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16 September 2013

Glen Brooks
Member for East Hills

Dear Mr. Brooks,

We are very concerned and extremely upset about the latest changes to the NSW Board of Studies (BoS) Info Pack 2013. If we are forced to interpret and implement it as it is written, it will dramatically affect the lives of everyone in our family in a negative way. Our children will not have room to grow in their strengths, will not be able to enjoy studying together and sharing learning experiences as a family and the planning and documentation will bury the home schooling mum so that she is unable to inspire and excite her children to enjoy and explore life and the incredible world they are in.

The very reasons that we choose to home school and pay for our own children's education (with no government assistance in spite of the taxes we pay) is so that our children can be inspired and excel and not be smothered by limitations and boundaries. We are extremely disappointed that we have been put back in the school education box when we have invested so much time and money to give our children the best they can have.

It also implies that we have been doing an insufficient job at teaching our children. Have we failed our children so badly that the BoS has to step in and compel us to teach exactly what they want and when they want it taught? Don't we have our children's best interest at heart? Do they think that we would be fine with our children being ignorant or embarrassed by a 'lack of knowledge'? NOBODY has our children's best interest at heart like we do. We have a very creative daughter and five sons who will need to be successful financially and provide for their families in the future ... and we are determined that they will be fully equipped for that ... AND we want all of them to contribute to their community and use their talents for their own and other's enjoyment. So we will absolutely not ruin their education nor their character development. The stringent changes imply that we would be neglectful and complacent if left to our own planning.

In the previous BoS Info Pack, the Curriculum Guidelines for the Key Learning Areas provided a good focus for us to be thorough in thinking through and planning our children's education. Removing them and expecting us to fully adhere to the School Syllabus for each year (or stage) put too much pressure on a family with many children. It would be an unwise use of our time to have to plan and help each child on their own topic, investigations, projects and goals for every subject. When we started home schooling, that is what we did and it did not work. The children did not get the best learning experience out of it as the parent has to keep switching between all the different topics (one child in each stage) and there was no company for them - it was too isolating. It only works in a school situation as

there is an entire class looking at the topic together.

Our learning now is very successful. For example, in term 2 we studied Ancient Rome. We read history books together, listened to audio tapes, watched several programs on Roman architecture (multiple times as they were so interested), wrote stories as though they were living at that time, built a model of the Colosseum, read historical fiction, had extensive discussions on living in that era and they did individual projects (Julius Caesar, gladiators, famous Roman architecture and weaponry). Each read extensively on their own topic and enjoyed learning about each other's projects. We entered the local Science and Engineering Challenge as a community team (four older kids ages 15, 13, 10 & 8 - against year 9/10 students) and they won the bridge building competition due to their use of the Roman architecture they had learned about. Our kids will never forget this topic and the fun they had doing it. It cannot compare with what they would have done if each was stuck following the syllabus in stages. We strongly object to being forced to abandon a style of learning that we love.

Our children excel in science and math. They should be free to move along the natural learning curve without having to think about the limits of each year level. Needing permission to school in a different year level seems to be restrictive and discouraging to the natural learning process. This is another case of trying to put the children back in the school education box. The argument may then be that the kids will be free to do that, but the parents have to just get permission ... then this becomes another case of making things more burdensome for the parent, more paperwork for something that will be a given only if we ask permission. There is no benefit to the child or the system in requiring this.

The documentation requirements also seem to be even more stringent than what is produced or required for children at school. When our children were at school, we never saw any individual progress or record keeping. The school basically had a list of test scores and an opinion of the child's attitude and effort. As my children were very quiet and fairly shy in a group setting, the school did not always have a correct opinion. The BoS Info Pack examples of documentation imply that we have to document and give an opinion on each child, each subject, each day. As the children will all be required to do different things every time when we are working, we will be forced to spend a fair portion of each day recording. As this is something that no school teacher in a regular school would be required to do, this is discrimination thinly disguised as compliance.

We are Christians who believe in the authority of the Bible. We believe that the physical evidence provides ample scientific support for the authenticity of the Bible's account of the origins of the Universe and the world. We teach our children to explore all facets of evolution and creation and carry out critical thinking to determine their own convictions about the truth. We do not agree with the full content of the Syllabuses as they are oriented around evolution and atheism as the only valid 'scientific' option, and therefore we are not able in good conscience to teach that material as though it were absolute truth. As conscientious objectors to the national syllabus, we defend our right to teach our children our beliefs, just as any Muslim, Jew or Atheist would.

Our daughter came by and saw us writing this. She asked if we should include that she did not have any friends at school and now she has lots of friends. She is now happy, thriving and loving the work she does. While she doesn't really enjoy essay writing compared to science and art, she is very capable and has a good attitude. There is great benefit in being able to experience rather than producing output for a mark the teacher can put on a report. If the new BoS Info Pack stays, it is likely that we will not be able to cope with the individual planning and record keeping for all our children and thus be forced to put them back in school. We hope that this is not the goal of the BoS. We do not want our children to be stifled and miserable, but what they are requiring of us is unmanageable.

We feel that the BoS Info Pack has changed in its tone and intent. If you examine this excerpt, you will see that what the BoS is calling minor changes and adjustments, have a significant and negative effect on a home schooling family. Please note that the crossed words were in the previous pack and are now removed and that the underlined words are new to the 2013 IP. "~~Home schooling, also called referred to as home education, allows requires a parent to integrate deliver the NSW Board of Studies curriculum with the learning processes that occur naturally in the home throughout a child's development.~~" This fundamental difference is evident all the way through the new BoS Info Pack in regard to many different issues. These so called minor changes are causing an uproar through the home school community as parents frantically try to determine how to comprehend, deal with and comply with these new and prohibitive restrictions.

Just last Thursday, the BoS released a Q&A supplement to their Info Pack in response to the overwhelming number of letters they have received addressed to both themselves and the Minister of Education calling for a withdrawal of the 2013 Info Pack. The home school community finds this new document confusing and dubious. It directly conflicts with many of the directives set out in the actual Info Pack. For example, it tells us that we can continue teaching the same way and that nothing has changed except that they are clarifying that we need follow the syllabus. They genuinely believe that this should be no big deal. We would like to contest this, as logically, it is not possible to achieve all of the outcomes of the syllabus without following the content of the syllabus. There are many letters to the HEA about the enforcement of the 2013 Info Pack. For example, several families were told that they had to work between 9am and 3pm. The Q&A states, "learning times to suit the family". That was not what they were enforcing. We believe that the Q&A was written to appease the home school community so that the 2013 Info Pack does not need to be withdrawn. The Q&A could change or be withdrawn at any time. If we do not get the 2013 Info Pack withdrawn, we will eventually have to comply.

The Info Pack clearly states that we have to follow the Board of Studies curriculum. The Curriculum Guidelines that were in previous Info Packs, allowed a parent to plan the year taking into account all the main elements that made up a Key Learning Area. Home schooling parents found these Guidelines helpful and well-rounded, leaving scope for children to expand their studies in areas of interest. Just say that we only had to follow the BoS curriculum to the outcome level, it would not help us to plan or visualise a quality education. In fact, it would hinder us, as it gives us only a picture of the leaves and not the branches of each tree (Key Learning Area). In order to plan well, we need to see the branches of the tree. The leaves (or outcomes) are not an appropriate basis for working out an educational plan.

We would like to show you the Education Act 1990.

In enacting this Act, Parliament has had regard to the following principles:

- (a) every child has the right to receive an education,
- (b) the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child's parents,
- (c) it is the duty of the State to ensure that every child receives an education of the highest quality,
- (d) the principal responsibility of the State in the education of children is the provision of public education.

We understand this to mean that we have the responsibility and right to educate our children. The duty of the State is to ensure that we are doing this in a way that ensures an education of the highest quality. If the quality of education we are giving our children is equal to or higher than that provided by public education, we are fulfilling the requirements of the Act. Therefore, the State should have an appropriate independent body to facilitate their duty to home schoolers, rather than having the Board of Studies force us to follow the NSW Syllabus.

Another major problem we have with the 2013 Info Pack is that it was not developed in consultation with home schoolers, the very people it affects. The Board of Studies are now making false claims of consultation. They now claim they consulted with the HEA. The HEA have no record or recollection of such consultation. In the NSW Hansard 20/10/98 Hon JF Ryan (9:14pm) *"The evidence presented by the Board of Studies made it crystal clear that the formal requirements of the Subordinate Legislation Act were not complied with. No regulation impact statement was conducted, nor was a draft regulation circulated to interested parties for comment ... Representatives of the Board of Studies tried to put forward a hopeless case that since their regulation changed nothing and was not controversial, no consultation was required. They attempted to claim that their regulation had wide community support, but they were unable to table one single sheet of paper giving tangible proof that they had asked anybody about the form or content of the regulation."* The situation in 1998 was very similar to the situation we find ourselves in today.

We request that:

- 1) Home schoolers be able to educate their children as described in the Education Act 1990 and not according to the BoS Syllabus
(http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/parents/pdf_doc/home-edu-info-pack-13.pdf)
- 2) The requirements be reverted back to Curriculum Guidelines to allow families to plan a quality education
- 3) The recordkeeping be reasonable, manageable and not onerous
- 4) The home schooling compliance system is developed and revised in consultation and peer reviewed with a range of actual home schoolers

Yours Respectfully
Ben and Sharon Wu