

**Submission
No 226**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Mr Joshua Mortimer

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Submission to the Legislative Assembly Select Committee Inquiry into Home Schooling

29/08/2014

To The Director of the Select Committee on Home Schooling,

My name is Joshua Mortimer, and I was schooled at home from grade 1 to grade 9. I then attended a public school in rural Australia to complete grades 10 through 12. The following details my experience with being home schooled – organised under the Inquiry's Terms of Reference relevant to my submission.

(b) the current context of home schooling in New South Wales

(i) outcomes of home schooling including in relation to transition to further study and work

As stated above, I was home schooled from years 1 through 9; and I strongly believe that this period prepared me well for my further education. After attending public school for years 10 through 12, I achieved a HSC ATAR of 98.6. I was subsequently accepted to study a Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery at the University of New South Wales, where I am now in my 4th year. I have been achieving above average marks throughout this degree and was subsequently accepted to complete a Bachelor of Science (Medicine) Honours research year, in addition to my medical degree. I am now nearing the end of my Honours year and am on track to be awarded First Class Honours.

As the above demonstrates, since my home education I have gone on to achieve highly in all academic areas. I also have a fulfilling social life and a close family unit. I honestly believe that I would not have been able to achieve everything I have without my home education, and I will be forever grateful for the efforts of my mother to foster my love of learning.

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

Having experience with both home education and public education, I feel I am particularly well placed to comment on this topic.

The biggest area of distinction for me between home education and public education was the manner in which I learnt to learn. During my home education I viewed my mother more as a facilitator of learning than as a 'teacher', particularly in the later years of Secondary School. While my mother was always available to answer my questions and assist with any issues when they arose, I was always encouraged to direct my own learning, under close guidance to ensure adherence to the NSW Syllabus. Rather than turning to a 'teacher' when I had difficulty understanding concepts, I subsequently developed an ability to problem solve and seek my own answers. This is in stark contrast to what I found was encouraged at public school. While I continued to largely direct my own learning throughout years 10-12, I found the majority of my peers seemed relatively unable to do so without very close assistance from the teaching staff. On numerous occasions this in fact led to me having a greater understanding of certain topics than my teachers themselves had. This even went so far as to result in teachers asking me to cover lessons and answer fellow students' questions when they were themselves unavailable or had to leave the room. While both the 'self-directed' and 'teacher-student' models of learning have their merits – and I in no way wish to devalue the public schooling system – I feel that the method of learning I adopted through my home education has prepared me far more for tertiary education than the methods encouraged at public school. At University, self-directed learning has been encouraged to a far greater degree than during High School; and I believe that my respectable marks have been as a direct result of my aptitude for this learning method.

Another area of distinction between home schooling and public school was in the efficient use of time. Throughout years 10-12 I consistently found that the amount of content covered in a full day at public school would have previously been covered in a matter of hours during home education. The amount of time spent moving between classes, waiting for other students to settle and introducing lessons at public school was substantial and, I feel, significantly hindered the amount of learning that could take place. The truth of this is evidenced by the fact that I was able to cover the majority of the year 10 syllabus concurrently with my year 9 education whilst being home educated.

During my home education my mother also continuously facilitated learning through a number of less conventional means. This ranged from organising tours of the local water treatment facility to participating in home recycling, joining a local woodworking club, attending museum events, taking tours of historical sites and learning about geography in the Blue Mountains. In addition, my mother made use of family friends with particular areas of expertise. For example, during year 9 I attended weekly history lessons with the father of another home schooled family who had a particularly strong knowledge in this area.

A topic which always arises when I discuss my home education with people more familiar with public education is that of socialisation. I believe that home education did not in any way impair my ability to socialise with people outside of my family. I was involved with a number of community groups, including youth groups, sporting clubs and a group set up specifically for home schooling families to meet each other.

In summary, I feel that home education fostered my learning through a large variety of means and facilitated my development both socially and academically. This has left me thoroughly prepared for my current life and continued education.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling

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

Throughout my home education my mother always ensured that we adhered strictly to the syllabus in all core subjects. As mentioned previously, I was able to cover the majority of the year 10 syllabus during year 9 at home; and I can attest that the content I covered directly and completely aligned with what was taught during year 10 upon attending public school. I had no difficulty in transitioning from home to public education and in fact found that my level of knowledge and understanding was above the level of my peers in the majority of areas.

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

The final area I wish to address is the need for representation of home schoolers within the BoSTES. As the Board is responsible for regulating home education in NSW, it is imperative that home educators have official representation on the board. All other areas of primary and secondary education are well represented, and home schooling should be no different. It presents a thoroughly valid and acceptable means of education and should be treated as such at a government level.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my submission.

Kind Regards,

Joshua Mortimer