

home education association inc.

Home education is a growing sector in education. More than 3000 children are currently registered for home education in NSW, there having been a 40% increase in registrations over the past five years. However, these statistics underestimate the true number of home educated children as many families opt out of the registration system; there may be more than 10 000 home educated children in NSW. Recent changes to the regulation of home education in NSW have made the situation for many home educating families. Consequently, many have brought issues associated with the registration process and the inequity of resourcing of home education to the attention of Members of the NSW Parliament.

Regulation of home education has become inappropriate and unreasonable. The administrative framework for home education in NSW was recently changed resulting in a process that is excessively bureaucratic, disproportionately reliant on paperwork and does not provide sufficient attention to the quality of education being provided. This has caused great distress in the home education community.

Numerous home education applicants have been poorly treated during the registration process and there are inadequate avenues for complaint or appeal. Many home education applicants have been refused registration or been given short registration periods however BoSTES has refused to provide applicants with written rationales for these decisions. While a comparison between the 2011 and 2013 Information packs clearly identifies significant changes to policy, procedure and attitude to home education, BoSTES has repeatedly asserted, and continues to assert that no changes have been made to the registration process. Recent data released by the Minister for Education proves otherwise as the number of home education rejections/withdrawals and short registration periods has increased from between 98% and 600% between 2011 and 2013. These changes are causing great distress in the home education community and increasing numbers of home educators are opting out of the registration system.

Issues resulting from the changes imposed on home educators are directly attributable to:

- No representation of home educators on the BoSTES or involvement in decision making regarding home education;
- Lack of understanding of the needs of home educating families;
- Little understanding of the diverse educational methods employed by home educators and the educational outcomes demonstrably met by home educated children;
- Lack of input from, consultation with or oversight by home educators, in the development of the new administrative framework;
- Authorised Persons assessing home educating families for registration being unable to adequately assess home education applicants due to poor knowledge of home education.

Solutions:

- BoSTES should include a representative member of the home education community and mechanisms should be put in place to involve the home education community in decision making with regards home education.
- A representative of the home education community should be a part of interview panels for Authorised Persons.
- Authorised Persons should be required to undertake training (delivered by home educators) on home education philosophy and methods.
- The current assessment framework (August 2013 information pack), should be withdrawn and revert to the previous system of 2011 (along with related AP manual).
- Any substantial changes to home education registration policy or process should be undertaken in consultation with the representative home educators.

Issue

Home educated children are excluded from educational resources. There is a lack of equity for home education in comparison to other educational sectors. Home educated children are excluded from educational opportunities that are available to government and private school students in NSW such as TVET courses, Open High School, School Sports programs, support programs for children with a disability, hospital school programs and educational resources operated by the Department of Education such as Belgenny Farm.

Home educated children can study subjects that are a part of the HSC and sit the relevant exams but they are ineligible for award of the HSC. Home educated children are unable to be registered if they are younger than six years or are past their 17th birthday and therefore they are not considered to be students by organisations such as Centrelink or Cityrail. Home educating families are unable to maintain registration while travelling domestically. Exclusion from such resources and opportunities appears to be of a punitive nature. Many families see little reason to register when they receive little in the way of benefit in doing so.

Solutions:

- Systems should be implemented that promote engagement between home educators and the school system.
- This may involve allowance of part time registration for home education and part time enrolment in school (as in the ACT and Victoria).
- In addition, home educating families could choose to connect with a local school. In exchange schools could be provided with a resource allocation based upon the population of home educated children linked with that school that would provide support to these families (this system was proposed by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Queensland).
- A policy that home educated students have access to resources available to students in government schools could be implemented.
- A policy change could be made to allow children between 4.5 years and 19 years to be registered for home education and for families normally resident in NSW to register while travelling.