19 years. None of our children have been to school. Our four eldest children have now completed their studies entirely at home and are all working in various jobs according to their gifts and talents, and contributing to society. Our eldest established an online marketing company two years ago, and with his business partner, they have 14 employees; Our second son is a qualified electrician and our third son has completed an Events Management Diploma and working as an intern at a campsite while studying for his second Diploma. Our fourth son has just begun his electrical apprenticeship. Their achievements and character traits today must be somewhat attributed to the fact that they were able to pursue their interests and develop their abilities in their own unique fields and be taught and nurtured within the context of a loving family home.

During our years of homeschooling, I have also been able to provide information, support and encouragement to many home educators worldwide through my website: www.design-your-homeschool.com.

A. Benefits to our Family

One of the main reasons we began to homeschool was to instil our family values, develop character in our children and build strong family relationships while enjoying living and learning through life together. We have spent hours and hours with our children – in one-to-one tutoring situations, working according to their own level of ability and at their own pace. We have also enjoyed group learning – within our own family (6 children) as well as within a social context.

Due to the beauty of homeschooling, we have had time to immerse ourselves completely in numerous subjects and in great depth. We have wonderful memories of when we studied a historical time-period in great depth. We read about it from time period literature and historical fiction, researched, cooked the food, created costumes, written stories and essays, created plays, made models, given speeches and invited others to join in our learning through hosting special days as well as special feasts. One of my sons organized a number of history days. After spending months studying the Space Race – he invited friends and families over and organized games and activities for the entire day. Kids were creating model planes from pop-sticks; they used recycled materials to develop and build a parachute which would safely bring an egg to landing from our second storey home and they built and fired matchstick rockets. Our children gave speeches and ran competitions and throughout the day, the participants earned points

and cashed it in for prizes at the end of the day. We have also hosted a medieval feast, Cold war day, World War I and participated in a Roman Feast.

We have studied artists, musicians, scientists all in relation to time periods.

They have read widely and we have read widely to them, immersing them in quality literature, the classics, historical fiction and historical primary sources.

We have studied languages and logic through books, CDs, teachers and online programs.

We have joined with other families in group learning – debating classes, thinking classes, worldview courses, drama classes, choir, dance, woodwork, art and more.

We have engaged in community events and they have been volunteers for years, helping with kid's clubs, organizing and taking on leadership roles. One year, as we were enjoying the life-cycles of butterflies – we took our collection of caterpillars, chrysalises and butterflies from home, (as well as our silkworms) and gave a talk and demonstration to a class at a school.

We have enjoyed the flexibility of open source learning via the internet which includes websites with video instructions to teach skills and knowledge, (my 15 year old is currently creating and following his own course in computer programming all from free, online resources) listen to historical speeches and debates (great resources found at TED), science documentaries and many more online resources such as Khan Academy.

My children have been able to have time to follow their interests. My eldest taught himself to design and build websites and from this beginning has entered into online marketing, running a company in this field today. Three others have also had the experience of creating websites and adding relevant content. We have raised a variety of stick insects, butterflies, silkworms, birds, guinea pigs and rabbits watching the entire life cycle and researching and learning about their different needs and requirements. Some have spent hours and days doing Science experiments, watching video clips and trying them at home. They have used design skills to build go-karts, upgrade Nerf guns, sew dresses, cook fancy meals and they even created a huge 8 metre car track which races 6 cars at a time which has come out at birthdays and used by various community clubs. They have built furniture – CD Holders, a beautiful hall table.

They have not been disadvantaged at all through their home schooling life. To the contrary, their personal characters, their drive, independence, motivation and responsibility that they show today has been encouraged through all of their educational experiences, their lives and their own personal pursuits.

We have wanted to see our children take an active role in their own education, and as they blossomed, we have sought to guide and instruct them, and cheer them on – working as coaches, mentors and facilitators of their education.

My eldest son recently wrote this about his education:

As someone who has never stepped foot in a school, being home educated has given me great opportunities, grown my entrepreneurial mind and provided many instances in which I have been able to work with teams of people and develop leadership skills in managing small groups of children, running camps and activities. This unique educational approach has given me the time and possibility to have a tailor made education, to build my own skills, to take initiative and jump into being an entrepreneur from a very young age. I have been given room and space to think creatively and the ability to look outside the square, and pursue my own interests. I am thankful that I could study at my own pace and not be required to follow the same exact routine or content as every other kid in the class or in my age group. My family has allowed me to have an amazing up-bringing and this has really led to positioning me where I am today. In the next month, my company will merge with another online marketing company to expand our expertise across the whole industry and so, at only 24, I will be a director and owner of one of the largest online marketing companies in Australia that will turn over close to 10 million dollars, have around 1000 clients and employees over 30 staff. I am excited about the next step!

The flexibility we have experienced in learning across subject disciplines and across the ages, when travelling and when at home could not be possible if the current regulation and excessive prescriptiveness of the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards, Information Package of 2013 is applied.

B. Our Experience with Registration

Over the years we have mostly experienced positive visits from Authorised Persons who encouraged us in our role and found our programs to be above and beyond the guidelines and recommendations. I have never been asked to refer to syllabus outcomes in this time. It was obvious that the education my children were receiving (allowing for individual pursuits and self-directed learning in many areas), fulfilled a course of study which could be seen as, under the Education Act, a “quality education.”

It is very concerning to me that although the Education Act has not changed since 2004, the Information Packages have. We ask, "Why? Why did things change in the packs? Why did they become more prescriptive? Why has there been a tightening up and a different understanding of what was expected in order to be registered?"

Looking back at my years of homeschooling, I wonder if in fact the Authorised Persons were in fact 'endorsing' my program? Endorsing it because it met the requirements as listed in the Education Act – was taught according to the Key Learning Areas and deemed to be a quality education. As parents who have been given the responsibility to educate their children (one of the key principles of the Act), we should have the ability to present what we deem to be a quality education in our own homes, without the added prescriptiveness that we are currently facing. It is certain that the new Information Package and the role of the Office of the Board of Studies has been a discouragement to home schooling families since the prescription and the manner in which the Information Package has been written does not allow us the flexibility to freely make decisions about our own lives and the lives of our children and pursue goals with confidence.

C. Our Understanding of the Parental Role

In the Liberal Party Platform Statement on the role of families, we read: "Liberals support the family as the fundamental institution for the raising and nurturing of children and for making each individual an integral part of society. Liberals recognise that the values, choices and actions of families have a profound influence on the welfare of the nation and that the interests of families should be at the centre of national policy making." (p7-8 Federal Platform The Liberal Party of Australia)

The NSW Education Act 1990, according to Section 4(b) upholds this by stating that "education is the responsibility of the parents" and according to Section 4 (d) that the "State's responsibility is public education." As individual families we have taken on the responsibility of educating our own children without funding and in accordance with the Act. Our action is not considered public education, but rather a model of private family education. Therefore in principle, parents who wish to homeschool should be given the ability to register and accept the full responsibility of the education of their children and provide their children with a quality education. In essence, the education of our children is not the responsibility of the State.

However, we have been under the jurisdiction of the State and according to the NSW Act, it is our duty to present registration to the Minister. This in turn is handed to a body, which has clearly shown by their increase in unfounded, unreasonable and unnecessary demands that they no longer understand the meaning of parental responsibility or choice, nor do they understand the nature of home education. For these reasons, we recommend:

Recommendations:

1. Establish an independent body to oversee, facilitate and support home education (based on the proven Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council model - THEAC)
2. That registration is managed by the above independent body. Registration as a basis of meaningful engagement with the Home Education community.
3. That home educators are given notification and equal access to educational support services, resources, opportunities and any initiatives which are available to children in the institutional school system. This will ensure that there is no discrimination against Home Education providers.

Gerald and Marianne Vanderkolk

The Background of Home Education in NSW

Home education has had a long and troubled place in the history of N.S.W. education.

The 1987 Act had been clearly designed to make home-schooling an unappealing option as seen in the Shadow Minister's comments in the second reading debate in 1990 that "home-schooling does not have equal standing with enrolment at a government school or at a registered non-government school. Home-schooling should not be encouraged and should always be regarded as inferior to school attendance" (Hansard, 1990, p. 1706).

The 1990 Act significantly altered requirements and procedures regarding home-schooling and clearly demonstrated the difference in philosophy and approach from previous legislation. Instead of seeking exemption from attendance at school, home-schooling was now recognised as a viable option to school so that parents could apply for registration of the child for home-schooling, rather than exemption from attendance at school. Indeed, home-schooling is included in Part 7 of the Act that deals with the registration of non-government schools. (The 1990 Education Reform Act; <http://www.aare.edu.au/data/publications/2000/rio00358.pdf>)

In 1998, the Disallowment of Home Education Amendment Bill was another push to create unnecessary regulations. In the Hansard on this debate, Mr O'Doherty states,

"Second, as I have said to homeschoolers and now put on the record of the Parliament, when the coalition is in government it will consult with homeschoolers on guidelines, which will probably be given force by regulation, that reflect the new character of home schooling. The coalition will not introduce guidelines or regulations which try to impose a school-based model on home schooling, which is a different form of education. The coalition does not have a preconception that home schooling must be like the education received in a State school for it to be valid."

This is the context home educators find themselves in once again. The Information Package of 2013 was concrete evidence of the changes which were already being implemented and enforced by the Authorised Persons. We are once again fighting bureaucracy who are seeking to regulate more and more and bring about changes without any consultation with those being affected by the changes, namely, home educators. We would like the Inquiry to consider the words of Mr O'Doherty in 1998,

"The coalition understands why parents prefer home schooling. They strongly believe that conventional schools do not provide the best education for their children. The State has

a responsibility, together with parents, to ensure that children get the best form of education. The Act enshrines that parental responsibility, and the role of the State is to support parents in their choice. Guidelines or regulations that seek to limit home schooling and impose a Big Brother model which operates from the top down, a model that includes the regulation presented by the Minister, are inconsistent with a belief that the State should support parents in their choice and not impose its will on them."

Comparisons of practices across Australia.

NSW has the most regulatory control – The Office of the Board of Studies is responsible for the administration and registration program on behalf of the Minister; The education program is to be based on and taught in accordance with the NSW BOS syllabuses; Must be suitable to cater for the learning needs of the child; Must be adequate recording of learning experiences and the child's progress and achievement; Time must be sufficient to cover the curriculum and be comparable to the time allocated by schools; Must provide a suitable learning environment; Must have adequate resources;

Understanding the way in which the registration is being regulated and administered, there is no wonder that we read quotes such as these on Facebook:

- "I'm in NSW. I would prefer it to be more flexible and not so rigid. I prefer that all AP's go through some proper training on what it actually means to Home School from HS perspective. I would prefer all AP's to do things the same way and not go off and do things the way they like. I want it understood that we are not Mainstream School. We are Home Schooling. Things are totally different. I also think too much paperwork is required so less paperwork."

WA: Need to complete an application form and produce the child's birth certificate; The family is responsible for planning, resourcing, delivering and monitoring the program and must demonstrate what progress the child has made; The program and progress are evaluated in accordance with the Curriculum Framework which establishes the learning outcomes to be achieved and includes 8 Learning Area statements about the knowledge, skills and values deemed essential to the students. It does not prescribe a curriculum. May be enrolled part time at their local school.

VIC: Must be registered with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority; Need to address 8 Key Learning Areas; Fill in registration form, no visits, no reports, no sending programs.

- “I love it the way it is in Victoria. Sign the form and left alone. I don't want it to change at all.”
- “I am in Victoria. All that has to be done here is a phone call to register, no showing of planning or anything, I would like to see a once a year visit to check our study plan and see how the kids are doing.”

QLD: Need to be registered the Home Education Unit; Parents must supply a summary of the educational program to be used and the educational philosophy; Send in a report once a year;

- “I’m in Queensland and recently registered with HEU. I found filling out the application and first year of the education plans for the kids fairly straightforward to fill out but HEU should send out the reporting pack with your registration so that you are aware of what they require and so you are able to properly prepare instead of leaving you clueless about what is going to happen and what you are legally required to report on.”

SA: Parents need to demonstrate that their children are provided with appropriate learning program, a timetable, resources, opportunities for social interaction, suitable learning environment; They must cover 8 learning areas (English, Mathematics, Science, Design and Technology, Studies of Society and Environment, The Arts, Health and Physical Education, Languages other than English.

- “I’m in SA. Simply fill out an application outlining what you plan to do in each subject area. Someone comes out for a chat and on 99% of cases its straight forward. I’m happy with someone coming out each year to simply check things are still going well and kids are OK. The review form gives me a chance to see where we've been going over the last year and where we hope to head in the year to come. I certainly wouldn't want any more structure to the system than that. Those doing reviews need to understand how homeschooling works and be sympathetic to the cause.”

TAS: THEAC is an independent advisory council, responsible to the Minister of Education, but separate to the Department of Education. It is responsible for the registration process and monitoring of individual home education programs. THEAC assists parents by providing information and through information sessions. Tasmanian home schooled students are not required to follow the national curriculum. THEAC has been operating in Tasmania for 20+ years.

- “Home schooling in Tassie is wonderful as you are able to develop your own system. The monitors are so supportive ... I put SO much effort into the process and it turned out they were overwhelmed by our efforts. The visitor who came was gorgeous, supportive and encouraging.”
- “It is rare for Tas people not to get registered – THEAC is very supportive. There are info sessions coming up. I think Hobart in a week or so. In our group we have lists of local home ed activities, etc. you can join in with. Lots of helpful people if you want to ask questions.”

ACT: Recognizes the parental rights to choose a suitable educational environment and educational philosophy. They can combine part-time home education and part-time attendance at school. Parents must provide a high quality education for their child; document the educational opportunities, the strategies used and make the programs, materials and records available to the director general. Parents may choose what curriculum to follow in accordance with their own approach to home education and the educational needs of the child. They need to offer a broad range of opportunities that foster the development of the child’s unique spiritual, emotional, physical, social and intellectual being; They must value the individual needs, interests and aptitudes of each child, and prepare each child to become an independent and effective global citizen.

NT: Supports the right of parents to choose an educational environment that suits their child, but believes that school is the optimum learning environment for a child. The parents are responsible for: seeking approval to home educate, provide a suitable curriculum, resources etc, comply with an annual home visit, ensure a portfolio is available. Parents are not required to use the Australian Curriculum or NT Framework, but must address 8 Key Learning Areas from the board requirements for home education.

History and Current Issues:

Regulatory framework for homeschooling:

In the appendix to this submission, we have attached a comparison study which I undertook to compare the Information Packages from 1998 to 2013. ([Information Package Change Comparison Chart 1998 – 2013](#)) This is clear evidence of the regulatory changes which are being seen in our homes today and are described below.

A. The Current Registration Procedure

The role of the BOSTES (Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards) is to administer the non-government school registration and accreditation program under functions defined by the Act. In the Education Act 1990, the BOSTES also oversees the registration of home education. The NSW Education Act 1990, according to Section 4, states:

- (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.

When a parent wishes to home educate their child, they must apply to the Minister of Education. The Minister seeks the advice of an Authorised Person in order to make a decision to register or not register the child. Based on the decision of the Authorised Person, the registration is either refused or granted. This process implies that the Authorised Person is qualified to make that decision. It also implies that parents need to seek permission from the State to accept the responsibility already delegated to them by the State clearly written in the Principles on which the Act is based. This misunderstanding of the premise of the Education Act 1990 is at the core of many disputes between home educating parents and BoSTES representatives. Who is really in charge?

Under the Education Act, we have the freedom to homeschool, and under Part 6, Objects for administration of this Act we are to have regard for these Objects:

The Objects which mostly affect home educators:

- (a) assisting each child to achieve his or her educational potential,
- (m) provision of opportunities for parents to participate in the education of their children,
- (n) provision of an education for children that promotes family and community values.

However, one problem arises when there does not seem to be separate regard for home education. Home education is different than school education and this is not reflected in the Education Act in which our registration process is delegated to a body which oversees non-government schools and which is familiar with a school based education system. Even on the BOSTES website, the roles and responsibilities of the BOSTES does not mention homeschooling. So, currently we are being registered by a body which seeks to regulate us under a “school-at-home” approach.

B. Role of the Authorised Persons

We want to show you a progression of changes from earlier Information Packages and the perceived role of the Authorised Persons to illustrate why there is now a lack of trust in the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) among home educators.

1998 Information Package

In the 1998 Information Package, we read,

“The Minister has authorized the Board’s Inspector and other identified appropriately qualified persons to act as Authorised Persons with respect to home schooling. The guidelines describe the procedures used during registration process. The registration for home schooling process should have a positive educational focus for families. Board Inspectors and Board Liaison Officers view each application in as flexible a way as possible, taking account of the ethos of the applicant and the needs of students and their parents.” (IP, 1998)

Their role was considered to be the role of a facilitator and those who “assist parents seeking registration for home schooling.” (IP, 1998)

2006 Information Package

Describing what will occur during the Authorised Person’s visit in 2006 we read,

“The purpose of the visit is to provide an opportunity for you to show and discuss the plans that you have for your child’s education. During the visit the Authorised Person will consider the information and material indicating the quality of your child’s education will be satisfactory and that the minimum requirements of the curriculum will be met. You will have the opportunity to show what has been developed at this stage and to describe steps you will take to address areas that need further attention. You may also wish to

raise and discuss any other Home Education issues. If you are unhappy about any aspect of the visit, please make contact with the Home Education Unit."

2013 Information Package

However, moving to the current IP, we see a definite change in tone in the 2013 which seems to be more from a governing body imposing regulations than an officer willing to assist the registration process, "be flexible and take into account the ethos of the applicant and the needs of students and their parents." (Quoted above)

In the latest 2013 IP, we read:

"The authorized person will consider the documented evidence that you provide to show how you intend to meet the requirements for registration as stated in Part 2 of this information package. The assessment process involves assessing the educational program and other documentation that you have developed. The visit provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate that the educational program you plan to deliver will comply with the requirements for home schooling registration." (p13, 2013 IP)

The language used in the 2013 IP makes home educators feel as though they are on trial and must prove themselves. It no longer includes, "discussing the application." That is why so many home educators are anxious about the registration process. That may also a reason why some choose not to register.

One important introductory statement was changed in the 2013 Pack has proved to be indicative of the fundamental change that occurred through many different parts of the IP.

"Home schooling, also ~~called~~ referred to as home education, ~~allows~~ requires a parent to integrate deliver the NSW Board of Studies curriculum ~~with the learning processes that occur naturally in the home throughout a child's development.~~"

C. The Requirement to Adhere to the delivery of the NSW Syllabuses

1. IDENTIFYING THE MINIMUM CURRICULUM AS THE NSW BOS SYLLABUS

Although there has been no change in the Education Act, in this regard since March 2004, there has been a definite shift over the course of the Information Packages from 2006 to 2013 to enforce the syllabus as though it is a prescribed requirement.

In the current 2013 IP, the minimum curriculum has been redefined to become the BOS syllabuses.

Information Package 2013 (Note: The minimum curriculum is the curriculum provided by the relevant Board of Studies syllabuses. Part 4 of this package details the curriculum requirements.) p10

However, according to the Information Packages from the past and as indicated specifically in the 2006 IP, the Key Learning Areas are the minimum curriculum, not the curriculum provided by the BOS syllabuses. I believe this change is an interpretation and does not have a basis according to the Act. Please note that the Key Learning Guidelines which have been listed in the last 5 IPs I studied, have been removed in the current 2013 Information Package.

On Page 10 of the 2006 IP (after the Education Act was changed in 2004) it states,

"The Authorised Person will consider a number of elements of the home education program that relate to the quality of the proposed educational provision.

This will include assessing that:

- *the teaching/learning program (the proposed curriculum or goals and intentions; your proposed approach) reflects the key learning areas described in the minimum curriculum and is consistent with guidelines approved by the Minister (see Part 2)"*

In that Information Package (2006, page 17), we read a definition of Minimum Curriculum:

Glossary Term: (p17)

Minimum Curriculum: This comprises the courses of study in each of the key learning areas (KLAs) which are to be studied by children at primary and secondary level.

The minimum curriculum for primary children (Kindergarten to Year 6) must provide courses of study in the six KLAs of English; Mathematics; Science and Technology; Human Society and Its Environment; Creative and Practical Arts; Personal Development, Health and Physical Education.

The minimum curriculum for secondary students (Years 7 to 10) must provide courses of study in six out of the eight KLAs of English; Mathematics; Science; Human Society and Its Environment; Languages Other than English; Technological and Applied Studies; Creative Arts; Personal Development, Health and Physical Education.

From this we see that the previously defined term, “minimum curriculum” has been altered from “courses in Key Learning Areas” and subsequently, defined as the BOS syllabuses. There is no basis for this change.

2. IGNORING THE WORDS, “ENDORSED” IN THE EDUCATION ACT

In the Education Act in Section 4 (f) we read,

f) courses of study in a key learning area are to be based on, and taught in accordance with, a syllabus developed or endorsed by the Board and approved by the Minister.

This allows the Board to “endorse” a syllabus which is developed according to courses of study in key learning areas. This is spelt out more in Part 3, Division 1, 8,1 (a)-(e) for primary and 10, 1(a)-(d) for secondary education. The word, “endorsed” in 8(f) must refer to the statements above it for otherwise there would be no reason to have these clauses and especially 8(e) and 10(d).

This 8(f) clause must refer to another course of study apart from the syllabus. The clauses in (a) to (e) give the body of what an endorsed syllabus needs to include for primary education.

(a) courses of study in each of the 6 key learning areas for primary education are to be provided for each child during each Year,

(b) courses of study relating to Australia are to be included in the key learning area of Human Society and its Environment,

(c) courses of study in both Art and Music are to be included in the key learning area of Creative and Practical Arts,

(d) courses of study in a key learning area are to be appropriate for the children concerned having regard to their level of achievement and needs,

(e) courses of study in a key learning area are to be provided in accordance with any relevant guidelines developed by the Board and approved by the Minister,

Therefore, the Board, through the registration process, can acknowledge a curriculum which has been developed by home educators.

The Authorised person will assess that: "the teaching/learning program (the proposed curriculum or goals and intentions; your proposed approach) reflects the key learning areas described in the minimum curriculum and is consistent with guidelines approved by the Minister." (2006 IP, page 10)

This provision was made available to parents throughout all the Information Packages with similar wording as we read in the IP 2011:

Home schooling requires that parents accept responsibility for developing, implementing and evaluating their child's learning program. Home schooling, also called home education, allows a parent to integrate the NSW curriculum with the learning processes that occur naturally in the home throughout a child's development. (p5, 2011)

It is my firm understanding that up to this point of time, the Office of the Board of Studies has been in fact approving our programs according to the Key Learning Areas.

In the current climate, we have felt the extra burdens of over-regulation, and there has been no change in the Education Act to warrant this "school-at-home" approach and the unnecessary requirements of onerous reporting.

Appropriateness of the current regulatory regime

A. Against the Nature of Homeschooling

The new requirements set out in the 2013 Information Package do not work with the nature of home education. Homeschool families learn together through life experiences, through subject matter that is relevant to the family, and often taught across the ages. These new regulations force parents to write programs and keep records for each child for all the numerous outcomes in each subject area according to the NSW BOS Syllabuses – for the outcomes and the content. What happens to learning together – following a topic and creating a unit study which involves the youngest to the oldest child? What happened to the parents having the freedom to write their own learning programs?

Home educators do not see children as packages that fit neatly into year levels. Rather, we see education happening all the time at the pace of the individual. Some children may be working at three different man-made year levels across the subjects. In fact, many homeschoolers reject the notion of a ‘year level’ and consider growth in skill levels to be far more important than meeting someone else’s criteria. This happens at different rates and at different time for all children and to require that home educators place a child in a year level and then inform the Board when that changes is a ridiculous requirement for both the homeschooling families as well as the inspectors who would need to come to inspect.

Although the Information Package of 2006 acknowledges that homeschooling is unique and diverse and there are many ways to approach education, the fact is the current requirements do not show a way in which we can individualize, go beyond our year levels, be innovative and explore avenues which step outside of the syllabus. This package is too restrictive for the nature of home education and will not allow a child to step out of the box to develop their own strengths. I find it difficult to see how this restriction will enable our child/children to “achieve his or her educational potential” (Part 2, Section 6 (1)(a)) or to develop (Part 2, Section 6 (1A)(b)(i)) their knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes in the fields, they choose, and (ii) their capacity to manage their own learning, and (iii) their desire to continue learning in formal or informal settings after school. (Education Act 1990)

The requirements as they are set out would force home educators to do school-at-home. This is contrary to our educational philosophy of what home education is all about.

B. Increased Lack of Trust in the Board of Studies

In the past, the Board of Studies seemed to understand what home education looked like and was willing to engage, consult and consider home education as a separate entity. One of the findings from a survey which the Board of Studies commissioned in 1999, revealed that 84% of the respondents (home educators) favoured guidelines in favour to regulations. (Home Education Consultation Report, 2000)

We believe that this report had an impact on the registration of home educators for years. There even seemed to be support and understanding of the nature of homeschooling when changes occurred in the Education Act in 2004, so much so that a representative from the Board of Studies held regional meetings to clarify and assure the home educating community that the changes would not affect home educators.

However, the BOSTES has shown over the years and in especially in recent times that they are wishing to regulate home education in the same way as the non-governmental schools, without our input at all. Whereas in the past, home educators could consult and give feedback to the creation of the Information Packages, that right was no longer acknowledged in the 2010, 2011 or 2013 packages.

C. Varied reports of AP visits and Statistical Evidence of Short Registrations

Since 2012 and in 2013, many home educators were experiencing difficulty in the registration process. This caused the Home Education Association (HEA) to question the Office of the Board of Studies, but each time, the Board responded by saying that for parents who were meeting the requirements before the updated 2013 IP, there was no reason to change their approach.

This quote from an experienced home educator shows the changes between different visits by Authorised Persons:

"I felt I was prepared for my visit with the OBoS AP, I had all of my record keeping and the kids works samples collated and linked to all key learning areas. The AP was happy with this, she was unhappy that I didn't have a future program, I told her that we don't plan as we are natural learners/unschoolers and that we would continue as we had done so in last two years of registration. Due to me not having a program she told me that she would have to reject me.

I asked to have the decision reviewed and I created a program listing things that we were either currently working on or intended doing in the near future with it linked to the key learning areas that it would cover.

I then had a second AP come to review my application, she was happy with the things my children had been doing even stated that some of the things they had been doing were grade 8 & 9 work (my kids are 11 & 12). When I showed her the future program that I had made for the kids she told me I didn't have it linked to the outcomes. I told her that I had never had anything linked to outcomes each of the last three times I had registered. I asked her if something had changed and she said no. After this she told me she would not be able to register me due to my not having the work linked to outcomes."

It is our opinion that significant changes noted in the 2013 IP were directly responsible for the difficulties in registration that home educators were experiencing and reporting. These changes probably began to be implemented directly after the 2011 IP was released and it appears that the 2013 IP is considered a "clarification" of policy rather than new policy. Nonetheless the 2013 IP constitutes real change in the regulatory environment for home educated families in NSW as seen by the statistical evidence below:

Registration Details showing changes in the Registration Applications from 2010-2013

	2010-11	2012-13	Percent increase
Refused applications	8	43	438%
Withdrawn applications	169	335	98%
Registration for 3 months	7	49	600%
Registration for 6 months	99	242	144%
Total children registered*	2940	3705	26%

* Data from the OBoS Annual Report

As can be seen, there is an increase of 98% of withdrawn applications and 600% increase in short registration periods. This data clearly demonstrates that there were significant regulatory changes taking place since 2011, and these changes have had a direct negative impact upon the home education community.

D. Contradictory Statements Contribute to Lack of Trust and Confidence

Even before the Information Pack of 2013 was released on the 26th of August, it was very clear that the changes were significant and were affecting many homeschooling families on ground level.

These changes include: Removal of recognition of different styles of home education, addition of a requirement for home educators to provide written plan for recording, teaching and assessing that is linked to the outcomes of the NSW Syllabus, removal of registration via documentation, addition of a requirement to restrict teaching to the years for which children are registered, change in the process so that initial registrations are a maximum of one year and institution of no minimum registration, addition of an allowance for “spot checks” of home educators, addition of a requirement that all home education occur in the home and be taught by the parent, an overall reduction in flexibility and a change in attitude from the Authorised Persons towards home educators.

Many letters were written voicing disagreement and real concerns. However, the Office of the Board of Studies continually refused to acknowledge that their 2013 IP had been changed significantly. They stated it was for clarification purposes and for the introduction of the National Curriculum. In order to see the scope of the changes, I undertook a study and compared all the changes over the Information Packages from 1998 to 2013.

Because so many letters were written, a Question and Answer Paper was added to the OBOS website on the 12th of September. This was to answer questions which were raised in the letters.

Once again some home educators investigated and compared the answers to the actual Information Package and found huge discrepancies and contradictory statements in the Q&A .

This continual refusal to acknowledge that changes had been made and the fact that changes were seen on ground level as Authorised Persons began to regulate homeschool families differently, has led to a lack of trust in the Board of Studies.

Ways in which it can be improved

We believe that having a home educator as a stakeholder the BOSTES will not solve the problems or have a long lasting effect. Instead, we would like to recommend that a new advisory body be set up in much the same way as the Advisory body in Tasmania. (THEAC) This body has been operating since 1991 and is working extremely well.

This body is directly responsible to the Minister. It is useful to read the 21 recommendations which were passed in Tasmania from the 1991 Working Party Report into Home Education in Tasmania, as a suggested model for New South Wales.

Some of the recommendations from the Report of the Ministerial Working Party 1991 are:

- The role of the Advisory body is to provide liaison with other agencies on matters relating to home education; Respond to concerns; Advise on policy issues; Provide reports directly to the Minister; Have responsibility for ensuring adequate monitoring of home education; Organize support and assistance to home educators. (from Recommendation 5)
- The membership of the Advisory Council will have: three members nominated by formally recognized home educators; three other members at the discretion of the Minister. (from Recommendation 6)
- The Advisory Body would take specific steps to monitor, facilitate and provide support for home educators. (Recommendations 9,10, 11)
- Formally recognized home educators should be able to purchase educational equipment and supplies through state purchasing agencies and be exempt from sales tax for such items. (Recommendation 16)
- Formally recognized home educators should have access to equipment from Curriculum resource centres located in three main geographical regions. (Recommendation 17)
- Appropriate changes should be made to the Education Act to allow distinctions to be made between home education and school on the basis of who has the overall responsibility for provision of the educational program and whether the program meets the criteria for home education.

With such a body in place, home educators can be assured that the Advisory Body understands the uniqueness of homeschooling, be supportive, recommend resources, offer help and provide access to the support services which are available to all school children.

Conclusion

Home education is different from institutionalized schooling and should be treated differently. Yet, in NSW the regulation of home education reflects the understanding of a body which has an institutional model and curriculum in mind, a school understanding, and uses school terminology.

Increased regulation does not mean better quality. Rather, choice brings diversity and diversity brings excellence. The uniqueness of home education is its strength. We have seen this in our own family being able to create unique experiences and programs to suit the learning styles and interests of our six children.

We have decided to live on one salary, and make sacrifices to spend thousands of dollars on wonderful educational tools and resources. We have made a huge commitment of time which only a parent can give. Our motivation is the love we have for our children and the sincere desire to give each of our children the best education possible for them.

We urge you to support home education and give it the status of a viable alternative by setting up an independent body to oversee this unique educational model. We believe it deserves specific attention because our needs are not the same as a school. We would love to see the possibilities of resource centres to support home education and provide facilities for group learning. We would like to be acknowledged, respected and supported in a meaningful way by those who have had experience with home education.

We also would like to acknowledge the authorized persons who have been supportive of home education and been encouraging to our family in their visits.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our thoughts and concerns to this Homeschooling Inquiry.

Gerald and Marianne Vanderkolk

Recommendations:

1. Establish an independent body to oversee, facilitate and support home education (based on the proven Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council model - THEAC)
2. That registration is managed by the above independent body. Registration as a basis of meaningful engagement with the Home Education community.
3. That home educators are given notification and equal access to educational support services, resources, opportunities and any initiatives which are available to children in the institutional school system. This will ensure that there is no discrimination against Home Education providers.

ATTACHMENTS:

Information Package Change Comparison Chart 1998-2013

This is a study comparing the changes that have occurred in the Information Packages from 1998 to 2013. The differences have been highlighted and noted. A comment regarding the changes in each section is added to the top of each section. The Information Packages which were used in this study are 1998, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2011 and 2013. Written by Marianne Vanderkolk

Nathanael's Story

This is my eldest son's reflections on his homeschooling life and how it has attributed to where he is today.