

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

We are not Australian citizens, but my family is here for an extending period due to my husband's work. We are American citizens and our home base is Los Angeles, California, but we have lived for extended periods in Beijing, China and Montreal, Canada. We have always homeschooled our children, ages 10 and 13.

Initially, we decided to homeschool because it allows my husband the flexibility to take work around the world and we did not want to be separated for extended time to spare the children from having to change schools. While that reason is still valid, our family would choose to homeschool even if we were never to travel again.

Homeschooling has enriched all of our lives in so many ways.

My children are able to truly master a subject before moving on. If this is accomplished easily, they can quickly move on to the next level without losing interest due to endless repetition. If a particular subject is more difficult, they have the time to approach it from different angles until it makes sense.

They are able to attend many cultural and educational events due to the flexibility of our schedule. In the seven months we've lived in Sydney, we've attended 3 musical performances, 8 theatre performances, 3 art gallery excursions, 6 athletic events, 6 Australian history excursions, 7 science museum excursions and 10 purely social excursions, in addition to weekly park days, and various weekly classes such as drama at the Australian Theatre for Young People, specifically set up for homeschoolers. We've been invited into people's homes and had them to ours for cooperative learning experiences and social time. This richness of activities is easily accomplished by homeschool families as the personalization of instruction allows for greatly reduced time sitting at a desk to learn.

My children do some structured work, but also take advantage of the opportunities which arise, even if they don't appear in that year's educational plan. They have learned a lot about the history of China, Canada and now Australia instead of worrying about which history is being taught back home. We have done California history and some US history during the times we have lived there, but it has often not been at the prescribed times. We find that it is much more important to be able to take advantage of current exhibits offered by museums and galleries, then to stick to a rigid order. We will sometimes focus on one topic, ignoring others for a time, to maximize learning. Eventually, it all balances out.

As a long-time homeschooler who has been part of homeschool communities in different parts of the world, I have been fortunate to have seen many wonderful children homeschooled under a variety of philosophies grow up and move into the adult world. I remember as a new homeschooler negatively judging some families for choosing to unschool. Some of these children now teach at colleges, write for newspapers and are engineers. Some of these children decided to attend schools in the later years and had no trouble integrating into the school system. While my own personal educational style includes some formal work, I am confident that alternative methods can and do work.

Many people worry about socialization and homeschooling. My children have a much more varied and frequent social life than any traditionally schooled children I know. They have friends of all ages and are comfortable around babies, peers, adults and the elderly. They know how to interact with people in businesses, in classrooms and at public functions because they do it every day. They know how to interact with peers because they take classes, attend park days and have friends over. My kids often comment on the rowdiness of school kids at performances or on excursions. I've explained that the minutes before things get started are often the only time these kids get to socialize with each other beyond brief lunch and recess periods. Most homeschooled kids I know wait much more

calmly during such times because they know they will have the opportunity to talk afterwards. In fact, it's often encouraged. I believe that in places where people feel supported in their choice to homeschool and are not worried to be out in the world and meeting in public and private spaces, you will not find better socialized children.

In our home state of California, we are registered as our own private school. Under that option, we are required to fill out an online form once a year which asks for information about number of students and grade levels offered. We affirm that we will offer an equivalent education to that offered by the public system. We keep some basic records of attendance and proposed curriculum. We are sent an email confirming our submission was received. This is the only involvement the government has in our homeschooling and we are free to choose the methods we find best to meet our children's needs. These are the same requirements California has for its large, privately-funded schools. I have not looked too closely at the requirements of the NSW education board because a quick glance at the website and the word-of-mouth information I have gathered is enough for me to know that it is too onerous for me to even consider. I am unsurprised that many homeschoolers here choose not to register. It seems that there are good examples of less restrictive homeschool registration here in Australia, such as in Victoria.

Although I personally am not affected by the homeschool registration process of NSW, I do see the negative impacts it has on our many friends and acquaintances. I hope this inquiry leads to positive changes in NSW the future.