

**Submission
No 242**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed
Date received: 8/08/2014

Partially Confidential

07/08/2014

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

I am a home schooling parent and was home schooled myself as a child. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this inquiry.

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,

I am aware that other States in Australia allow a parent to remove their child from school to begin home schooling (for a period of time) before they are formally approved for home schooling. I would like to suggest the Board of Studies could include the option for parents to be given a temporary approval to remove their child from school to begin home education for a period of three months while awaiting official approval.

(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,

Home schooling allowed me to follow and develop my interests and to prepare for further education and work. Through home schooling I was able to pursue my interest in the environment which led me to enter a state wide competition, along with students from NSW schools, and win a first place award for my entry for three consecutive years. I was an active member of our local community and within the home school community. I attended excursions, workshops, choir, sporting events, and camps with other home schooled children. I was a member of several local community groups including gymnastics, dance, Girl Guides, Scouts, marching band and youth council. I completed a certificate through TAFE earning high marks and easily entered the workforce. During my years of employment I was required to meet strict deadlines, communicate with a broad range of clients and represent the company and the community in a positive way. I was quickly promoted within the company and well-liked by my employers, clients and fellow employees.

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

My motivation for homeschooling my child.

My son has several medical conditions that impact his learning and development. He is diagnosed with Autism (moderate), Global Developmental Delay of 50%, Sensory Processing Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, an unknown gene mutation, poor eyesight and low muscle tone. He has been receiving weekly Occupational, Speech and behavioral therapy from three years of age. I am passionate about helping my son to develop his abilities and reach his goals.

He started his schooling in a government placement support class Pre-school three days a week and then started Kindergarten in a government placement support class (MC) in a public school a few suburbs away. Before he started Kindergarten he could count to 14 and recognize and name all upper case letters and 80% of lower case letters. His first school report stated he demonstrated a level of understanding well below that which he demonstrated at home. His school reports stated he could count to 4 and was learning to recognize some upper and lowercase letters. Despite meetings with his teachers and the learning support team about his demonstrated abilities at home not reflecting his school report and that he could now recognize all upper and lower case letters his next report still stated he was working towards this ability. I also discovered for most of kindergarten he was the only child who could speak in the class so he was learning sign language in class to help him communicate with his class mates. I

also received several nasty phone calls from the school principal in regards to his absences from school to attend medical appointments. His class teacher said not to worry about it, and that medical appointments were a valid reason for absence but the calls from the principal continued. Following a very abusive call from the principal I removed him from school immediately and I made a complaint to the principal's supervisor. My complaint was dismissed and the supervisor tried to persuade me to send him back to school but I informed them I would be applying for homeschooling (this was just 2 days before the school holidays). During the school holidays I had the police show up on my doorstep saying the principal had contacted them to say my son was missing as he had not been at school for a few days before the holidays. I said I was in the process of applying for homeschooling and my son would not be returning to that school. I was told to make sure he was in school within 2 weeks or they will be back and I could be faced with charges. The homeschooling application stated it could take 3 months for approval so as soon as school returned I enrolled him into our local school for fear of another visit from the police.

He was placed in a joint Kindergarten and year 1 class and was improving and enjoying school with no issues related to his medical appointments. After almost a year we had to move house so he had to start at another school and was put in a joint year 1 and year 2 class. He was happy to go to school and complete the work that was given but required the assistance from another student to write his answers. His school reports still did not reflect the abilities he demonstrated at home but meetings with his teacher assured me he was continuing to improve and answer questions but still could not write or complete any work unassisted. He began year 3 and was not coping well, was constantly distracted and could not complete work unassisted. After extensive meetings with his teachers and a school report that completely contradicted his abilities it was determined that he was being assessed based on written tests, technical drawing tasks and communicating with a teacher he only sees for one hour a week (so he refuses to talk to her because he doesn't know her well enough). My son cannot even write his name or draw a square. This form of assessment is not appropriate for a child who cannot draw or write and I expressed my concerns with the principal of the school and was told there were not many other ways they could perform these assessments other than using writing and drawing tasks and that as my child progressed through the grades the amount of assessments in written form would increase. I was not satisfied with the response, so began to look into what options were available such as Distance Education as well as Homeschooling. I contacted the school to discuss the option of distance education and was told it was only available for children in circumstances such as having a broken leg. I then contacted the Department of Education to discuss my concerns and make enquiries as to what options were available for assessment of children who cannot write and to discuss Distance Education if there were no other options available within the school.

The conversation with the representative of the Department of Education (Local Area Learning and Engagement Coordinator) left me angry and confused. I was told that my son was receiving the maximum support he was eligible for (approximately one hour of aid time three times a week) and the only option left was to put him back into a supported placement class but that nothing could be done about the reports not reflecting his academic achievements even in a supported class but that I should take comfort in the fact that I know he can do better than what was reported. I enquired about Distance Education and was told the school would not give permission. I was also told by the Education Department representative that no teacher or school can ever make the statement "The student's educational needs cannot be met by the local school with access to the available school, community and state resources." As this statement, according to the Education Department representative is discriminatory despite it being included as a reason why distance education may be recommended.* I was also told by the representative that in his opinion Public Schooling was a much better option than Distance Education or Homeschooling purely for socialization. When I said I was home schooled and was not disadvantaged socially he started to try to tell me that it's very difficult to be allowed to home school and that there was a lot of paperwork and program planning involved and would take months to plan. He also said there were many other parents in the same situation (their child's school report doesn't reflect their academic ability even in a supported class), who have also questioned if home schooling would be good option and he said he gave me the same advice he gave them. He stated that in his opinion it was better for a child to be disadvantaged educationally in school than to be disadvantaged socially at home.

I was left feeling like the Education Department has no interest in improving the way special needs children are educated and assessed.

*A distance education enrolment may be recommended when ALL of the following apply:

- Consideration has been given to the support preference based on effective communication with the parent/carer.
 - The student's educational needs cannot be met by the local school with access to the available school, community and state resources. These must be documented in terms of:
 - effective collaboration between the school and the parent/carer regarding the child's needs
 - assessment of additional need
 - intervention strategies implemented at the school
 - impact assessment of these interventions
 - The distance education school is the most appropriate enrolment
 - A risk assessment/management plan that takes into account the specific circumstances of the isolated learner has been devised and verifies the safety and suitability of the home or other location in which learning will take place. (Taken from NSW Government Education and Communities Distance Education Revised Enrollment Procedures – 2013 Section 2.8).

(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children,

My son has several diagnosed medical conditions that impact his learning and development. He is diagnosed with Autism (moderate), Global Developmental Delay of 50%, Sensory Processing Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, an unknown gene mutation, poor eyesight and low muscle tone. He was shy and quiet at school but very talkative and loves to ask questions at home. He works best in a quiet environment with one on one direction. His speech is delayed which makes it difficult for non-family members to fully understand him, his low muscle tone affects his ability to sit or use his hands for extended periods (more than 30 minutes), his ADD & SPD affect his ability to focus and participate in some activities.

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

Homeschooling has allowed my son to work undistracted and demonstrate his level of academic achievements through hands on activities. Earlier in the year at school my son was given Kindergarten worksheets to complete, now at home he is able to demonstrate an age appropriate level of understanding in basic Maths and Science and is very happy learning at home.

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

I was well aware that home schooling was a legal option and had been considering it for some time but was put off by the information in the application package. The information package states that registration can take up to three months which is not helpful for parents who feel their child needs to be removed from school urgently. It also makes it difficult to prepare a 12 month plan for each child as the start date is unknown. In my experience registration took three weeks not three months. The samples provided for developing a unit or program are in my opinion far too detailed. I was very nervous waiting for the AP to arrive, wondering if my preparations would pass registration even though I had everything covered I was concerned that my program was not as detailed as samples in the information package. I would have felt much more relaxed if I was able to send the AP my program to look over and comment on before the appointment. The AP however was very happy with all my preparations including the program, resources and learning areas.

I would like to suggest the application package to be changed to include a larger sample of units and sample programs. I would also like an option to be included to receive temporary/provisional approval to remove a child from school to begin home schooling (for a period of at least 3 months) while awaiting official approval from an AP.

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

The NSW Syllabuses is not the same as the Australian National Curriculum. This would make it difficult for a home schooling family who are moving from NSW to another State or from another State to NSW as the program already in place for those children would need to be altered to be in line with the requirements for that State.

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

As a parent of a child with special needs including Autism I was always worried about my child's safety, welfare and wellbeing at school. There was always constant worry that he would wander out of the school gates, fall down stairs, not be cleaned properly if he soiled himself, or be hurt or bullied by one of the other students. There was a plan put in place to help identify and prevent such issues but that did not prevent those incidents from happening. He was coming home with scratches on his face and bite marks on his arms. When I would pick him up from school I would hear his classmates call him names like 'little baby' and talk to each other about how annoying they thought he was. He told me he only had one friend in his class at school but then that friend got moved to the other class and the other children don't like him.

With home schooling he has the ability to learn in an environment where he feels safe, comfortable, loved and nurtured. He is able to express and explore his own emotions, physical ability, personality and interests, he also has many opportunities for social interaction including sporting groups, Joey Scouts, home school excursions, and within our family and the community

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

The option of part time home school or part time attendance at school is available in other States but not in NSW. This would have been a very good option in my situation since my sons attendance was affected by appointments which gave him a bad attendance record and led to issues that resulted in me removing my child from that school. Part time attendance would have allowed for better scheduling of appointments, time spent in class and one on one tuition at home.

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

I am aware of the fact there is no representation of home schoolers within the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards. I think the BoSTES should be required to include a member that represents the home education community.

Conclusions

The home schooling registration information package for NSW is overwhelming and this opinion is also shared by registered teachers. The information package should be adjusted to better reflect home schooling and include a full 12 month sample program. Provisional approval should be granted with receipt of application.

Thank you

References

NSW Government Education and Communities Distance Education Revised Enrollment Procedures – 2013 Section 2.8