

**Submission
No 49**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Mrs Elizabeth Cooper

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Mrs Elizabeth Cooper

18/7/2014

For The Attention of:

The Select Committee on Home Schooling

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission for the consideration of the committee. We are pleased there is a forum for statements to be considered on the actual practice of Home education in NSW.

We are the Cooper Family of _____, on the Central Coast of New South Wales. I, Elizabeth Cooper, home-educate our 11 year old daughter and 10 year old son. My husband, Robert Cooper, is a registered nurse. We also have a 3 year old son. Prior to having a family I have been a classroom teacher of Music. I have taught in a NSW state high school, a private high school, a private school in Canberra and in a public school in England.

Our primary reasons for homeschooling our children are:

1. We want the best possible education for our children.

Through my teaching experience I have observed many attitudes to, and practices in education that I would like to avoid. While I have been impressed with many aspects of school life and achievement I am convinced home education has enormous benefits. Students can work at their own rate, be given almost immediate personal attention to overcome difficulties, and spend greater time on individual educational interests. Their learning can take place without comparisons, unnecessary external pressures and a multitude of distractions.

2. We want to assist our children in the exciting journey of education and accompany and guide them on their "life Journey".

We love the freedom and time home education gives to train our children's attitudes, discuss life's complexities while facilitating their education.

Below are our thoughts on the terms of reference for the committee's investigation:

(b) the current context of home schooling in NSW including:

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

- Our children attended our local public school, PS in 2010 – 11. Both our children compared very favourably to their classmates in terms of academic achievement. Our daughter took part in year 3 Naplan testing and scored very well in most areas. The only result not in the highest brackets was average.
- My husband's sister was home educated in Canberra and was always an extremely enthusiastic learner. This was a major factor in our family considering home education. This young woman had no difficulty entering tertiary education and has nearly completed an arts degree and holds a certificate in dental nursing. She currently works as an educational presenter with **Questacon** and **The National Film and Archives Museum** in Canberra.

ii) financial costs

- We try to keep our costs as low as possible though of course we have needed to spend quite a bit on necessary resources. We make extensive use of our local library and the services of the wonderful children's librarians. We use the internet daily on free online educational sites such as Khan Academy for maths and spellingcity.com for spelling. We make use of many other educational websites with regularity also. We would like assistance to pay for our resources and educational internet use.
- We believe the sacrifice of my potential income is worth the time spent with our children however, there are many "normal" activities our children cannot participate in because of limited income. We have to be quite selective, and creative, with participation in activities and sports. We also juggle the use of one vehicle to keep costs down.
- We would love the committee to seriously consider the need for an educational allowance for homeschoolers to assist in the costs of educational materials, internet use, books, computers etc that are funded for schooled children in NSW.

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

- Some details are given above in our introduction,
- We use a range of educational methods but have a strong leaning towards Charlotte Mason – style education which uses many "living books", verbal and written narration of all reading, science and nature study in the outdoors where possible, and copywork. We read many biographies, making history, maths, science, art and music come alive. We use a more formal approach to education than many but love the freedom to explore the children's interests as they arise. We attend as many excursions as possible. We have visited many places in Sydney, NSW and Victoria to see the places of significance to Australian history. We like to learn first-hand as much as possible.
- Watching our children in classrooms while assisting as a parent helper in 2011 -12 cemented my desire to home-educate our children again. I watched my lively, intelligent son "tune out" in the classroom. I observed our daughter compete with her friends to avoid following the teacher's instructions as long as possible. At home with three children, I can better engage them in learning and adapt resources to their learning style.
- Our children have far more contact with each other than schooled children. This benefits all three children but especially our preschooler.

iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers,

- I have heard unregistered families despair of the onerous process of registering several children at differing stages of learning as required by the OBoS.

v) characteristics and educational needs of homeschooled children

- Our children do not have any official special needs but do benefit from a flexibility of timing and resources. Our ten year old son can jump on the trampoline or go for a run around the block when he is struggling to focus. We can spend time *discussing* ABC's "Behind the News" and the current affairs issues that arise rather than write a report or do an assignment on it. We don't need to give our children extra worksheets to keep them busy so we can manage a full class' needs.

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

- See comments made in iii) above.
- We participate in activities with other home schooling families at times. These have included art lessons, music and dance classes. As parents we draw on each others' strengths and interests. We have been to many museums, coastal discovery tours, a recycling centre, parks and parliamentary visits to name just a few!
- When we go on holidays as a family we sometimes visit an area we have read about as part of our studies. Eg We have visited goldfields in NSW and Victoria, the Blue Mountains and seen "democracy" in practice in both Sydney and Canberra.
- Many onlookers are concerned about "socialisation" of homeschoolers. Our children relate to children and adults of many ages every week. They do gymnastics with 4 – 13 year olds, go to church with adults and peers, and play with peers and their siblings of many ages regularly. When they mix with other children they have the benefit of adults nearby to aid them develop beneficial social skills. They observe adults interacting and "socialise" in the real world with professionals, tradesmen, sales assistants, instructors, grandparents and many other real people through daily life interactions. They are not shielded from these because they are in a school for many hours of most days.
- While I and many other homeschooling parents have teacher training, many of our homeschooling friends do not. These parents demonstrate the same high commitment to their children as they assist them in their learning. Many have taken their children out of school due to the system's inability to cater for the child's needs. I am convinced a parent who takes on this commitment is determined to help their child towards educational success and will do whatever it takes, even without teaching experience and training. I have observed many non-teachers doing an extraordinary job with their children.

(c) regulatory framework processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered homeschoolers,

- I believe there are common problems for homeschooling families in the registration process which discourage families to make an application to register. These are discussed more in the points to follow.

i) current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered homeschoolers

- We have been registered for homeschooling three times, each time for two years. Preparing for the most recent AP visit at the beginning of 2014 was more stressful than previous visits due to the new expectations outlined by the OBoS. While we have a well researched, broad and structured plan for our children, knowing the OBoS required correlation to specific year levels and related outcomes of the NSW and National Curriculum made preparation far more difficult. Needing to document our teaching and learning in this way is not necessary when you are working with your children for most hours of every day.
- We have given considerable thought to the materials and procedures that will be effective for our children. We have made sure we are covering the KLA's in detail, even more than is required eg our children have been learning the German language and have music lessons in several contexts. Our history studies have been in far more depth than the syllabus requires. An outline of our approach to each KLA and evidence of learning is easy to show without the onerous record keeping requested by the OBoS.

ii) training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons

- Some AP's show a poor understanding of many of the strengths of home education and want to inspect as though we are schools. This places pressure on families to simply "do school at home" thereby negating many advantages of home education.
- Many OBoS Approved Persons appear to be unaware of how home education works. I have heard many reports of visits that have been destructive to a child's education.

iii) adherence to delivery of the NSW Syllabuses

- I believe, as stated in the Education Act, that the parent holds the responsibility of the child's education. I am concerned with the OBoS power to decide the specifics of the "quality education" required by the Education Act, especially now that they are being so particular about every detail needing to match the scope and sequence of the NSW syllabi.

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

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

- see comments in (c) i), ii), iii)
- We would like a new regulatory regime developed in consultation with HEA and other home educators.
- We would like the freedom to show the quality education we provide for our children in a format appropriate to our style of education to an experienced, supportive "Approved Person".

d) support issues for homeschooling families and barriers to accessing support

- I am concerned with the lack of support available to home schooling families in the registration process. Instead, many AP's have actually actively discouraged registration,

often where the school system has failed a child. These new homeschoolers are vulnerable and need support.

- We would like to be able to access some programs available to children in mainstream schooling such as learn to swim, computing, music and sporting programs or the option of part-time school enrolment.
- In future years, when our children are of high school age, we would like to have equal access to TVET courses and Open High School. We would like our children to have access to travel concessions if needed and Centrelink funding beyond the age of 16 years while still in full-time study.

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

- The OBoS have made significant changes in their expectations of homeschooling families without consultation with those to whom it most affects. Surely this is an approach that is bound to fail.
- We would like representation as home educators on the BoSTES.

We look forward to hearing the conclusions of the Committee's investigation. Thank you for your consideration of these matters and attention to home education in NSW,

Regards,

Mrs Elizabeth Cooper.