

**Submission
No 173**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Dr Deborah and Mr Tane Brunt

Date received: 8/08/2014

7/08/14

Dr Deborah Brunt & Mr Tane Brunt

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you kindly for the opportunity to express our experiences regarding home education and to participate in the enquiry. My name is Dr Deborah Brunt and my husband is Mr Tane Brunt. We are home educators of our family of five children. We love being able to educate our children.

I would like to comment on the following terms of reference:

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

In 2013 we home-schooled our children in New Zealand. I would like to outline the process we went through and highlight differences in the two systems. I have included the NZ parent information pack from the Ministry of education. The application process was simple. At that time Jan 2013 I applied for my 9 and 7 year old boys to have exemption from school. I was required to fill out a registration application form similar to that required for NSW.

Additional Requirements for exemption included:

1. Curriculum or programme to be delivered. This was an overview of our plans for the year.
2. Topic plan - which is basically an example of all the learning activities we might do around a topic we were studying.
3. To show what resources we would be using in our programme.
4. How we would use our environment (i.e. kitchen for baking, garden for growing veggies and nature study etc.) and our community (i.e. local libraries, museums, theatres, bush tracks etc.)
5. Our plan to assess our child's progress and achievement
6. How we plan to educate at least as regularly as a child in school - usually a timetable or sample week.

These plans were all submitted via post and then read by the Ministry of Education home-school representative. Upon receipt of this information they accepted to register my boys for home-schooling. If inadequate information is required they request this to assist making their decision.

The advantages of this system over the NSW system which we had previously registered with include:

1. They did not have to be registered as a particular year of school. This term actually makes little sense to home educators.
2. There was no expiry date on their application. There is no interim registration. You are registered indefinitely.
3. We did not have to comply with learning outcomes, stage statements or content for each curriculum areas (such as English, math, science etc.) we simply had to show our curriculum plan or programme that we planned to provide. They specifically state in their info pack that the NZ curriculum can be used as a guide but is not compulsory.
4. We did not have to have an AP come to our home to assess our learning plan or even to speak to us.
5. We did not have to have further monitoring of our child's education by the Ministry of Ed. There are no ongoing applications or re-applications required. They did require us to complete a statutory declaration that we were still home schooling our children every 6 months.
6. A home-school supervisor allowance was provided to us which consists of
1st child \$743
2nd child \$632
3rd child \$521
Subsequent children \$372 each.
7. Children in NZ yr. 11-13 (equivalent Australian yr. 10-12) can also have access to funded distance education so they can graduate with NCEA (equivalent Australian yr. 10-12). Children are in no way excluded from accessing resources available in public education and can participate in sports leagues, science fairs etc.
8. Parents can educate their children as a family. They can submit one education program and topic plan for their family rather than have to write out the same plan again and again, but changing names and pronouns for each child, if their style of learning occurs as a family as ours does.

All of these would all be a great improvement on the current NSW home schooling situation.

**(b) The current context of home schooling in New South Wales including:
(ii) financial costs.**

It should be understood that home education does give considerable expenses.

It generally requires parents to work less in paid employment so that one parent is home with the children.

There are expenses associated with purchasing curriculum materials and these come out of the parents own pocket. We have spent over \$2400 in books, art supplies and other materials from Jan 2014 to now.

The money that would be necessary to pay for school upkeep and teachers' salaries is not paid to parents who are the developers of individual programmes for each child, who administer the education and then also have a heavy burden placed upon us in terms of compliance with the NSW BOS. Interim registration, ongoing reapplication and repeat visits. Paperwork compliance issues when you have 3 children at different 'stages' and even though your learning is generally as a family have to individually report a learning programme for each only after 6 months of interim registration.

It is almost an insult to be regulated, monitored and have to comply with the NSW BOS syllabus, as though a teacher but not to be remunerated as one. As home educators, we are basically teachers in private schools - our private home-schools. It is easy to see one reason why a number of families fail to register.

I am not necessarily advocating paying parents to home school their children, but the rules and regulations are all one sided. Either the compliance and regulations should be more reasonable than they currently are, or at least recognise the great work parents are doing and remunerate to a reasonable degree, such as in the NZ example above.

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

I am a general practitioner, I have a medical degree and a Masters in Health Science and my husband is legally trained with a Bachelor of Law. We have 5 children. They are ages 10 yrs, 8 yrs, 7 yrs, 3 yrs and 22 months old.

We home-school our children because, we feel it is important to provide our children with an excellent education. We want our children to grow up learning from the classics and from nature, and internalising traditional values and virtues.

We do not subscribe to a one-size-fits-all, nor that the classroom a natural or optimal learning environment.

Real learning comes through real experiences such as talking with the old lady in the supermarket or examining crab in rock pools at the beach, and through coming face to face with the great thinkers of the past. An excellent education is gained through reading about morally strong people of the past and through internalising the morals they emulated.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

As a home educating parent I am not seeking to replicate a public school in my own home. The problem with the AP visits that I have had is that the AP has expected or demanded that I replicate 'school at home'. We simply cannot do this otherwise why would we want to educate our children at home. Those methods were employed for large-scale education systems i.e. schools where individualised attention cannot be given but in the home it can. There are different methods of learning spelling and grammar than worksheets so to suggest because children in school have to do these so mine should too is not appropriate.

If AP visits are to continue APs should be educated about at least the common home-schooling style and philosophies so that they can understand themselves how a single learning activity such as baking bread covers many curriculum areas without home-schooling parents having to break this down for them, or even being made to feel stupid for suggesting it. Even worse is when they are told as we were because this is not how learning is done in school it is not in line with the NSW BOS Syllabus.

The Aps should encourage the initiative that parents are taking to provide such rich learning environments for their children. They should not push a 'school at home' or else you cannot home-school agenda. They should also embrace these amazing alternate approaches as children thrive under them.

They should never intimidate parents into thinking they need to do school at home so the parent is so overwhelmed they put the child back in school out of fear as happened to a friend of mine.

They should not make personal comments such as 'Your son will turn out like mine, a good reader but unable to write'.

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

We agree with the principles of the NSW Education Act that

- (A) Every child has the right to an education
- (B) The education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child's parent
- (C) The principle responsibility of the State in education of children is the provision of public education.

The regulatory framework which is then set up around this contradicts this statement by requiring parents to opt out of mandatory public schooling and comply with the NSW BOS syllabus.

Adhering to the NSW BOS syllabus is not the only way to receive a quality education as there are a number of alternative models of education.

I do not believe it is necessary to adhere to the NSW BOS Syllabus. It should serve as a guide but not be mandatory as in NZ. This is one example why I was told my

education plan for my 10 yr old son was not adequate because for math he was learning trigonometry and that is not a part of stage 3 math.

Also for home educators who have cross-curricular programs it is a laborious task of breaking down a task such as baking a loaf of bread into outcomes. It involves english- reading an instructional text-type, math - measuring volume and mass and time, science- fermentation, chemical reactions, energy and heat, formation of carbon dioxide. This compliance can sometimes take longer than the activity. This takes away valuable time with my children and adds what to their learning. When you try and multiply this out on 3 children it takes considerable time.

The BOS syllabus does not ensure a quality education. Twenty percent of children are at or below min standard in year 9 for literacy and 18.2 percent for numeracy. But simply being literate or numerate is not a quality education. Quality education is being able to think and discuss the great ideas and to have a moral character - to be a contributor to society. No syllabus no matter how worded or dressed can or will deliver this.

There are certainly appropriate alternatives to the NSW BOS Syllabus including a curriculum based on classic texts and living books. In the younger ages this means simple classics like Fairy Tales and Aesop's fables, and utilising more complex classics as ages increase to The Secret Garden, Heidi and Little Britches around mid-primary school ages, to Shakespeare, Dickens, and Austen for example in High school. In studying these works children encounter values, nature, geography, animals, culture, human interaction, relationships, inflation, economy, spelling, comprehension, reading skills, etc... the learning opportunities are endless.

Additionally natural learning is an excellent form of education. Children are educated according to their interests and literature, non-fiction and other texts are studied to enhance learning in these areas. For example if a child is interested in sailing they may read 'Swallows and Amazons' series, learn how to sail, experiment with materials to see which float or sink and which are water tight, then follow-up with readings about density and mass, visit the maritime museum, learn about the waves and tides and the moon's gravitational pull, how a sextant works and the trigonometry involved in that. Again, the opportunities to learning are endless.

I do not believe it adds to my child's education for me to micro analyse all the books we read and the learning activities we do to show an AP that we are adhering to the BOS Syllabus. Ours is all there in a classic-based, natural learning, program. I would simply love for you to be able to appreciate the varied learning experiences that occur in our home.

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

At home we can provide a warm, safe, loving environment and teach and live our family values without fear of our children being bullied, manipulated or being infiltrated with philosophical ideologies in opposition to our own. They are happier as

individuals and have much stronger sibling bonds, and deeper relationships with us, their parents as a result of being home-schooled.

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

More appropriate regulation would be

1. Registration should be granted initially without a need for a visit as many parents find they need time to detox their children from the school environment and transition them into family schooling. Many home educating families make a number of adjustments to their curriculum during these early years as they are finding their feet, their rhythm, tapping into home-school networks, and sharing resources. This period of settling in should be free from the stress and fear that 'if they do not do it right their children will be forced back to school. This should be for ideally 2 but at least 1 year.

2. If a visit is deemed necessary and I do not think it is, then the first visit should be at least at the 1 year mark, if not 2 yrs from initiation of home-schooling, as this gives adequate time to settle into new routine and become productive and gives the parents time to show progress. How much progress can you prove in a short interim period of only 3 or 6 months? Besides it just creates unnecessary stress for the parent

3. If progress is deemed adequate at that visit, then if further renewals are deemed to be required, then these should be via written applications not visits.

4. The home education programme should not have to be based on the BOS NSW Syllabus. There are many alternative excellent home-school models available including natural learning, classical education, Charlotte Mason and Living Books etc.

5. The fact that there are a significant but unknown amount of unregistered families suggests there are deficiencies in the regulatory process. If we are really interested in the education of the child shouldn't the process be simple, welcoming and without fear, so that people want to register rather than steer clear from it. Would it not be more useful to have resource people who are experienced home schoolers to assist parents with their educational programmes rather than school-teacher trained people coming into the home telling parents how they can and cannot teach their children.

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

If home schoolers are to continue to be subject to BOS regulations, they must have a voice on the board of studies otherwise it is government without representation, a very undemocratic practice.

In conclusion we would recommend

- A) More appropriate regulation in terms of an initial AP-free period to allow settling into home-schooling without stress or fear for a period of 1-2 years

and to allow progress to occur, only 1 AP visit after that and then ongoing registration via parental written/visual samples of progress if ongoing oversight is deemed necessary.

- B) Being more flexible with the education programmes parents deliver. Allowing parents to use the NSW BOS as a guide rather than mandatory adherence.
- C) If AP visits are to continue all APs should be educated in home-school educational philosophies and methodologies, as if they are trained for the public school system, they may lack the training to actually see how home education can adhere to the NSW BOS.

Thank You for your consideration

Dr Deborah Brunt

MBCHB, MHSc

Mr Tane Brunt

BConsMgt LLB