

Submission
No 14

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Mrs Julie McEwan

Date received: 8/07/2014

Partially Confidential

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

I would like to express my support of the home education lobby with regard to the Legislative Councils Home Schooling Enquiry.

Whilst I am not currently home educating my children I greatly value the freedom of choice currently available to parents to select public, private or home education for their children. Our family have availed ourselves of each mode of education in different seasons of our family's life and as best befitted our individual children during their educational years.

Our family comprises mum, dad and four boys. My eldest two boys attended our local public, primary and high schools where they received a good education. They were fortunate to have quality teachers who invested in them and received a very broad education. By the time my fourth child had come along I had concerns that the NSW curriculum had become too broad at the expense of foundational literacy and numeracy skills. It also concerned me that the natural inclination of my boys to want to learn and express themselves, very quickly became a drudgery once they were in the school environment. Their creativity and enthusiasm for learning was squashed as they had to learn in a large class setting, following topics that held little interest for them and at a pace which left them bored and distracted. Despite not having been to preschool in any form, my second son started school reading and writing quite well and it wasn't until about Year 2 that many of the other children finally caught up to his level of learning. In the interim, he had lost interest in learning, become lazy and minimalistic in his approach to schoolwork and learned that it wasn't cool to be smart, so dumbed himself down to the level of his peers. Consequently I began to look into the possibility of home educating my youngest son during the infant school years (which later grew to include all of primary) in order to give him a better start to his education.

Having made that decision, circumstances were such that it made sense to include my third son in our homeschooling endeavour. He had been unfortunate to have a long run of poor teachers. Each had personal circumstance which had been stressors in the year they had taught my son, family break-downs, serious illness and deaths. Unfortunately this had a cumulative effect over a few years on my son's education and I didn't believe he was working to his potential. Neither teachers nor students seemed to know how to relate to my son, who was gentle and sensitive. Additionally, he experienced quite severe and prolonged bullying by both children and a couple of teachers. He didn't fit the 'boy mould' expected of him. He wasn't into sport, was quiet and reflective, and preferred the performing arts to cars and rugby. Things came to a head in Year 5 when he would wake up in the morning and make himself throw up into a bucket to prove that he should be allowed to stay home from school for the day. Whilst at school, he was so stressed emotionally that he was no longer able to learn. He refused to take food to school and wouldn't eat or drink for fear of having to use the school bathrooms. He came home exhausted each day from having to deal with the physical and psychological bullying he was experiencing every day. Attempts to approach the school were met with denial and deaf ears. It is interesting looking back at his growth chart during those couple of years at school. His weight and height, comparative to the rates experienced by all three of his brothers, shows a definite stunting during that period. Consequently, I began home schooling him in Year 6 and continued until completing a Certificate of Completion of Year 10 before transitioning into TAFE courses at age 15.

By contrast our 7 years of home schooling allowed both the younger boys to thrive. Over a period of about two years my third son regained his physical and emotional health. He put on weight, began eating better and was more relaxed and able to be himself. As a result, his academic performance greatly improved. He also became more self assured and assertive. The flexibility of home educating allowed us to catch-up on some areas of learning in which he had fallen behind and plow ahead in the areas which he enjoyed and did well at, further increasing his confidence.

The following are just some of the advantages I believe home education offers.

- One-on-one teaching in a loving environment by people with a genuine interest in the child's long term development.
- A personalised program of learning catering to the child's interests, strengths and weaknesses.
- Continuity of learning. No missed concepts due to illness or simply distraction during a lesson.
- Ability to work at the child's individual pace.
- Multi-age learning activities with other home educators.
- Improved family relationships.
- Stability during periods of family stress (my husband has been sick for much of the time we have home educated).
- Plenty of opportunity to learn in unique, hands-on ways. We were able to spend 7 months travelling around Australia with a focus on learning about Australia's geography, history and natural heritage. Seeing places and experiencing culture first hand was an invaluable learning experience that could never be matched by simply reading about places or events.
- Socialisation with all ages is a more natural experience and has better prepared my children for interacting with people in society than the false, single-aged structures of school. My third son found this particularly useful as he moved into TAFE with students of all ages and cultural backgrounds.
- Flexibility to source the best educational materials from around the globe. We had been using a mathematics curriculum from Singapore, a Canadian writing program, a World History curriculum from US as well as a great deal of Australian content. In short we were able to select the best on offer worldwide.
- Access via the internet to resources not available in schools.

This year has seen us move into the private sector as our family commences a new season of education. My youngest son has entered school at Year 7. His mid-year results indicate that he is doing exceptionally well academically. He is at the top end of the top stream class. Maths has been his strong subject and he has been accelerated into a Year 9 curriculum with the possibility of

simple as participation in NAPLAN would be sufficient to ascertain progress in core curriculum areas. I think there would also be some benefit to being able to view home-educated children's results as a group on the NAPLAN website so other families can see the educational outcomes of home-educated students as a whole comparative to other schools.

My son's biggest fear in commencing school this year was the prevalence of bullying in NSW schools. Within the large home-educators group of which we were a part, bullying simply didn't occur. All of the children seemed confident and self-assured as well as caring and compassionate, so there was never a desire to lord it over others in the group. The occasional altercation was always dealt with sensitively and was seen as a learning opportunity.

I understand there are 23 members on the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards including 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 think that BoSTES should be required to have a member that represents the home education community on its board.

So, whilst it would appear that our home-education journey has come to an end, I want to ensure others have the same freedom to choose the best educational model in the future. If my boys decide they'd like to educate their own children at home, I want them to be able to do so without fear of social or legal recrimination. Thank you for the opportunity to express my views on this issue. It is my great hope that the decisions which will be made in the near future will have positive benefits for home-education and Australian society as a whole, for many years to come.

Yours sincerely,

Julie McEwan