

Submission
No 28

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Ms Gail Oakley

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LEGISLATIVE
COUNCIL

The Director
Select Committee on Home Schooling
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

9th July 2014

To the Director and Members of the Select Committee on Home Schooling,

My name is Gail Oakey and our family began homeschooling in September 2009 whilst living in the USA. We were there for several years because of my husband's work.

Terms of reference items

b(iii) demographics and motivation of parents to homeschool their children

b(v) characteristics and educational needs of homeschooled children

We initially began homeschooling following preschool as the school system in America seemed to be highly structured, very constrained in time and budget, and unable to cater for our energetic, curious oldest son. Although schools in New South Wales seem to differ from their American counterparts our oldest child has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and school in general does not seem to be the best option for a child with an attention span of 15-20 minutes on a good day. Homeschooling provides him with the opportunity to move during lessons, take more breaks and have shorter learning periods thus allowing him to continue his learning without disturbing other children. It also allows me to tailor his learning to the time of day when he is most receptive and currently allows me to integrate a course of occupational therapy into his schooling.

Although his younger brother does not have these educational challenges he also responds well to a learning programme tailored to his own learning style and so I am able to provide both children with a quality education.

Terms of reference items

b(vi) comparison of homeschooling to school education including distance education

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

I have a BSc (Hons) in physiotherapy so am not a qualified teacher but in the context of this previous work I have supervised students and taught groups of adults. I do not see this lack of teaching qualifications as a setback as I am not teaching a large group of children and in need of "crowd management" skills. I also have access to many helpful curriculums, online resources and books and I am able to outsource areas I do not feel qualified to teach myself. For example my children attend swimming lessons plus dance and drama classes.

We appreciate the flexibility homeschooling gives to be involved in a variety of activities and to have an opportunity to make friends across differing ages and circumstances. We are involved in a homeschool Bushcare group, a homeschool Australian history club, we go to

homeschool rock climbing sessions and a weekly homeschool activity group as well as being involved in the Anglican Parish churches, the Football Club, Swim Club and 1st Cub Scouts.

We were very concerned that the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) sought to restrict home education to activities that occurred only in the home. This is from the 2013 Handbook for Authorised Persons (AP): "Registration for home schooling requires that the educational program be delivered in the registered child's home. In assessing an application for home schooling registration, an Authorised Person must be satisfied that the education of the child, as required for registration, including for all key learning areas, will occur in the home." Some home educators were told by their AP that they could not count activities that occurred outside of their home in their home education program for the purposes of registration. I would like to suggest that many of our out of home learning experiences help my children put their learning into a context that is surely more meaningful for their adult life than doing a work sheet in a classroom.

These opportunities to be involved in our community also mean my children are regularly seen by those called on to be mandatory reporters of abuse whereas the BOSTES 2013 Information Package referred to above actively discouraged families from these community activities.

Terms of reference items

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

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

the AP who has visited our home for the past few years has been wonderful. She understands homeschooling and the options it gives to families for flexibility and the individual tailoring of lessons that suit a child's learning style and educational needs. I am concerned that the person who replaces will not be so understanding and will not have grasped that homeschooling is not necessarily "school-at-home". It is time that AP's receive training about home education both before they begin their job and throughout their term of employment with the home education unit. This should be from someone who knows how home education works and how it is different from school education.

I would like to see AP's taking on a more supportive role in assisting parents to deliver the high quality of education that most homeschoolers desire for their family. I would like to see future AP's who are able and willing to assist parents put together plans for homeschooling, not just tell them their plan isn't good enough.

Terms of reference item

c(iii) adherence to delivery of the New South Wales curriculum

I have no problem with everyone involved in the delivery of education having a syllabus to follow. In fact I often find that we are covering much more than the current NSW syllabus states we need to, especially in areas my children are particularly interested in.

I do have a problem with being told that I cannot move a bright child to a higher level of work or repeat lower grade work to help foundational understanding. This is what BOSTES have tried to mandate by attempting to restrict how the NSW syllabus was delivered and reported upon in home education. Perhaps I need to apply for permission to teach a gifted or remedial education. Or perhaps we just need some common sense to see that home education allows

children to move on or repeat work in a way that school education just isn't able to do because of the number of children in a classroom.

Terms of reference item

e) Representation of homeschoolers within BOSTES

Finally, I feel that many of the recent misunderstandings BOSTES have concerning homeschooling would not have happened if there was a home education representative on the Board. It is important that BOSTES as the regulatory body for homeschooling has an understanding of the issues concerned with this method of education delivery, a representative on the Board would assist in this.

Thank you for the time you have taken to read this submission.

Yours faithfully

Gail Oakey