

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

Date: 7th August, 2014

Name:

Address: NSW

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

I have been an unregistered homeschooler in NSW for 7 years now. I am an active member of the homeschool community in our area.

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 have no experience with Homeschooling in other states or territories

Whilst I haven't ever registered I am aware of the increasingly restrictive requirements that are required by NSW. I would like to register but have found in the past few years that NSW has become more prescriptive and watched the angst that other homeschoolers have gone through to complete paperwork that is onerous and takes one away from the main task, which is educating our children.

I would like to see a system where parents are given probationary approval before needing to show documentation, such as Queensland

- (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,

Whilst my children are not at this stage we know have a number of friends who have gone onto further study. They have usually completed their course in a shorter amount of time due to having opportunities to follow their interests in earlier years. They are socially mature and given back to the community. I love that they are willing to share their skills with the younger homeschoolers.

- (ii) financial costs,

As a family of 7, we are currently home educating 4 of our 5 children. We set aside money within our budget to cover costs. At the moment we have a budget of about \$2100. This usually falls short of what we truly need to give our children a quality education. At best, we take from other areas within our budget e.g. food, clothing, at worst we have to decide which activities will best fit most of our kids. This in essence goes against one of the reasons we homeschool, to give our individual children opportunities where they best learn or have an active interest. Not all activities/excursions are best for all my children.

From family to family the financial costs of home schooling their children varies. The greatest loss to the family is that they often forgo the opportunity of a second income. Not only do they have less income but there is also no financial support from the state or federal government, other than Centrelink's parenting payments, which is available to most families. We pay for our entire curriculum needs: books, texts, stationary, computers, excursions (including petrol and/or public transport costs), and our own personal development as educators. We have the additional costs that are naturally incurred with being at home all day – lighting, heating/cooling and water.

While we do not mind paying these costs, we love our children and want the best possible opportunities for them, it would be good to see some recognition for the financial burden we bare and the savings we have brought for the state Government in our choice. As a family that contributes to this country and states' taxes and in part the

educational costs of public and private students, it would be good to receive some remuneration for the costs families bear.

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

People vary their reasons for homeschooling. In the 7 years that I have home educated my children, I have never once met a homeschooling parent that didn't have their child's learning needs at the forefront of their agenda. Parents that unschooled or used natural learning right through to people who used a more traditional style of learning, all could discuss what their child was learning and the love of learning that most of these children had.

We homeschool our children for a variety of reasons of which a few are below:

1. The academic superiority of a one-on-one teaching environment.
Working with my children 1-1 allows me to teach concepts more quickly, takes into consideration their learning styles, and allows me to change the pace for their learning strengths and weaknesses
2. The freedom to tailor courses of study to our individual children.
My children are all individuals and therefore learn in different ways. Home education allows me to meet their needs and tailor it for their differences. Having taught in a public school system, it is easy to teach students in a way that we (the teacher) best learn. It is also hard to allow 30 students follow their interests – that is a logistical nightmare. Homeschooling affords us this.
3. Ability to monitor socialization situations.
All children are socialized one way or another. School is not really set up in a way that society functions. It is uncommon for such a large number of the same aged people to be working together. I am well aware of the bullying and peer pressure that abounds in schools, public and private alike. Who do I want socializing my children, teaching them social skills? As a caring, loving parent I want my children to learn from a wide range and age of people not peers and strangers. My children are able to and enjoy speaking to all ages of people. They speak intelligently and politely. They also recognise the behaviour of other children as wrong and silly. We want them to have a right social conscience without the forced pressure of their peers.
4. We are Christians and we want to be able to choose teaching materials that reinforce our religious beliefs and our morals.
We have moral standards that are different to the education department. While I understand this turn from God's rightful rule, we choose for our family to live under God's rule and to choose materials that build up our family's belief.
5. The flexibility to create more family time.
My husband travels occasionally with his work. Homeschooling allows us to spend time with him in a different area of New South Wales. Whilst we don't always travel, due to activity commitments, homeschooling allows us the flexibility to break when my husband is home and to work outside of 'school hours' when he is away.

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

As an unregistered home educator I would like to share the reasons behind this. We have always thought that we would register yet I kept putting this off as I noticed the angst many homeschoolers went through to put together a program that most, more often than not, knew they would not follow.

I believe more people are choosing not to register or to not reregister because there is the perception that the current registration is a meaningless exercise that is in place for bureaucrats to tick boxes and not for the well being and education of our individual children. I do not want to conform to the present restrictive requirements, as it will mean that my children will not be gaining the education that is best for them. On the whole parents want to provide an education that best suits each of their children, not to follow a set of prescriptive rules that is needed for public education.

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

All my children have individual and varied needs. They each have a range of skills and abilities with different educational needs. While most of my children would succeed in a school environment, I don't think it is to their advantage to be left in such an institution.

One of my son's has a learning disability and while this wasn't the reason we started homeschooling, I have seen the advantages of this type of education for him. His poor working memory and slow processing ability would quickly leave him behind his peers in a school situation. Added to his inability to sit still for prolonged periods of time, he would quickly be labeled as a troublemaker.

While there are many people who do homeschool because of learning issues, I think it is important to recognise that people home school for different reasons and having a supportive system will allow parents to make informed decisions on the best education for their child/children.

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

I love homeschooling for the wide and varied opportunities that are available for my children. While school has excursions and incursions, it is limited in what and how much it can offer. Being involved in a home school community allows for individuals to follow their passions and to share that with others in the group. This year my children (aged 6-12) have been involved in attending performances such as Shakespeare, opera (The Barber of Seville – abridged), Swan Lake (abridged and explained), The Lion King, visits to the Powerhouse, National Museum, visit to Mogo Village (gold rush), homeschool music, drama and writing classes, high school robotics and metal work classes, library book club and a Viking day to name a few. This precludes any extracurricular activities they do. These home school activities have happened because of dedicated parents following their children's interests, not necessarily because it is on a list of outcomes.

My family follows a Living Books approach, which is based on the writings of Charlotte Mason, a British educator in the 19th century. She was appalled by the tendencies of modern education to:

1. treat children as containers to be filled with predigested information rather than human beings
2. break down knowledge into isolated bits of information to be fed into 'container' children
3. engineer artificial learning experiences

This approach to academics is to teach basic reading, writing and math skills and then expose children to the best sources of knowledge for all other subjects. This means that we give our children experiences like nature walks, observing and collecting wildlife, visiting art museums and reading real books with 'living' ideas. Living books are usually written in narrative form by one author who has a passion for the topic and makes the subject come 'alive'.

My children, aged 12 down to 6, have thrived on this education. They know much about many subjects and have a love for Shakespeare, great artists and composers. They love the outdoors and are able to discuss literature with us, knowing what makes a book great or awful. I know that my children would not receive this kind of well-rounded education in school as I have seen it first hand as a teacher. I also know that it doesn't tick all the boxes required by BoSTES. Yet my children are thriving and well educated.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

From the comments of people in our homeschool community who have registered, it is clear that the current registration process is onerous and restrictive. I would like to see the process being supportive of homeschooling rather than regulative. It would be helpful for the Board of Studies to consult with homeschoolers in regards to the registration process. This in turn may see an increase in registrations, as people feel respected and validated in their choice to home educate.

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

As someone who isn't registered but would like to be, I believe we need authorised persons who have an understanding of and are supportive towards homeschoolers. This may mean they need to spend time with experienced homeschoolers to find out what happens on a day to day basis and how fundamentally different it is to a school based education.

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

While the State must ensure that all children get a quality education it clearly states in the Education Act of 1990 that the primary onus for the education of their children are the parents. Education comes in many forms and I do not believe that the NSW Syllabus is the only quality education available. Whilst high quality education is occurring in my family, it just doesn't happen in the form that is being insisted upon by the BoSTES.

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

Home education allows us a family to choose social networks that are encouraging and nurturing for our children. Whilst peer pressure and bullying can be found in all areas of society, the fact that we often socialize as a family group means we are aware of problems as they occur. It also allows for my children to interact with many people of all ages. What a benefit to know that my children know how to have a meaningful conversation with all different types of people in our community.

Home education allows us to deal with various issues such as drugs, alcohol, sex education, and stranger danger in a comfortable and open environment where the children can ask us questions without any ramifications from their peers. It also means it can be done as a group or one to one as they are ready. We think this works better than across the board approach that is found in schools.

I think it is also important to note that we are not educating in isolation. We are frequently in the community, either as a family or by participating in church groups, homeschool groups, and sporting groups. We are involved in excursions either as a family, small or large group. To make home schoolers stay at home during school hours, as was recently encouraged in the 2013 Home Schooling Information Pack, shows a gross misunderstanding of what homeschooling is about. It will isolate families and is something that needs to change.

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

I understand the need to regulate homeschooling but it must be done in a way that respects the rights of parents to educate their children in a way that they deem is appropriate. As succinctly written in the Education Act, parents are the primary educators of their children. Parents should be free to develop their own programs to meet their own children's needs. It would be good to move back towards being able to develop our own program in the Key Learning Areas mentioned in the original 1990 Education Reform Act.

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

The very nature of home education makes homeschooling families good at networking and supporting each other. It is important for people new to homeschooling to be placed in contact with other homeschoolers. It would be beneficial if this kind of information came from supportive AP's.

The acknowledgement that homeschooling is a viable and valid method of education and that all students should have an equal opportunity to access programs. Currently this is not happening. Access to some programs are only available to students of government and private schools and not home schooling students. The most beneficial to homeschoolers would be:

- TVET students wanting to pursue a trade
- Open High School,

- HSC subjects for those wanting them
- Support programs for students with a disability
- The ability to be part-time enrolled in school for specialist subjects

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

Currently there are 23 members on the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards. They include teachers, principals, nominees of the Catholic Education Commission and the Association of Independent Schools, an expert in early childhood education, an Aboriginal person and various others. There is no member representing home educators on the Board, even though BoSTES is responsible for the regulation of home education in NSW. I would like to see that there be at least one Home school representative on the Board.

(f) any other related matter.

N/A

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share our homeschool experiences. I hope that the inquiry will lead to greater opportunities for homeschoolers to be involved in the decision making process and to be validated in the choices we make.