

**Submission  
No 136**

## **INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING**

**Organisation:** SouthEast Home Education

**Date received:** 4/08/2014

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Submission by SouthEast Home Education.  
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The Director  
Select Committee on Home Schooling  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

### ***RE: Inquiry into home schooling***

#### ***Introduction***

We, Greg and April Simon, are owners/operators of Southeast Home Education, which offers support to home educating parents, most of whom reside in NSW. The parents we support use the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) system as a base for their homeschool programmes, as well as many other resources to individualise the content and cater for each child as they see fit.

We started homeschooling in NSW in the early 1990s, and always registered our own children for homeschooling, until moving to Victoria for a few years. On returning we re-registered in 2011.

In the 90s, after our first two consecutive home visits resulting in 2 year registrations periods, we were able to register again by documentation. Our documentation at that time contained a scope and sequence of our chosen resources, as well as past and future activities in the form of excursions, projects, and a myriad of life experiences which clearly showed how the key learning areas were being addressed for a well-rounded education. Our 4 children went on to receive ACE year 10 and year 12 certificates, all have since studied at tertiary level, and are now gainfully employed, community engaged adults.

We were amongst hundreds of parents who believed that they could deliver relevant, tailored and individual education in a safe and natural environment.

#### ***Reasons for Homeschooling***

The reasons for homeschooling vary between families, but some common ones are:

- Individualized programmes
- Personal interests catered for
- One on one attention (or near to)
- Private, home environment
- Freedom to teach religious and moral views of parents
- Desire to teach alternative content to that offered by the state outcomes
- More time with the children
- Ability to allow more time and attention for slower learners, and extend gifted children
- Ability to cater for a child or children with special needs

- Parental supervision of social contact to minimise negative social interaction and bullying risks
- Private tuition without the financial commitment

### ***Different homeschooling regulations***

Homeschooling is a legal option in NSW and in every state and territory in Australia. Each state/territory has slightly different procedures and requirements for registration.

- **NSW** and **WA** require a visit at least once a year from an Authorized Person (moderator in WA), and documentation to be produced for the inspectors' perusal.
- **ACT** requires a visit from a Government Education and Training Directorate inspector after a six month provisional period.
- **Qld** requires application and documentation to be reviewed by DETE -HEU personnel.
- **NT** requires application and programme outlines be sent to the NT Government Department of Education for review and approval.
- **SA** requires enrolment in a school and exemption from attendance so as to homeschool.
- **Victoria** only requires a form to be sent by parents, with no visit or documentation.
- **Tasmania** requires application for homeschooling and a programme outline is sent to THEAC for approval.
- **New Zealand** requires parents apply for "exemption" so they may homeschool, and they are not required to follow National curriculum Guidelines. They only need provide a plan for home educating, and are granted exemption. The homeschool parents receive an untaxed, financial allowance per child by signing a statutory declaration that they are regularly providing an education as well as a school would do. Only 12% of homeschool families in a given year, are visited for review.

### ***Concerns with the new BoSTES guidelines***

The new NSW BoSTES guidelines for homeschooling are very unpopular with parents. This is, in our opinion, because the documentation now required is akin to school documentation, requiring outcomes written in educational jargon familiar to school teachers and policy writers. It is not appropriate for parents. Registration periods have become shorter, and visits more often.

Very often, parents wish to homeschool because they do not like the content and direction of the state outcomes. It may be that they clash with their own worldview, though not always. Forcing them to match their own programme to state outcomes can in some cases cause a manufacturing of documentation to appease the Authorized Person, and not offer a clear indication of the true programme to be delivered.

The outcomes' coding and jargon is foreign to many parents, and can cause unnecessary stress in the preparation of documentation, taking away time from input into the children's education.

The Victorian model is the fairest, in our opinion, and nearest to protecting the right of parents to homeschool, respecting their ability to make choices, but above all releasing the responsibility back to the parents. The VRQA does not enforce its own curriculum outcomes upon parents.

In the opinion of many parents, they should not have to ask permission to homeschool, as they believe it is their inherent right. If a parent decides to use a provider for education (eg, a school) then they have that right too. If parents wish to homeschool, a state department register for statistical reasons is fair, and parents should then accept responsibility, in the same way they do in the feeding and nurturing of a child. This is the Victorian system. Permission is not sought, but responsibility is assured by way of a signed form.

The Victorian model saves time and money for the state government, with nothing spent on Authorised Persons in the inspection process. This is fair and transparent.

From our observation of hundreds of homeschooled students over many years, we believe parents would happily register if there were no visits or documentation, as in Victoria. Parents do not wish to “fly under the radar” but feel driven to this in order to avoid what they consider to be interference.

We personally have known many who have homeschooled without registering, largely because of what they see as an invasive process in NSW, coupled with the pressure for documentation.

Many parents are being driven to a Distance Education model, seeking enrolment out of state. This being a legal option gives comfort to the parent as they are not being unlawful, but it is not true homeschooling. It is an attempt to comply with an interstate school, instead of a NSW one. This puts undue strain on parents, who pay high fees, and have extra requirements other than what they would wish in their homeschool. These parents often wish to homeschool, but find the enrolment with DE easier than the BoSTES registration process.

When we began our homeschool experience in the 1990s, most families were registered. Now we believe a higher proportion are unregistered. This is due to the ever increasing issue of documentation and compliance with outcomes from the BoSTES’ point of view.

Homeschooled children are often not at the same levels as their peers. This is very often the reason parents remove them from school, as the school environment or delivery methods are not working for their child. Being forced to pigeon hole a child into a school ‘grade’ because of age does not always work. If Johnny’s age is stage 2 but he is only working a stage 1, what documentation should be prepared? A true one that reflects his actual level, or a false one for where he ‘should’ be?

SouthEast Home Education offers support services to over 100 hundred families in NSW. All of these families seek to personalise the education process of their children, and wish to do so legally. We have known many who have reluctantly either put their children in an unfavourable situation back in school, or enrol in a DE school out of state, because they were afraid of being unsuccessful in producing what is required by way of documentation for BoSTES.

No payments are made to homeschoolers in Australia; however every tax payer supports children in schools. Homeschooling parents DO NOT ask for any payment for their own efforts in educating their children, so therefore it is not the responsibility of the state to enforce guidelines, in the opinion of many homeschoolers.

In NSW, the Authorised Person is most often a school teacher by profession. However, the person does not always understand the needs and dynamics of a busy homeschooling family, or the reasons why the parents have chosen to homeschool. Inspectors are often encouraging and pleasantly

helpful to the parents they visit, but conversely they can be intimidating by portraying the “expert educator” image, as if they were inspecting a school rather than a family. This can leave a once confident parent feeling inadequate.

It would be sufficient to have a non-school teacher inspector, merely to ascertain the commitment of the parent and safety of the home. One initial visit would suffice, and would remove any perceived responsibility of the state. The most ideal inspectors would be past or present homeschool parents who can offer “real life” experience and understanding.

### ***Recommended registration model***

As experienced homeschoolers in NSW, experienced teachers also, and now as the operators of a homeschool support service, it is our opinion that the most useful and workable model of registration for homeschooling would involve a mixture of the processes of the aforementioned jurisdictions, summarised with the following points:

1. Parents sign a form notifying their intention to homeschool. This would relinquish any responsibility from the state. The state provides for children’s education by way of state schooling. If parents do not wish to take this option, they have that choice to make their own provisions.
2. A short outline or description of the homeschooling approach could accompany the declaration form.
3. **No** funding should be provided to homeschool families.
4. One home visit by an experienced homeschooler could be offered, but not made mandatory.
5. NSW BoSTES outcomes should be accessible via the website, but not be mandatory.
6. Detailed documentation linked to outcomes should not be required. They are impossible to be individualised and do not suit the family setting.
7. A yearly letter from BoSTES to ask for an updated status (is the child still homeschooled?) could be sent to each family.

Homeschoolers are law abiding, but know their own mind. Rather than throwing hundreds and thousands of dollars into trying to regulate homeschooling, which seems impossible, and is driving hundreds to hide, the BoSTES would be likely to obtain more compliance and save tax payers’ money in the registration process if they leave the homeschoolers to take responsibility. More would register if they were allowed to take that responsibility, and not feel they have to ask permission and force their programmes to fit the BoSTES outcomes.

It is often said that anybody other than a qualified teacher cannot deliver educational outcomes successfully to children. This might be true of a traditional classroom model, but is not the case in the homeschool setting. No one is more qualified than a child’s own parent, given he or she has the necessary resources, determination and commitment.

SouthEast Home Education has scores of stories of children who have blossomed since homeschooling, and past students who have easily moved into universities and careers. It is a myth, widely circulated and unfortunately believed, that universities require an HSC for entrance. There are many other pathways. We have personally been involved with scores of such cases.

## ***Conclusion***

Homeschooling is a widespread and growing alternative to traditional school education, and many homeschooled children benefit. Homeschooling students are not simply truanting, but are engaged in meaningful studies using an individualised programme and under the supervision of their own parents. There are many reasons why parents choose to homeschool their children, but they are always, in the considered view of the parents, for the benefit of their children.

We therefore recommend that:

- The Homeschool Committee in its report recognises the viability of homeschooling as a legitimate alternative form of schooling.
- That NSW adopts a model of registration for homeschoolers similar to that outlined under the section "***Recommended registration model***" above.