

## INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

I have been a registered homeschooler in NSW for 13 years. I have also run a homeschooling resource business for . I have a monthly newsletter with 690 subscribers. I am an active member in the homeschool community.

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.**

Over the past 13 years of NSW registration, I have seen the requirements in NSW increasingly restrict homeschoolers mainly through documentation but also through requirements to not travel whilst homeschooling. NSW Board of Studies requires a much more prescriptive form of homeschooling compared to all the other states and territories.

**(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,**

My four children were homeschooled from kindergarten and never attended pre-school. My two oldest have spent some time in school and are both currently studying at Open University. Neither of these children have done the HSC. My two youngest have never been to school.

I have found that homeschooling has allowed my children to pursue their interests beyond their school grade level. They have also been able to learn things that they would never have learnt at school. They have not suffered academically – in fact I would suggest that homeschooling actually gives children an education superior to public education. This is backed up by research done in America that shows homeschool children perform 30% better than their public school counterparts (B Ray, 1997; R Williams, 2014). I have found this to be our experience.

We considered sending my son to school in Year 4 and we did an admission test for the gifted and talented program at St Phillips Christian College, Newcastle. We were told he came second in the test. He was competing against children who went to private and public schools. My oldest son then went to school in Year 7 till Year 10. He was approached to be Middle School Captain by his teachers within 3 months of being at the school. After he had been at school for less than 12 months he came

third in a national competition at Monash University for website design – website design was a skill he had learnt at home.

Homeschooling has allowed our children to be active participants in the community. They have participated in charity work, such as helping at local charity based events and preparing food baskets as Christmas gifts to the needy. Both of my girls are involved with the Waratah Girl's choir and were voted the junior Choir captains by their peers. This required public speaking and leadership skills. My oldest daughter was able to travel to Europe with the choir, and is currently a student leader in the senior choir.

My children have been able to pursue their music interests. My oldest daughter has Grade 6 singing and Grade 4 piano. She has also been awarded a singing scholarship for 2 years.

These children are seen as leaders of their youth group. My 16 year old daughter runs a monthly group for young teenage girls.

**(ii) financial costs,**

Homeschooling has minimal cost implications for the government. We are not using up school resources. However homeschooling has a heavy cost burden for families as the main educator must be at home and can't necessarily pursue a career.

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

We homeschool because we think it is best for our children. As a parent I am motivated for my child to succeed. I want them to get a good job and be well educated. I am interested in them finding the career path that suits them. I want to make sure that they are learning and I want to keep in touch with how they are progressing. I also want to make sure my children have a good educational environment and that the educational content supports our personal educational philosophy. I am a Christian and I want to give my children a Christian education

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

Whilst I have seen a great increase of homeschoolers in my local area (and my business) I have also seen a growing distrust of the government as the documentation requirements become more complicated. This is resulting in more parents choosing not to register.

Distrust has increased because the perception is that the current registration process is a meaningless bureaucratic exercise that hinders rather than helps homeschoolers in their planning and organisation. There is also a perception that the underlying agenda is to dissuade people from homeschooling in favour of traditional schooling and that this is being driven by people (mostly teachers) who do not understand the benefits of homeschooling.

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

I think all children have special needs and homeschooling has allowed me to cater for those needs. I have been able to change curriculum that suits each child's learning style. I have been able to accelerate one child and slow down one child who was struggling with some subjects. I have also been able to avoid the negative effects of comparison for the below average progress in one subject for one student.

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

Most parents love their children and want the best for them and the extreme effort required to homeschool is not something a neglectful parent would desire. It is much easier to blame the teachers for your children's learning problems than yourself. Homeschooling parents are committed to seeing their children succeed. This is a big difference to other forms of education. Yes teachers may want their students to succeed, but generally speaking, parents have a much greater commitment to that process.

Homeschooling is not distance education. It is not just getting subjects done and handing them back to the teacher. Homeschooling allows you to incorporate different educational methods. We follow a loosely based Charlotte Mason Method. The sequence and methods of education do not fit well with the NSW syllabus scope and sequence. However this particular philosophy of education is well researched and used by many educators all over the world. There are a great number of educational resources that support this method.

**(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:**

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

I am not unregistered, however, I do have friends that are and I believe that one of the reasons that they don't register is because they don't agree with the regulatory constraints of the NSW board of studies. They are not lazy they just have an

educational pathway that they feel committed to and they see the NSW approval process as a paperwork exercise that is unnecessary as far as their children's education goes. The process has nothing to offer them. It doesn't give any advantages only intrusions. The certificates mean nothing so why should they do it.

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

The NSW Board of Studies needs to make sure that the Approved Assessors have a good idea of homeschooling philosophy. All of the assessors I have met have been retired school principals. They only know the school way of doing things. Most of them have been really nice people but many don't understand homeschooling. I have found my initial visit with an AP has often involved me helping them to understand the homeschooling approach we are using.

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

I believe it would be far more appropriate for parents to be guided by the National Curriculum (and not the NSW Syllabus as this is far more detailed and written for schools) – as is the case in all other states and territories.

The NSW syllabus can be there as a guideline but not followed to particular specifications and not with the insistence that outcomes (or stage statements) be attached to each learning experience. The NSW syllabus is written for schools and whilst it is good to have a guideline available, enforcing homeschoolers to work in specific grades in all subjects is totally inappropriate for homeschooling.

One of the common reasons that parents may choose to homeschool is that they see that they need to adapt the school curriculum to suit the particular strengths and weakness of their child that is falling short – or finding difficult. Making parents adhere strictly to a syllabus can therefore be counterproductive and not in the best interests of the child. Parents should be able to cover the syllabus but not necessarily in the same sequence as the National curriculum is set out. Sure there will be gaps in learning if they return to school but there will be other things that they will have learnt that school kids would have missed.

I also believe that subjects like creative arts and personal health and development still be taught but not as per the syllabus.

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

Homeschooling provides a very safe environment for children to grow up in. My daughter went to school in Year One for a term. She found that her teacher spent a great deal of her time trying to control the class and one particular child. She said that the teacher shouted so much that my daughter put her head down and acted like she was colouring in so that the teacher wouldn't see her crying. She found the bullying of the "fat girl" very distressing. My other child who was in third grade at the same time, who had a very good teacher, said that he also had a boy who ruined the class every day and the teacher used to try to make sure he had his medication every day. These two experiences were at a local public school that I believe had a good reputation.

Homeschooling has allowed me to give my children a good learning atmosphere. Even though my children are not perfect we have been able to work through issues as they arise. It is not a totally child centred environment either. Children learn about schooling and living. They learn to deal with the interruptions of daily life but still achieve their educational goals.

Yes I suppose there is less outside supervision from teachers but the suggestion that parents want to homeschool in order to abuse their children is offensive, and untrue. Homeschooling requires planning and effort. Whilst there may be child abusers who homeschool my experience is that in general, parents who choose to homeschool do so out of a loving, self sacrificing commitment to their children. Are these so called homeschoolers who abuse children really homeschoolers anyway? Are they going to let the approved person into their home to assess their learning plan?

Some people believe that because children are not at school they are unsocialised. However I would dispute this. My children interact with a broad section of the community through other homeschool families, church families, recreational pursuits, family friends and relatives. They also have homeschooling excursions, visit the doctors, shop, use community facilities and interact with staff at libraries, art galleries, museums and retail outlets.

My daughter has asthma and while she was under 10 it was good to be able to keep her asthma care under control.

I also have one child who has required attention to special learning needs. These issues have been addressed without stigma and I'm happy to report that this child has grown out of many of the issues that would have required "specialist attention" in

a school. This child in particular has benefitted greatly by having the opportunity to home school.

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

The current practice of making homeschoolers complete such overwhelming documentation will not increase the percentage of registered homeschoolers. The NSW Board of Studies need to make the documentation more applicable to homeschooling requirements.

One of the main complaints that I have is the way the new registration guidelines have been set out. As far as I'm concerned the most significant change is to follow the NSW syllabus (which was always a requirement) and linking the learning with outcomes of the syllabus to your lessons. This is a very cumbersome requirement. No other state or territory requires such cumbersome documentation. Previously we could just say we were following the syllabus and give examples of how we were doing this with a discussion of planning and showing our resources and a general planning guideline.

Now the extremely difficult thing about this requirement is there are about 80 requirements per stage (which usually lasts 2 years) and these requirements are not set out in an easy way. You have to sift through the NSW Board of Studies website and documents picking them out. This useless piece of red tape (that the approved person will probably only glance at) is not set up to help us. Its effect is to scare homeschoolers, adding an extra burden to our already busy schedules.

In the new Board of Studies Home Schooling package (August 2013) on page 32 they give a full page example of how a parent might meet just one outcome. This type of documentation would be impossible to maintain and is completely unnecessary. Whilst the Home Education Unit has told me over the phone *it just one example*, it is hard to imagine any homeschooler could do such thorough documentation for every outcome. I believe it is an unrealistic example and should be removed.

Also many learning experiences cross a range of outcomes. If you have a few children you would spend large portions of your day trying to update outcomes and how can you be expected to even remember specific outcomes. I am an experienced home educator and find this very daunting. New homeschoolers find this impossible.

These outcomes are not content based. For example a Year 1 outcome is, "Engages in writing texts with the intention of conveying an idea or message." It doesn't tell

you what to write but rather that your child wrote something (anything) and their writing had a purpose. Sure we can tick off a requirement that this is what our child can do but why do we honestly need to? The biggest hassle is that we have to take our perfectly good curriculums and spend hours working out how to match them up with the educationally jargoned outcomes of the NSW Syllabus.

I believe that the NSW Board of Studies also needs to give people an interim approval before they show any documentation. In Queensland you register to homeschool and you get a probationary approval and have about 3 months before you have to provide your documentation. I think this is much better as parents get a feel for homeschooling and after a few months they start to understand the homeschooling process much more.

The other requirement which is restrictive, and unworkable, is the insistence that the HSC syllabus be followed for Year 11 registration. It is my opinion that the Authorised Person also finds this requirement unworkable and often advises people to just say "Year 10 extension". Why is it necessary to follow the HSC syllabus when there is not prospect of being able to even sit the HSC when homeschooling? Conversely why is it that homeschooled students are excluded from sitting the HSC if they wish to?

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

One practice that I would definitely like to see implemented in NSW is the ability for parents to utilize part time school like you can do in Victoria and ACT. This would be of particular benefit in the latter years of high school when part time based school study may assist with the transition to tertiary education.

I would also like to see a way homeschool students can apply for student concessions on public transport.

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

I believe that the NSW Board of Studies home education unit does not really understand the needs of home educators. Nor does it recognise the fundamental right of parents to determine the best educational journey for their own children. Currently their aim seems to be to impose a narrow view of educational methods and outcomes, rather than assist with obtaining the best possible outcomes for homeschooled children.



It seems appropriate that at least one member from the Home Education Association (HEA) be represented on the NSW Board of Studies. Whilst the HEA is a national body they have a large NSW representation and have the ability to communicate with a wide range of registered and unregistered home educators.

**It is my hope that this inquiry will result in:**

- the removal of the current registration package provided by the NSW Board of Studies (and in particular removal of the need to adhere rigidly to the NSW Syllabus).
- A probationary period for new homeschoolers before they are required to show full documentation (of at least 3 months).
- documentation requirements reduced and rewritten to reflect the nature of homeschooling.
- the National Curriculum being used as guide for homeschool planning only.
- A restructuring of the NSW Board of Studies to ensure that homeschooling is recognised as a viable educational model and that homeschoolers be supported, not opposed, in their efforts.

Yours Sincerely,

**Date:**

**References**

Dr. Brian Ray, *Strengths of Their Own: Home Schoolers Across America*, National Home Education Research Institute, Salem, OR, 1997.

Williams, Rodger. (2014). The homeschool effect.

Cited 14/07/2014 <http://thehomeschooleffect.com/the-homeschool-effect.html>