

15 September 2013

The Hon. Adrian Piccoli, MP
Level 34 Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister Piccoli,

I am writing to you on behalf of the NSW members of the Home Education Association (HEA). The HEA is a non-profit volunteer association that was incorporated in 2001 to encourage and promote the practice of home educating in Australia and to provide support to home educating families. The HEA has the largest membership of any home education organisation in Australia.

Home education is one of the three legal modes of education for children in NSW, the two others being state schooling or private schooling. Families wishing to home educate their children are required to register their children for home education with the NSW Office of the Board of Studies (OBoS). The number of registered home educated students in NSW has steadily increased over the last five years. The NSW Parliamentary Research Service published an e-brief on home education in August 2013. This e-brief provides a good summary of home education in Australia, HEA have enclosed it for your reference.

The experience of the HEA is that the registration process for home educators in NSW has proceeded relatively smoothly for the vast majority until about two years ago. However, over the past two years, HEA members have been reporting that the registration process had changed and that they were being asked to provide information or undertake paperwork beyond that ever before required. The registration process had become extremely stressful and difficult for some families, including the children. The diversity of locations from which these reports originated and their sustained and repeated nature, led the HEA to believe there had been a major change in policy and practice at the OBoS.

The HEA approached the OBoS on a number of occasions making specific enquiry as to whether there had been any changes to registration policy or practice. HEA were advised there had been none and that no changes had occurred since October 2011. On the 30th of July 2013, HEA representatives met with the OBoS to again raise the issue of changes in registration practice and policy. At that time the HEA were advised that there had been no changes but a new Registration for Home Schooling in NSW Information Package was about to be published. HEA were also advised that the new August 2013 Information Package contained only minor changes as compared to the previous 2011 Information Package.

The 2013 Registration for Home Schooling in NSW Information Package was published on the 26th of August. The 2013 Information Package was very different from the 2011 Information Package containing major changes in policy and procedures for home education registration. The HEA is of the opinion the significant changes noted in the 2013 Information Package were directly responsible for the difficulties in registration HEA members were reporting. The enclosed background paper describes the most problematic changes as reported by HEA members.

The changes in the registration process were made without consultation with the HEA or any other home education group. These changes are causing great distress within the home education community. HEA note it is standard practice where change is proposed within the school system for the state and private school sector to be consulted by OBoS. The HEA met with the OBoS on the 4th of September 2013 requesting the new policy changes and the 2013 Information Package be withdrawn, and consultation with home educators initiated.

The serious level of repercussions reported by homeschooling families as directly attributable to the implementation of the 2013 Information pack resulted in the HEA advising OBoS that the starting point for any consultative process would necessarily be the withdrawal of the 2013 Information Pack. The OBoS has since advised that they do not intend to withdraw the new policy changes.

HEA would like to request a meeting with you on this matter. HEA requests that, as a matter of urgency, the registration process return to that described in the OBoS 2011 Information Pack. The magnitude of distress within the home educating community resulting from of the implementation by OBoS of the 2013 Information Pack is enormous. Further HEA requests that consultation with home educators be mandatory before any change is made to the registration process in NSW. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Please contact our Secretary, Sharyn Grebert, directly.

Ms Sharyn Grebert, HEA Secretary
Ph: 040 701 4229
Email: secretary@hea.edu.au
Mailing address: as above, HEA Office

Sincerely,



Tamara Kelly
HEA President
president@hea.edu.au

