

Submission
No 230

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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Legislative Council Home Schooling Inquiry

Date: 7th August 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission to the Select Committee on Home Schooling. We are parents of four children, (7), (6), (4) and S (9 months). is in year 2 and is in year 1 and will begin next year.

(b) The current context of home schooling in New South Wales including:

(ii) financial costs

Although we are a single income family, we believe that investing in our children's education is a high priority. We are purchasing educational resources, equipment and funding specific activities needed to give our children the best education possible.

The government could be doing more to support people like us.

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

We have many reasons to home educate our children, these include:

- We believe that growing and learning together as a family is an effective way of developing children academically, emotionally, spiritually and physically. We want our children to develop a lifetime love of learning.
- Each child is created with unique gifts, abilities and interests. We believe that the home schooling environment is best suited to identifying and fostering these strengths in our children and directing them to suitable career paths.

- Each child learns in different ways and at different paces. The home school environment is best suited to identifying the child's learning styles and educational needs. We are then able to encourage strengths and address learning difficulties.
- Home schooling allows flexibility in daily programming to encourage shared learning experiences as a family and to identify individual training opportunities.
- We believe that it is a parental responsibility to educate our children and help them learn, grow and mature into responsible and productive citizens.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

(ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons

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

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

We registered to home educate our first child, _____ at the end of September 2012 and received a 1 year registration due to be renewed in September 2013.

Our daughter _____ was due to be registered a few months later in January 2014.

We discussed the possibility of renewing _____ registration a few months later so _____ and _____ could be registered at the same time meaning that it would be a single visit instead of two in a short space of time. However the board had recently changed guidelines allowing a maximum registration of 1 year for first time applicants whereas it had previously been 2 years and they were not prepared to allow _____ a longer registration.

The way it worked out we have received 3 visits from AP's over 8 months. registration was due again at the end of September 2013, the AP came to visit and after his assessment we were given 2 years registration. was registered at the end of January. I discussed with the AP whether he thought she was at Kindergarten or Year 1 level as her 6th birthday was January 30th. I thought she was at Year 1 level except for her writing. He looked at the work she had completed and at my planning and said she was definitely at Year 1 level except for her writing. He said that he would note it down and that the next time an AP came to visit they would check on her writing progress. He verbally told me he would be recommending us for the maximum registration period which for would be until September 2015 to align with .

I want to explain the reason writing had not progressed further. Last year I fell pregnant with our fourth child, during the pregnancy I had the condition Hyperemesis Gravidarum (excessive vomiting in pregnancy). This meant that I was unable to get out of bed for months. For a time I was unable to care for my children or myself so we moved in with my parents. During this time I did what I could when I could. This meant we spent a lot of time reading and I used a literature based approach to cover the different subjects, but we did not progress as far with writing. My parents live on a farm and my husband works with them and at that time my brother did also. It was sowing time so when I was too unwell to do anything they did a lot of learning through life spending time with their Dad, Pa and Uncle on the farm. Our son learnt the practical application of Maths. They spent time with their Nano in the home, who also read them lots of books and had a whole new library of books for them to explore.

I was concerned that we weren't getting as much of the work I had planned to do done as the in previous year when we had an established routine. However I learned during

this time that children don't take a break from learning – they are hardwired to learn and I was surprised that although they didn't receive as much 'formal' instruction during this time they continued to grow in their abilities.

At the end of the busy sowing time and with my condition improving we moved back to our home. Shortly after this time my younger brother was riding a motorbike out to muster sheep when he collided with a fence and was critically injured with a brain injury. He survived, however sustained serious brain damage and over a year later remains in the Brain Injury Unit at Westmead in Sydney. I am so thankful for that time that my children spent with their Uncle before his injury.

The accident also meant that initially while he was in a critical condition we spent time in Sydney until he stabilized. After that our day-to-day life also changed, my husband took on more responsibility of the farm with my Dad in Sydney with my brother. This had an impact on our school routine as [redacted] worked longer hours and was not able to help out as much at home (indirectly supporting) or do extra schoolwork with the children as I was unwell which he would otherwise have done. Eventually the condition improved to a point. I was able to school the children from the couch with a small table set up for them.

Contrary to my APs verbal assurance, when the registration certificate arrived it was only for 6 months. I phoned the Board of Studies and the AP phoned later that day and he explained that after the visit, he further considered his recommendation and thought that it was too long for [redacted]'s writing to go unchecked so recommended a period of 6 months. He said he didn't realise that he needed to let me know and thought that was the board's responsibility. He was a new AP and this was the first time he had visited us so obviously was unaware of his responsibility to communicate this with us. Mistakes

happen, however the short registration added considerable pressure on me and my husband.

Pressure was added by the stage of life we are in – with two children homeschooled, a preschooler and a young baby requiring attention and because of our lifestyle. The family farm business is broad acre cropping. This means that our lives revolve around the seasons – the yearly cycle of cropping and the weather. The 6 month registration fell over the busy sowing time, meaning that my husband was not around to help out. In a given 6 month period life looks different to another 6 month period. However over a 12 month period the learning that needs to take place in the year does happen – it is just not within the terms of the school system but based around our lives.

In fact, as the BOSTES recommends to send in your application for renewal of registration 3 months early & I sent my form in then, the AP came 4 months after the registration. I was approved to home educate for the maximum registration period.

However I am left feeling uncertain about exactly what the expectations of the BOSTES are? I wonder what would happen if my husband and I did fall pregnant and I was unwell again and my registration was due and I was unable to fulfill the requirements of the syllabus? Even though I am confident in our ability to do this over the span of a child's education and the children would be still be learning. Would we be denied registration? I have felt pressure and have experienced stress because of the registration process. To be honest, if I had known what registration would mean for our family I wouldn't have registered.

There needs to be recognition that learning happens throughout all of life and that depending on the season of life that family and the individuals within it.

It was my understanding that the Education System is there to serve parents not parents to serve the Education System. Parents have the freedom to choose from a number of legitimate options to educate their children - public, private, Christian, distance education, home schooling. If traditional schooling is the preferred choice of the parents, the schools are responsible to report to parents through written reports as well as parent teacher interviews. As we have chosen Home Education. We feel it is our responsibility and therefore not BOSTES's. I feel my freedom in this role is restricted by BOSTES. I believe the question needs to be asked: ultimately, who is responsible for children? The parents or the state? My thoughts are that in a free country it is the parents.

I do believe that regulation is necessary as sadly some parents do not have the best interests of their child at heart. All children need to learn to read, write and do arithmetic (as well as other important things) however I don't believe the BOSTES syllabus or any parent can design a syllabus that covers everything a child needs to know. I look back at my education and while I am thankful for it I know there are gaps and I encourage you reading this to reflect on your education also. No syllabus is complete. What is most important is to nurture the love of learning to prepare children for a lifetime of learning. I believe it should be at the discretion of the parents to make the decision of what is more valuable in the life of the child – a particular life experience or meeting an outcome required by the syllabus. I believe that in some situations the syllabus may need to be put aside.

For me to meet all the requirements of the syllabus is an unrealistic expectation. Next year learning will be spread over 3 stages, Early Stage 1, Stage 1 and Stage 2 as well as nurturing baby who will then be a curious toddling 1 year old and the rest of life.

I suggest that it is about incorporating the heart of the syllabus in education and we should not be focusing on the finer details. I do not feel it is possible to do this like in a traditional school setting. I do feel confident that we can provide our children with a quality education that prepares them for life.

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

As a parent I value the safety, welfare and wellbeing of my children as my number one priority.

A home schooling environment is best suited to achieve this aim. My children are very safe at home. All activities we undertake as a family are well supervised and planned. My children are able to achieve a good balance between social activities and are not exposed to the negative welfare situations that may result in the school environment, such as bullying and peer pressure to conform.

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

We would like to see a new body set up for regulation comprised of people with experience in or with homeschooling who understand and value the unique nature of the homeschool environment in different families.

Based on our experience of registration we would like new applicants to be able to receive support.

We would like the documents that we engage with to be written in plain English. It has been my experience that a lot of educational jargon is used and in conversation with teachers, I understand that teachers working in the school system struggle with these documents.

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

We would like to see a homeschool representative on the BOSTES board that who has understanding of the many different methods and their value used to approach homeschooling.

In conclusion

We are committed to educating our children in a safe, supportive and encouraging way. We want what is best for our children and I hope that the government does too.

We trust these experiences, comments and thoughts to you, the Select Committee on Home Schooling, in faith that you will consider them. In the hope that an appropriate regulatory system will be established that recognizes the unique nature of each homeschool and values the diversity that this brings.

We believe in the freedom to choose the education method that best suits each child and family. I hope that the government, as servants of the people, has the best interests of all children in mind and continues to encourage the choice of education.