

Submission
No 18

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

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

11th July 2014

Summary

I am an experienced home schooler, and I am committed to my children. The Education Act of 1990 gives me the responsibility to educate my children. I choose to do that myself. The current registration regime is unhelpful and does not assist me in the task of delivering a quality education to my children. I would like to see a new and independent registering body whose role is to facilitate parents in the education of our children.

To the Select Committee on Home Schooling,

I am a home schooling mother with over six years experience, both in Western Australia and New South Wales. I am a supporter of registration, but I am concerned with the way that the Board of Studies administers registration in NSW.

Terms of Reference

(a) the background of home schooling including comparison of practices with other jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand,

I have been through registration in NSW twice, both times receiving the maximum two-year registration. It required many hours of work. The Board of Studies in NSW requires a lot of record keeping and documentation to support an application.

My experience of registration in WA was quite different to NSW. In WA, the Department of Education and Training required registration, with curriculum requirements in the Key Learning Areas. This is similar to NSW, but the difference is with the documentation. I showed them what I planned to do – that is I showed them the books and resources I had, not a separate large document I had to prepare. The Moderator looked through it, and discussed it with me. I remember on one occasion, the Moderator suggested I needed to add more to one area, but this was done helpfully.

From my experience, the attitude of the WA Department towards homeschooling was helpful. They were there to help you do it right. Whereas the Board of Studies make you feel as though they are trying to catch you doing the wrong thing. It is not collaborative.

I have not experienced difficulty getting registered in NSW, but I have put a great deal more time and work into ensuring that we pass registration. I don't believe that it has improved educational outcomes for my children. It has taken a lot of time away from teaching them. It has added a great deal of stress to our homeschool experience, and it hasn't changed what choices I would have made.

(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,

At this stage, my children intend to go on to further study. For each of my children, I plan to contact Tertiary Education providers relevant to their interests and discuss pathways with them.

(ii) financial costs

The greatest financial cost with homeschooling is the loss of a second income. It is because of our commitment to delivering a quality education, tailored to the educational, psychological and social needs of our children, that we are willing to make this financial sacrifice. The education of my children is clearly important to me.

The daily cost of home schooling is one that I am willing to bear. I am committed to my children. I believe that my children are primarily my responsibility, not matter how they are schooled.

The Inquiry would do well to recognize that homeschoolers save the government money, especially families who have children with special needs. We are committed to raising responsible future taxpayers, with little burden on the state.

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

We choose to homeschool our children for a number of reasons.

Firstly, we believe that parents have the primary responsibility for raising children in our society. Many parents choose to delegate the education of their children to the state. In our family, we believe that the best outcomes for our children – educationally, psychologically and socially – are achieved with homeschooling.

Secondly, we choose to homeschool for the sake of our relationships. Family is important to us. We want to grow resilient, stable, compassionate people. We believe this is best achieved in the context of strong family relationships. We prefer not to have our children away from the family for the extended time that a school requires.

Thirdly, it fits with our lifestyle. My husband works weekends, with his days off during the week. He often cannot take time off during school holidays. As homeschoolers, we can fit our school week and our holidays around his work. The flexibility is a real benefit of home schooling, and contributes to the strengthening of family relationships.

And *finally*, we choose to homeschool because of the quality of the education we can give our kids. From my observation and experience it far exceeds what a public school could deliver. They simply cannot do what I can do, because of two simple factors - mathematics and relationships.

Mathematically – it is a simple observation that one teacher to four students (in my case) must result in a quality outcome, when compared to one teacher and a class of 20-30 children. The time and energy I can invest in ensuring they are each progressing is far more than in a school setting. My children have more one on one teaching and a more personal, tailored education that takes into account their

strengths, weaknesses and interests.

Relationally – it is also a simple truth that no one else, even a dedicated public school teacher cares as much about my children as I do. I am deeply committed to helping my children achieve to their best. Not just for one year, but forever.

These two simple factors, along with the availability of many resources, makes home schooling the best way that I am able to deliver an education of the highest quality to my children.

(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers,

When I meet other homeschoolers, I can categorically say that I cannot tell which children are unregistered and which are registered. Unregistered families are just as committed to their children as I am; it is the Board of Studies that they do not like.

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

My children are intelligent, healthy, normal kids. There is nothing in particular about them that necessitated our decision to home school. I think that they would cope well enough in a school environment. But ‘well-enough’ is not the same as what is best for them. I believe they are thriving at home, and so my choice is to give them the best.

My children have benefitted from not being exposed to the worst aspects of school like bullying and peer pressure. I do not think it is in the best interests of a child to be taken away from their strongest support structure (their family), for extended periods of time, to deal with complex social situations without the guidance and support of their family, and without the experience to deal with them.

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

I do not see myself as a teacher, standing up the front, imparting knowledge from my head to the heads of my students. I see myself as the facilitator of their learning. I develop a long-term vision, planning what we will do from year to year. I provide the resources for them to learn. I provide an environment for them to learn and I walk beside them as they journey. They are the ones who learn. I am also there to show them the questions to ask, and to model how to think, and to help them overcome the hurdles along the way.

This is where the benefits of homeschooling shine. The model of school teaching – of a teacher teaching a subject from the front – may be the easiest or most time-efficient way of teaching 20-30 children. But, surely we do not assume that everything the teacher said is received and understood by all their students? Imagine if a teacher had the time to interact with individual students for extended periods of time, and to help them discover and learn the subject as they walk beside them in their learning. A teacher cannot possibly do this with 20 -30 students. This is what we can do at home.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

The registration process is too onerous. *It feels like* the Board of Studies is looking for ways to not register families. The Information Pack is contradictory to the Q&A's. Experienced home schoolers have a hard time wading through it all, and new

homeschoolers usually feel completely overwhelmed by the registration process.

It is becoming a common practice for an experienced homeschooler to be present during the registration interview of a new homeschooler. This is because we have all heard the untrue and unhelpful things that Authorised Persons have said to new homeschoolers. Some Authorised Persons are helpful, but some are very unhelpful. We live with the uncertainty of not knowing which one we will get and how that could disrupt and damage the education of our children.

The registration process is getting more and more regulatory, but there is no evidence that more regulation leads to better outcomes.

I would like to see a registration process that is more of a *facilitation* of homeschooling. The parents and the state BOTH want to see children educated well. If the government and the parents were *partners* in the education of our children, rather than the government being a *regulator* of our education of our children, the outcomes would be more positive.

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

Authorised Persons need to be understanding and supportive of home schooling. Home schooling is a valid educational choice. Children are growing and thriving. Authorised Persons who do not agree with home schooling should not be in a position to be able to refuse or restrict the right of a parent to homeschool. They are fundamentally opposed to the Education Act (1990), which states that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of a child.

Educate all those with responsibility for registration on home education. Send them to an experienced home schooler to find out how it works. They need to research the benefits of homeschooling and the many home education approaches

and philosophies. Even better, would be requiring Authorised Persons to have personal experience in home education. An Authorized Person who has only ever seen education delivered in a school format cannot understand the uniqueness of home schooling. Home schoolers should be part of the process in any decisions to change the training and recruitment of Authorised Persons.

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

I am not opposed to the content of the NSW syllabuses. I am opposed to the idea that the NSW syllabuses are the ONLY quality education available.

The Education Act of 1990 gives the primary onus for the education of our children to parents, NOT the State. It does say that the State must ensure all children get a high quality education, but I must argue that that does not mean it can only be the NSW syllabus! Surely a high quality education can come in many forms.

It is very important to me that my children receive a broad, high quality education. The state has the right to ensure that is happening, but not the right to insist that it is happening exactly in the form they want it.

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

Firstly, I would like to point out the commitment home schooling parents make when they forego a second income, and their own careers to provide a high quality education, and safe environment for their children. Home educators are highly committed to their children.

Secondly, I would like to point out the constant reports in the news about the high levels of bullying and abuse at schools. It is not possible to suggest that children

are safer at school than at home.

Thirdly, home-educated children are NOT isolated. Home-educated families interact with the community in many different ways and with a high level of frequency. We participate in community groups, church groups, homeschool groups, sporting clubs, and other interest groups. We go on excursions. We interact with people in the community, including doctors and health professionals, neighbours and family. My children interact with people of all ages, frequently. This is something the Board of Studies actually tried to restrict in their recent changes. The 2013 Home Schooling Information Pack explicitly discouraged families from engaging in activities outside of their home, and insisted that we must stay home during school hours and school terms, isolating us. This was one of the changes that were made to home education regulation that was vigorously resisted by home educators. This shows The Board of Studies' lack of understanding of home schooling.

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

Registered home schoolers do not feel supported by the Board of Studies, and many people are not registering at all. Clearly it is not working. I think the Board of Studies should not be the ones responsible for registering home schoolers. They do not understand homeschooling, and they don't seem to be interested to learn.

The fundamental improvement that can be made is to shift the role of the Board of Studies (or similar registering body), from being regulators to being facilitators. They also need to be an informed registering body. It would be helpful to have a registering body that understood home schooling, and the different homeschooling philosophies. A further improvement would be a registering body that included

home schoolers, past or present.

The Tasmanian model, where there is an independent registering body responsible for home schoolers is one that the Inquiry should investigate.

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

The home schooling community is a very supportive one. Home schooling families are a great resource, and we help and support each other in our home schooling journey.

I think if the Registration Body included people who understood home schooling, and people who have home schooled, then people who are new to home schooling, would be helped to deliver the high quality education the government seeks.

I find it hard to understand why the Board of Studies specifically excludes homeschoolers from a range of things, available to all other taxpaying families. There are support programs and educational programs that would sometimes be helpful to be part of, but which we are excluded from simply because we are homeschoolers.

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

If the Board of Studies is to continue to be responsible for the regulation of homeschooling in NSW there are two important changes that need to be made:

1. Home schoolers need a representative on the Board, just as all other types of education are represented.
2. Those responsible within the Board of Studies for home education should be required to demonstrate understanding of, and support for, home education.

(f) any other related matter.

I would like an Inquiry into the Board of Studies. It seems to be a conflict of interest that the ones responsible for coming up with the standards and regulations are also the ones testing compliance. There is a lack of transparency, there is contradictory information, there is lack of communication, and a lack of understanding.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to my daughter. She recently entered a competition to come up with an invention. I found out about the competition, and sat with her as she came up with ideas. She selected one of her ideas and wrote about it, and then drew a picture. We then made a video entry and submitted it to the competition. She was then asked by the PR company for the competition if they could use her entry to promote the competition. Her video entry appeared on the Sunrise program, and she was featured in our local newspaper. This was not in my planned program of study that had been approved by the Board of Studies. This was spontaneous. This is how home education works. She didn't know she was doing 'science and technology' as well as 'art' and 'english'. She came up with an idea and wanted to do it. Home educators are able to adapt and utilize so many different things, quickly and easily.