



Home Schooling

Review

1 October 2003

HOME SCHOOLING REVIEW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Home schooling in Queensland is not well understood. It is seen by many as either a social or educational aberration pursued by a small minority of fringe groups within the community, or as a manifestation of parental neglect. This perception is no different to most other parts of Australia.

In the absence of significant Australian scholarly research into the home education movement which pre-dates public education, opponents and critics often call for evidence that is not readily available or promulgate myths about parents' reasons for making this conscious educational choice.

Current legislative and regulatory frameworks do little to build trust and mutual respect between the home schooling community and the State. But what is most evident from the review is that there is a need for change from the present.

The recommendations below are not designed to provide the answer to all issues. They are designed to provide a way forward on a complex social and educational phenomena that is here to stay.

RECOMMENDATION 1

1.1 *That the current Education (General Provisions) Act 1989 s114 be omitted and replaced by a new section.*

1.2 *That the following amendment be considered:*

s114 Education of children

- (1) Each parent of a child of compulsory school age shall cause the child to be educated and must -
 - (a) ensure the child is enrolled with a State educational institution or a non-State school; and*
 - (b) ensure the child attends the institution or school, on every school day, for the educational program in which the child is enrolled; or*
 - (c) be educated in some other manner as prescribed in regulation.**
- (2) A child attends an institution or school only if he or she complies with the institution or school's requirements about physically attending, at particular times, its premises or another place.*
- (3) However, despite subsection (2) -
 - (a) a child enrolled in a program of distance education attends the school of distance education by completing and returning the assigned work of the program; and*
 - (b) a child enrolled in another program that does not require physical attendance at the institution or school's premises or another place attends the institution or school by complying with its requirements about communicating with or contacting the institution or school for the purpose of participating in the program.**
- (4) Subsection (1) applies subject to this part.*

RECOMMENDATION 2

2.1 *That the current dispensation requirements of a parent who wishes to home school a child be replaced by a registration requirement.*

2.2 *That the registration requirement be defined in regulation.*

2.3 *That registration be required annually for each child.*

RECOMMENDATION 3

3.1 *That the payment of a prescribed fee (\$1,000 per annum per child) for services and resources from State schools of distance education by home schooling parents of children of compulsory school age be abolished.*

3.2 *That as a consequence of the abolition of this fee, the resourcing models of State schools of distance education who previously received this fee be re-examined and adjusted where necessary.*

RECOMMENDATION 4

4.1 *That home schooling parents continue to be permitted to access the services and resources of State and non-State schools of distance education.*

4.2 *That enrolment of a child in an approved school of distance education by a home schooling parent, be deemed to meet the requirements of registration as outlined in Recommendation 2.*

RECOMMENDATION 5

5.1 *That home schooling parents continue to be permitted to adopt an “own” program approach to the education of their children.*

5.2 *That such a decision be recorded as part of a registration requirement as defined in regulation.*

5.3 *That the current requirement of a parent to be a registered teacher, or to engage or employ a registered teacher in order to teach an “own” program be abolished.*

5.4 *That the annual reporting of educational outcomes be defined in regulation.*

5.5 *That failure to report on educational outcomes result in cancellation of registration and consequent sanctions as defined in regulation.*

RECOMMENDATION 6

6.1 *That a central entity be established to provide a range of services and resources to home schooling parents including the facilitation of learning pathways and information.*

6.2 *That access to the entity be conditional upon registration of a child for the purposes of home schooling.*

6.3 *That such an entity be resourced by the Department of Education.*

RECOMMENDATION 7

- 7.1 *That a Home Schooling Advisory Committee together with its role and responsibility be established by regulation.*
- 7.2 *That the committee membership be reflective of the diversity of the home schooling community and include parents who have registered their children to be home schooled.*
- 7.3 *That the committee report annually to the Minister for Education.*
- 7.4 *That the Home Schooling Advisory Committee work with the Department of Education to develop a set of protocols to manage the interface between registered home schooling families and government agencies.*

RECOMMENDATION 8

- 8.1 *That parents of youth in the compulsory participation phase as defined by the Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill 2003 be required to meet the registration requirement as prescribed in regulation.*
- 8.2 *That the following amendment be considered as a basis for dispensation from the requirement that a young person participate in the eligible options provided by State or non-State schools.*

s25 Home schooling

The chief executive may deem a dispensation to be granted if the young person –

- (a) meets the registration requirement as prescribed in regulation; and*
- (b) will be receiving education complying with the requirements prescribed under a regulation.*

RECOMMENDATION 9

- 9.1 *That recommendations of this review so endorsed are independently evaluated within three years of their enactment.*
- 9.2 *That such an independent review be informed by the proposed Home Schooling Advisory Committee.*

INTRODUCTION

Home schooling in Queensland is not well understood. It is seen by many as either a social or educational aberration pursued by a small minority of fringe groups within the community, or as a manifestation of parental neglect. This perception is no different to most other parts of Australia.

In the absence of significant Australian scholarly research into the home education movement which pre-dates public education, opponents and critics often call for evidence that is not readily available or promulgate myths about parents' reasons for making this conscious educational choice. This is not the case in the United States, Canada and parts of Europe where home schooling is flourishing, accepted as an equivalent, valid educational option for children, and an area of increasing interest for research, policy makers and government.

WHAT IS HOME SCHOOLING?

Home schooling or home education as many prefer it to be termed, can be defined in a number of ways.

*"Home schooling is the practice of parents educating their own children themselves rather than sending them to schools for formal education. The home schooling movement is characterised by parents taking the full responsibility for their children's education instead of delegating that responsibility to another person or institution. In this sense it is different from distance education, which still delivers the responsibility of a child's education to an institution."*¹

*"Home schooling is an educational alternative to conventional school practice, where parents and guardians assume the primary responsibility for the education of their children, rather than delegating that responsibility to a state or private school."*²

*"Home schooling occurs when a child participates in his or her education at home rather than attending a public, private or other type of school. Parents or guardians assume the responsibility of educating their child and may develop their own curriculum guidelines."*³

Home schooling is legal in all Australian States and Territories but the legislative and policy framework varies considerably (Appendix 3).

Invariably home schooling is governed through some aspect of the Education Act and home schooling parents are required to comply with some specific provisions. To a greater or lesser degree, policy and guidelines shape the relationship between the state or territory government and the home schooling family. Regardless of the stated approach, this is generally characterised by a tacit acceptance of home schooling with a very light monitoring of programs if at all.

THE QUEENSLAND CONTEXT

Home schooling became a third educational alternative to enrolment at a State or non-State school for compulsory-aged children in Queensland under the *Education (General Provisions) Act 1989*. It was supported by an Order-in-Council (Appendix 2), approved on 3 August 1989, which became the basis for the Department of Education's current policy and guidelines on home schooling.

¹ Unpublished Thesis, Master of Education, QUT, T Harding 1997

² Unpublished Thesis, Master of Education Studies, CQU, B Harp 1998

³ Luffman, J. (1988). *When Parents Replace Teachers: The Home Schooling Option, Canadian Social Trends*

This is not to say that home schooling commenced in Queensland from that date. There is evidence that home schooling has been a feature of education in this State for a number of decades. But the Order-in-Council together with supporting policy and process formed the operational structure for the regulation of home schooling. This included processes for applying for the required Ministerial dispensation from compulsory schooling in order to home school, home schooling curriculum options, payment of fees for home schooling programs provided from State schools of distance education, requisite conditions for home schooling approval and simple criteria for the assessment of submitted curriculum programs.

WHY HOME SCHOOL?

There is evidence that throughout history, societies have practised home schooling. Prior to the growth in public education in many western nations during the late 1800s, home schooling was a significant education pathway that saw parents (often with support of community members) educate their children prior to the world of work.

In Australia home schooling was a feature of family life in rural and remote areas during the mid-late 1800s and much of the 1900s. Parents were the principal educators and accepted responsibility for the education of their children. The introduction of schools of distance education changed this in many ways, but the parent as home tutor still remains today.

While research is limited in Australia, the intellectual roots of the various strands of home schooling philosophy most evident in contemporary North America can be identified. The first is ideological and some classify it as the Christian Right. Its philosophical leader is the former missionary Dr Raymond Moore. His primary conclusions stated in publications (1969) such as *Home Grown Kids* and *Home-Spun Schools*, was that a child's entry into formal education should be delayed until ages 8 to 12. This was seen to allow for the spiritual and moral formation of the child.

A further strand is best captured by the writings of humanist John Holt (1923-1985) who visited Australia in 1981. Holt believed that the most civilised way to educate a child was through home schooling. His arguments were largely pedagogical and influenced by the Libertarian Left. He advocated educational decentralisation and greater parental autonomy. Those views are developed in his books *How Children Fail* (1964), *How Children Learn* (1967), *The Under-achieving School* (1969) and his definitive work *Teach Your Own* (1981).

Another prominent writer and thinker in the area was the futurist Ivan Illich who proposed the notion of "de-schooling" society. In his celebrated work *De-Schooling Society* (1971) Illich argued that schools had evolved into institutions that were detrimental, even harmful to society and to the individuals who attended them. He saw schools as further benefiting only the privileged and this in turn leads to "social polarisation". In essence he believed that schooling was not synonymous with learning for all.

Thus what has evolved is a home schooling movement that has been shaped from divergent philosophies. This broad community of interest it appears, is now reaching a broader range of families and values.

REASONS FOR HOME SCHOOLING

The reasons for home schooling are not singular and simple. They are often multiple and complex and the reason for the initial decision is often subsumed by various others within a short time. Some "parents" make this decision (to home school) prior to the birth of a child. Others make the decision over a number of years, based often on personal experience or the recommendation of family and friends. Some parents can identify a catalyst, others not.

In 1999, the United States (USA) Department of Education estimated that approximately 850,000 students were being home schooled. More recent research by Rhodes (2000) estimates this at 1.7 million or 3.4% of the school age population. In a survey completed in 1999 by the USA Department of Education, the following reasons for home schooling were identified.

Reason for Home Schooling (USA)	Percent
Better education at home	48.9
Religious reasons	38.4
Poor learning environment at school	25.6
Family reasons	16.8
Develop character/morality	15.1
Object to what school teaches	12.1
School does not challenge child	11.6
Other problems with available schools	11.5
Student behaviour problems at school	9.0
Child has special needs/disability	8.2
Transportation/convenience	2.7
Child not old enough to enter school	1.8
Cannot afford private school	1.7
Parent's career	1.5
Could not get into desired school	1.5
Other reasons*	22.2

* Parents home school their children for many reasons that are often unique to their family situation. Some of the "other reasons" parents gave for home schooling in the Parent/NHES: 1999 study were: It was the child's choice; to allow parents more control over what their children were learning; flexibility; and parents wanted year-round schooling.

(Percents do not add to 100% as respondents could state more than one reason).

As part of the review, a voluntary survey (Appendix 5) of all parents who had successfully applied in 2002 for dispensation from compulsory schooling for the purposes of home schooling in Queensland was undertaken. Question 2 asked: "*What are the major reasons why you have chosen to home school your child or children?*" The question was open-ended and elicited the following reasons for home schooling.

Reason for Home Schooling (Queensland)	Percent
Peer pressure/negative influence/distraction	29.6
More personal/one-on-one support	25.6
No faith in education system/teacher issues	21.3
Religious beliefs	20.7
Family values/bonding	17.3
Bullying while at school	16.2
Special needs/medical reasons	15.0
Flexibility for family	7.9
Provision of a safe and secure environment	6.8
Large or over-crowded classrooms	5.9
Enhanced social experiences/extra curricula activities	5.9
Travel time/isolation/lack of other options	5.4
Concerns with curriculum	4.5
Not suited to parents requirements	2.8

(Percents do not add to 100% as respondents could state more than one reason).

At a similar time, the Australian Christian Academy (ACA) conducted a survey of its 600 families in Queensland. In its submission to the review, it provided data in response to the question, *“Why are you home-schooling?”* This open-ended question elicited responses that were then allocated to suitable categories which best expressed the intent.

Reason for Home Schooling (ACA-Queensland)	Percent
Religious	34.0
Parenting	29.0
Academic	20.0
Socialisation	7.0
Practical	9.0
Special Needs	1.0

The submission states:

“Because the Australian Christian Academy is a Christian organisation, it is not surprising that this reason (religious) was given in a majority of cases..... Secondly, the parenting reasons demonstrate that these parents closely associate actively taking on their children’s education with the role of parenting. They see parenting as being fully responsible for the education of their children.

Three of the reasons categories, academic, socialisation and special needs, express the various pedagogical concerns parents have for their own children. They are concerned for their academic well-being, their social development, their individual educational or health needs. The final category of “practical” reflects reasons for not accessing alternative educational forms, such as, financial, and distance from other educational options.”

There is no simple answer to the question “Why do parents home school their children?” While there are a number of common themes that can be identified as the initial reason for the decision, this is often overtaken by more complex reasoning as unique as each child.

LEGISLATION IN QUEENSLAND

As detailed in Appendix 2, home schooling in Queensland is governed by an Order-in-Council (3 August 1989) and the relevant sections of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 1989*, Appendix 3.

In essence the Act requires a parent, prior to the commencement of home schooling, to apply for dispensation from compliance with the compulsory enrolment and attendance provisions of the Act (s115 and s116) in the approved form. This applies to all children of compulsory school age (6 to 15 years).

Dispensation is granted on the proviso that:

The child concerned is receiving, in the opinion of the Minister, instruction –

- i in a place other than a State school or a non-State school in accordance with the guidelines approved by the Governor-in-Council; or*
- ii in a range of subjects acceptable to the Minister, in some other manner which, in the opinion of the Minister, is efficient and regular.*

Having received dispensation, the Order-in-Council sets out three approved options for parents or legal guardians wishing to home school their children, viz:

- Option 1: enrolment at a State school of distance education;
- Option 2: enrolment at a non-State school with approval to offer distance education programs for the purposes of home schooling; or
- Option 3: provision of an approved curriculum program and supervision of the child’s education by a teacher registered in Queensland in the child’s home.

In the case of Options 1 and 2, applying for a dispensation requires the parent or legal guardian to identify the State or approved non-State school offering distance education programs on the application form, and to attach proof of the child’s birth and their legal guardianship. Once approved, the child can then be “enrolled” with the school and, provided relevant fees are paid (currently \$1,000 per annum for State schools and school determined fees for approved non-State schools), curriculum materials and services are provided to the child.

The current procedures for obtaining a dispensation from compulsory schooling attendance for home schooling purposes impose additional requirements on parents or legal guardians selecting option 3, the “own program” approach.

They require the parent or legal guardian to provide details in respect of the curriculum that shall:

- (i) have regard to the age, ability, aptitude and development of the student concerned;*
- (ii) take account and promote continuity of the learning experiences of the student concerned;*

- (iii) *be responsive to the changing needs of the student concerned;*
- (iv) *reflect and take into account current understandings related to educational and other development of students.*

All home schooling parents or legal guardians, regardless of option chosen, are required to:

- (d) *provide evidence of and subsequently ensure that there are sufficient and suitable resources available to support the educational program;*
- (e) *provide an undertaking concerning the period of time the child would receive instruction on each school day and the number of school days, planned in each year;*
- (f) *provide evidence that the learning area set aside for the child is conducive to the educational process.*

The process of dispensation approval and selection of option one, two or three is managed by public service officers within the Department of Education at its central office in Brisbane.

It is a paper-based process with occasional contact by telephone or more latterly by email. Parents are provided with a basic information kit including the relevant forms for completion.

Parents or legal guardians may apply for dispensation at any time during a year and the decision (approval or non-approval) is binding for that calendar year. A separate application must be completed on the approved form for each child. This means that parents must apply for dispensation each calendar year for each child.

THE NUMBER OF HOME SCHOOLERS IN QUEENSLAND

It is very difficult to provide an accurate number of children who are being home schooled in Queensland in any given year.

What can be provided with accuracy is the number of children whose parents successfully applied for dispensation from compulsory enrolment and attendance at a State or a non-State school at some time in a given year. The parents subsequently select an option for home schooling: Option 1 - State SDE; Option 2 - Non-State SDE; Option 3 - Own Program.

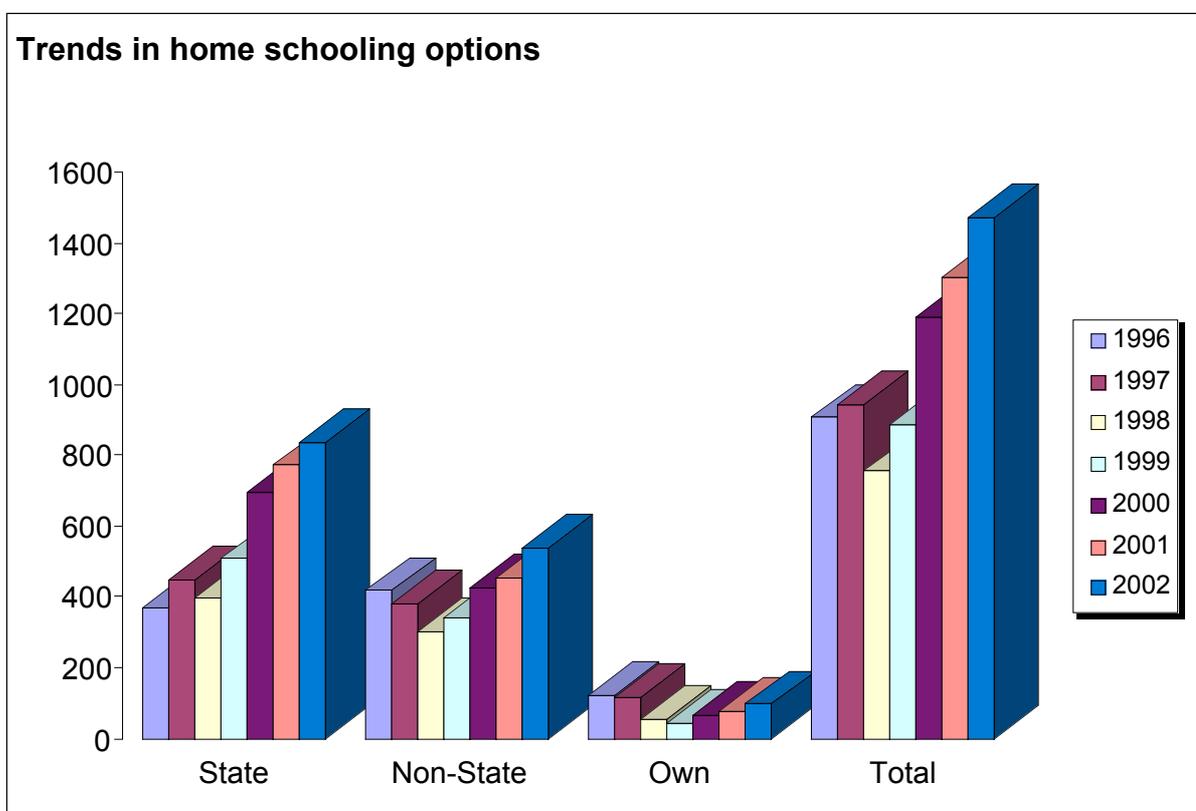
Dispensations for home schooling in Queensland

Yearly totals by chosen option

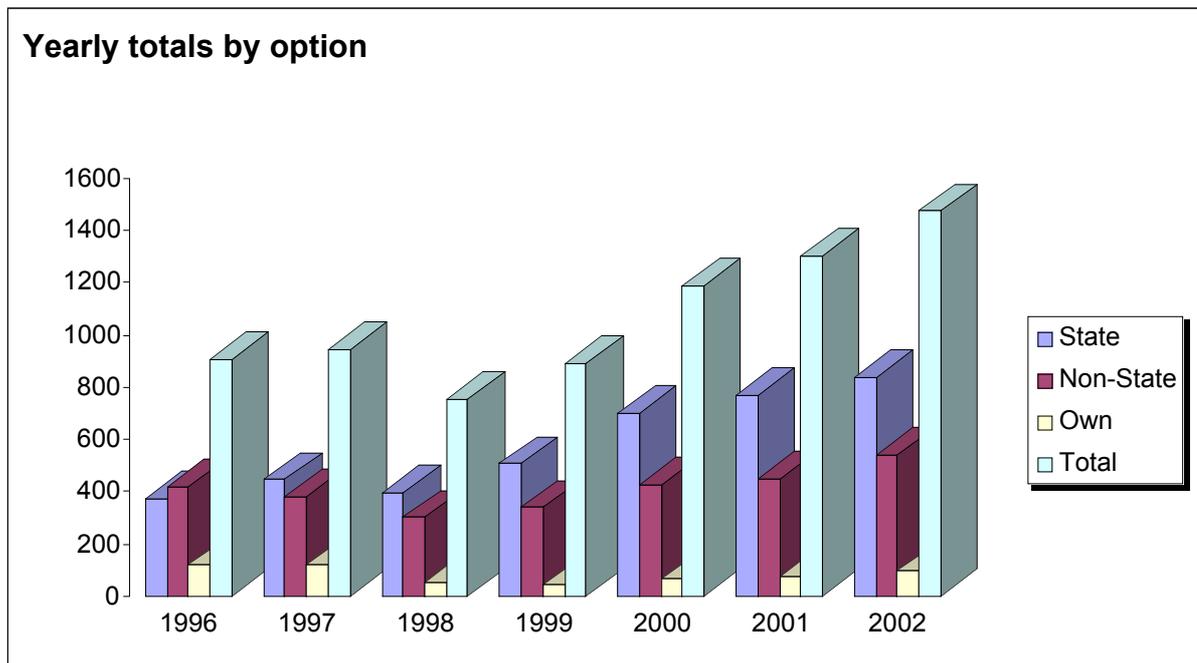
Year	State SDE		Non-State SDE		Own Program		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
1996	371	40.9	417	46.0	119	13.1	907
1997	446	47.3	379	40.2	118	12.5	943
1998	399	52.8	301	39.9	55	7.3	755
1999	507	57.0	339	38.1	43	4.8	889
2000	698	58.7	426	35.8	65	5.5	1,189
2001	772	59.2	453	34.8	78	6.0	1,303
2002	839	56.9	539	36.6	96	6.5	1,474

There are currently seven State schools of distance education and four non-State schools with approval to offer distance education programs for the purposes of home schooling.

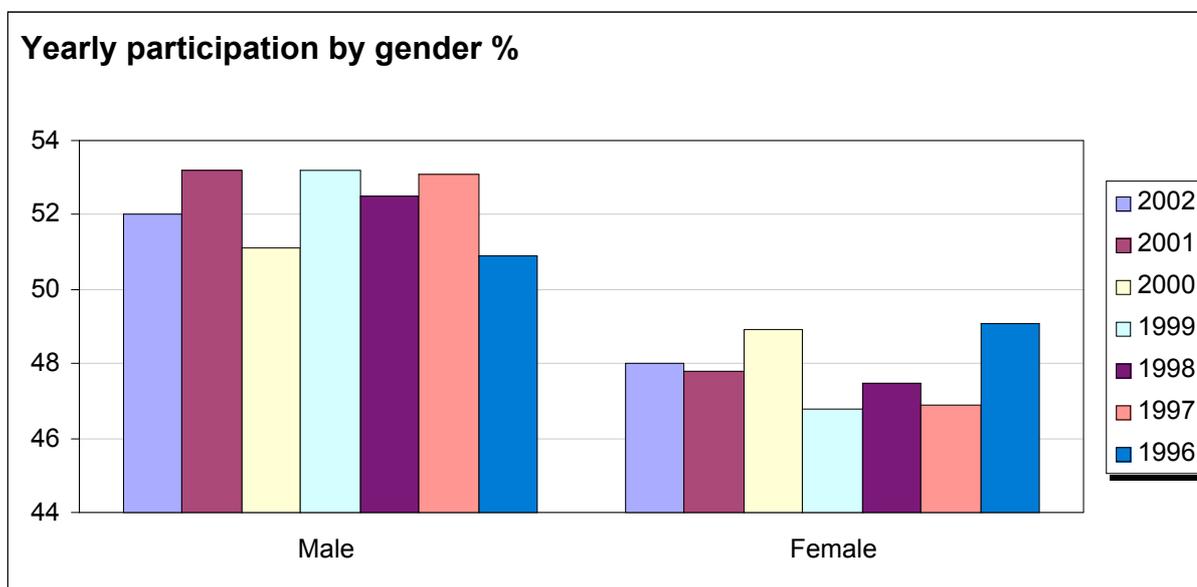
<p>STATE SCHOOLS</p>	<p>Brisbane School of Distance Education Cairns School of Distance Education Capricornia (Emerald Campus) School of Distance Education Charleville School of Distance Education Charters Towers School of Distance Education Longreach School of Distance Education Mount Isa School of Distance Education</p>
<p>APPROVED NON-STATE SCHOOLS</p>	<p>Australian Christian Academy School of Distance Education (July 2003) (Pine Rivers) Hinchinbrook Christian School (Ingham) Jubilee Christian College (Atherton) Riverside Christian College (Maryborough)</p>



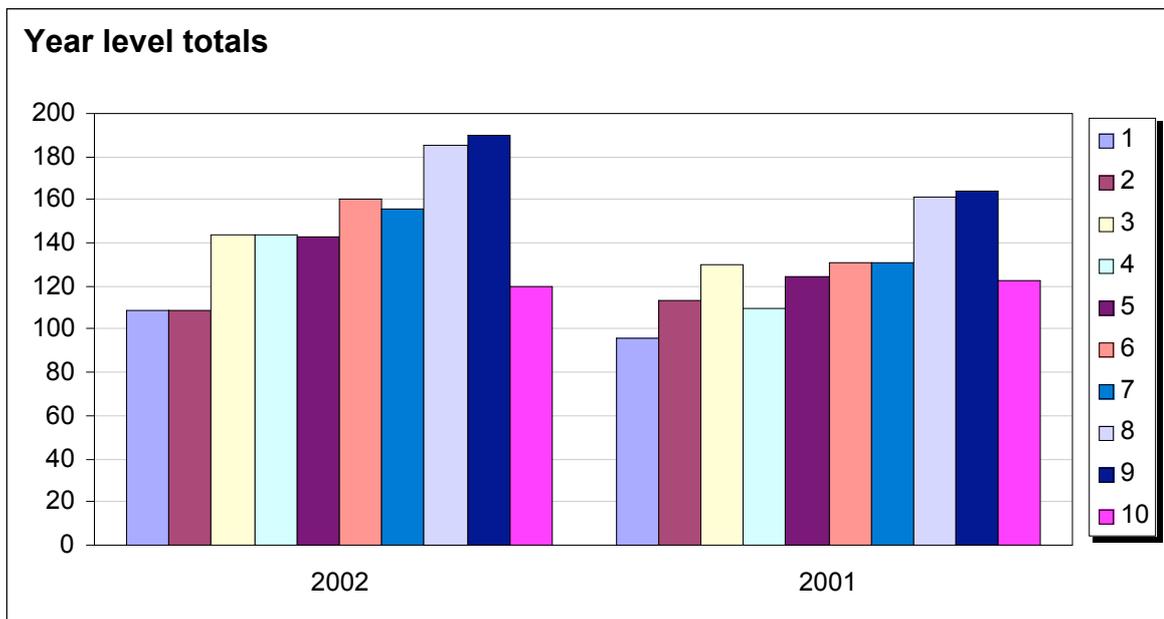
At the aggregate level it is obvious that in recent years growth in the order of 10% annually has not been uncommon, with programs provided by State and non-State schools of distance education being accessed more often than developing an “own” program.



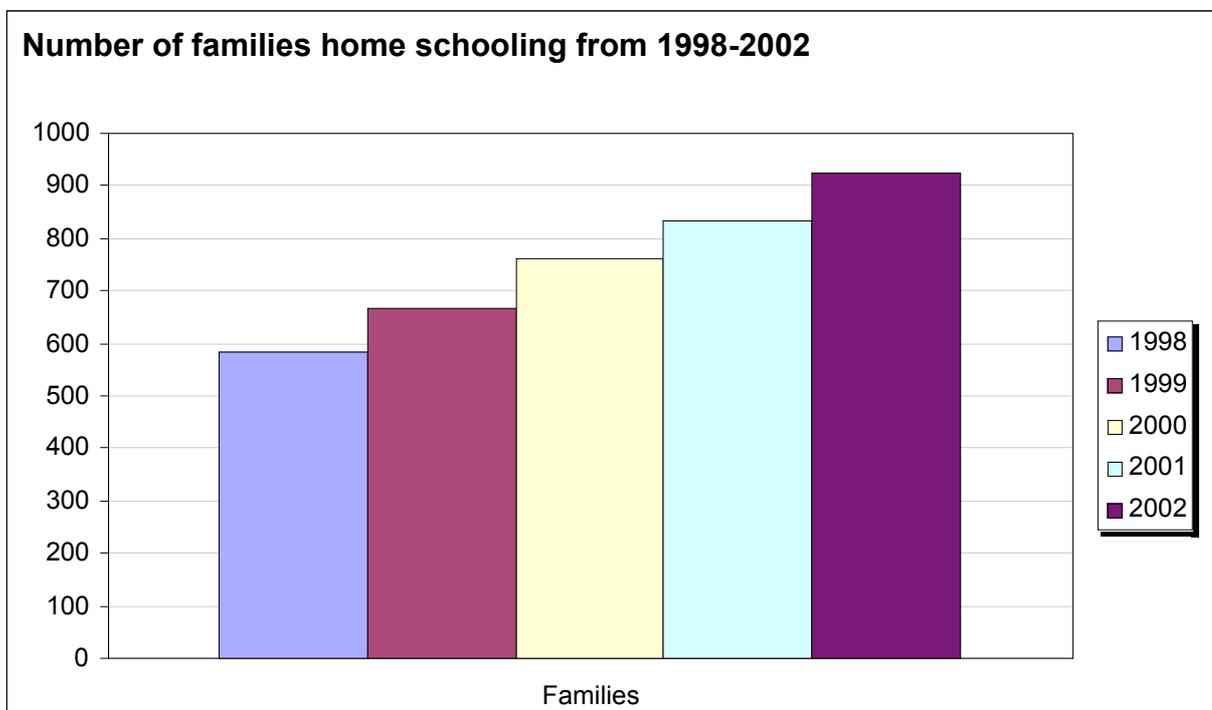
Since 1996 there has been a slightly higher proportion of male children (50-53%) than female children (47-49%) but little can be deduced from this gender comparison.



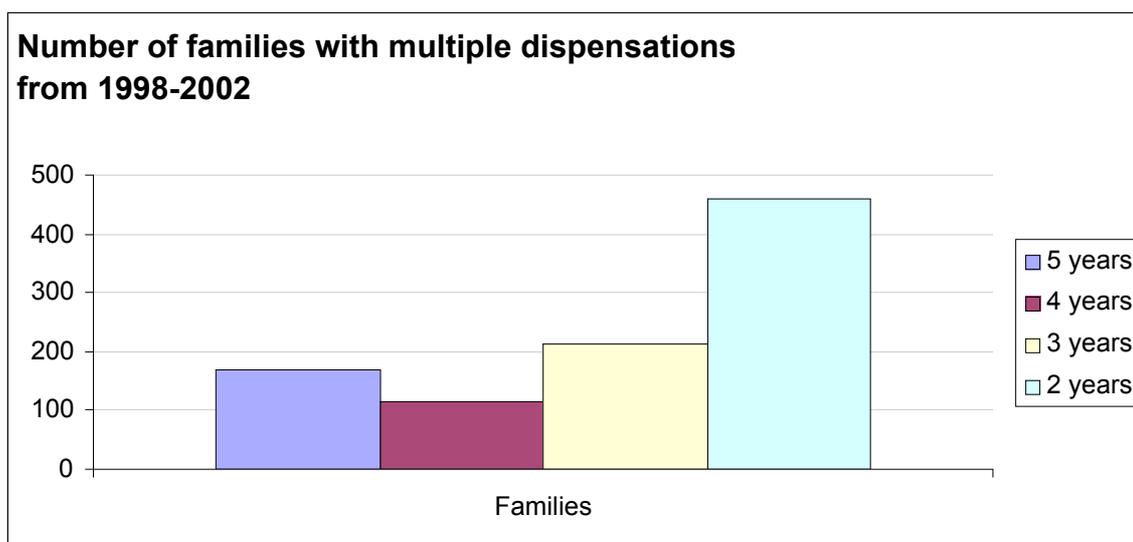
An examination of year level totals in each of 2002 and 2001 reveals that there is a steady increase in dispensations granted throughout the primary school years with a peak in Year 9. The decrease in Year 10 is attributable to many students having their 15th birthday in this school year and thus an application for dispensation is no longer required.



Of note is the increase not only in the number of children being home schooled, but the number of families who have applied for dispensation for the purposes of home schooling.



The data also show that a significant number of families continue with dispensations for more than one year.



For the period 1 January to 30 June 2003 the following number of dispensations from compulsory schooling for the purposes of home schooling were granted.

2003 DISPENSATION TOTALS TO 30 JUNE 2003					
State SDE		Non-State SDE		Own Program	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
625	49.8	525	41.9	104	8.3
TOTAL: 1,254					

Based on trend data, the 2002 total of 1,474 children will be exceeded in 2003.

While this data provides an accurate record of the number of children who have been approved under the current legislation and guidelines to be home schooled in Queensland, it does not report those children whose parents choose not to apply for dispensation, but are home schooled.

It is very difficult to know with reasonable accuracy how many more children are home schooled in Queensland outside of the current legislation and guidelines.

During the consultation phase of the review and the analysis of submissions, it became apparent that there are more children being home schooled outside of the current "dispensation process" than within it. But in the absence of any state-wide research, government agency information or census data, this is difficult to quantify. Estimates have been made by interest groups that vary widely, dependent on the assumptions in projection.

But it is possible to extrapolate from available data some range of numbers of children who may be currently home schooled in Queensland. Both Canada and New Zealand governments state that the number of home schooled children may be equivalent to one percent of the total school student enrolment in a given year. Both nations have legislation that permits home schooling and both acknowledge the growth of the home schooling movement in the past decade. This is similar to Australia.

By comparison, the United States where home schooling has been legal in all states since 1993, (it was illegal in 30 states in 1980), provides a slightly higher figure.

A major survey conducted by the USA Department of Education (National Center for Education Statistics), *Parent Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1999* concluded that in the order of 1.7% of total student enrolments were home schooled.

Number of Students and Number and Percentage of Home Schooled US Students, Ages 5-17, with a Grade Equivalent of Kindergarten to Grade 12, by selected characteristics.

Characteristic	Number of Students	Number of Home Schooled Students	Percent	Standard Error
<i>Total</i>	50,188,000	850,000	1.7	0.14
Grade equivalent, K-5	24,428,000	428,000	1.8	0.2
Kindergarten	3,790,000	92,000	2.4	0.52
Grades 1-3	12,692,000	199,000	1.6	0.29
Grades 4-5	7,946,000	136,000	1.7	0.28
Grades 6-8	11,788,000	186,000	1.6	0.24
Grades 9-12	13,954,000	235,000	1.7	0.24
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
White, non-Hispanic	32,474,000	640,000	2.0	0.19
Black, non-Hispanic	8,047,000	84,000	1.0	0.31
Hispanic	7,043,000	77,000	1.1	0.25
Other	2,623,000	49,000	1.9	0.65
<i>Sex</i>				
Female	24,673,000	434,000	1.8	0.19
Male	25,515,000	417,000	1.6	0.17
<i>Number of children in household</i>				
One child	8,226,000	120,000	1.5	0.24
Two children	19,883,000	207,000	1.0	0.14
Three or more children	22,078,000	523,000	2.4	0.30
<i>Number of parents in household</i>				
Two parents	33,007,000	683,000	2.1	0.21
One parent	15,454,000	142,000	0.9	0.16
Non-parental guardians	1,727,000	25,000	1.4	0.82

Note: Numbers may not add to total due to rounding. Number and percent of home schoolers excludes students who were enrolled in school for more than 25 hours and students who were home schooled due to a temporary illness.

Source: USA Department of Education, National Centre for Education Statistics, *Parent Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 1999*.

It is worth noting some recent research in the US projects figures higher than 1.7% (eg Rhodes, 2000 3.4%) and that the US Census Bureau now includes home schooling related questions in its survey of households.

Thus if a range of 0.5% - 1.0% - 1.7% was applied to Queensland school enrolment figures^(a), significantly more possible home schooling students would be identified.

Number of Students in Queensland Schools 2002 for Years 1-12 by selected characteristics

	Possible Home Schooling Range		
	0.5%	1.0%	1.7%
Total			
619,587	3,097	6,195	10,533
Age 6-15*			
522,943	2,614	5,229	8,890
Primary (Years 1-7)			
376,759	1,883	3,767	6,405
Secondary (Years 8-12)			
242,828	1,214	2,428	4,128
Female			
303,802	1,519	3,038	5,165
Male			
315,785	1,578	3,157	5,368

(a) Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, 2002.

As the current legislation and guidelines in Queensland only apply to 6 to 15 year old children, and there are an identified 1,474 students in 2002 approved within this regulatory framework, there may be an additional range of 1,140 - 3,755 - 7,416 children of the 6 to 15 age cohort* being home schooled, if we adopt this methodology.

A further insight may be gained by comparing the difference between the resident population and the number of students in schools for the 6 to 15 year age cohort. Using published Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2002 information and acknowledging the inherent errors in estimating resident population with point in time school enrolment data, another count range is identified.

Using this methodology and discounting for factors that may explain difference, it still appears that the 2002 official count of 1,474 dispensations for home schooling is a significant understatement of the possible total count of home schooling students.

Estimated Resident Population, Queensland, single year of age 2002 – Age 6 to 15 versus Student Enrolments at State and non-State Schools 2002

Age	Preliminary Estimate of Resident Population ^(a)	Students in State and non-State Schools ^(b)	Difference	Percentage (%) Difference ^(c)
6	53,142	51,226	1,916	3.60%
7	53,502	53,239	263	0.49%
8	53,485	53,383	102	0.19%
9	53,879	53,668	211	0.39%
10	54,514	53,767	747	1.37%
11	54,412	53,882	530	0.97%
12	53,673	53,256	417	0.77%
13	52,988	51,968	1,020	1.92%
14	52,151	50,815	1,336	2.56%
15	52,321	47,739	4,582	8.75%
Age 6 to 15	534,067	522,943	11,124	2.08%

(a) Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Population by Age and Sex 3201.0, 2002.

See Notes on Estimated Resident Population sheet for details on the process of estimation used by ABS.

(b) Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, 2002 (Age at 1 July).

Enrolments include all students at State and non-State schools (full & part-time).

Inherent errors in the process of estimating resident populations and counting students at Census will account for a proportion of the differences.

(c) Comments with respect to difference

Age 6: Turning 5 by 31 December of the previous year

Age 13: Transition from primary to secondary school

Age 14: Able to leave school at 14 years 9 months

Age 15: Able to leave school at 14 years 9 months or on 15th birthday

The difference figure is potentially disturbing but may be explained in a number of ways.

During the primary school age years the difference may be explained largely in terms of home schooling (approximately 0.5 – 1.0%). The marked difference in the age 6 cohort could be explained by the variable age range of students commencing Year 1.

The significant difference occurs in the transition from primary to secondary school (age 13 – 1.92%) and accelerates to the end of compulsory schooling (age 15 – 8.75%).

This difference could be explained in four possible ways; additional home schooling children outside of the current legislation and guidelines; secondary school age children accessing alternative education programs not attached or hosted by schools; children not in any form of education; children leaving school soon after turning 15 years.

In summary this methodology also reveals an additional potential number of home schooled children (outside of the known “dispensation group”), that could be in the range of 1,100-7,600. This issue must be addressed.

HOME SCHOOLING MYTHS

One of the more popular myths about home schooling is that children who do not attend regular schooling are not socially developed and do not mature into confident well-balanced individuals. While there is an absence of detailed Australian research on this matter, there is much research in the United States of America and studies archived at the US-based Home School Legal Defence Association in Oregon. This research is broadly applicable to Australia.

In summary, researchers have found home schooled children are as well socialised as students educated in traditional State and non-State schools. Boyer (1993)⁴ researched the social stratification of children in schools by the lock-step age and grade approach to schooling. He concluded that by the time children are teenagers, they have little idea how to socialise with anyone outside of their peer group because of this approach to education. Tillman (1995)⁵ has documented that home schooled children participated in a wide range of extra curricular and community activities both with age peers and with those of more than two years age difference outside the immediate family.

Shyers (1992)⁶ study demonstrated significantly higher assertiveness and self-concept ratings with home schooled children than their traditionally schooled peers. He found that these children exhibited significantly lower problem behaviour as a means of resolving conflict and other social issues, than their peers in schools. Mattox (1999)⁷ concluded that the average home schooled student is regularly involved in 5.2 social activities outside the home ranging from activities with their “schooled” peers including afternoon and weekend programmed sport, music, neighbourhood play, church groups, part-time employment and voluntary work, to field trips and cooperative programs with groups of other home schooled students. Farris (1997)⁸ concluded that 98% of home schooled students are involved in two or more “outside of the home” activities on a weekly basis. This is often sponsored or organised by the formal or informal networks and associations of home schooling families.

Throughout the consultation phase of the review and in the formal submissions, there was evidence of interaction among home schooled children on a regular basis both with schooled and other home schooled children. These children participated in the wider community in ways equivalent to their “age peers” and their parents fostered this socialisation. Equally there was evidence that home schooled children were less peer dependent, more independent at similar age, and quite knowing of their situation and circumstance.

Another myth relates to the quality of the educational achievement of home schooled children. There is no research evidence to suggest that home schooled children perform in ways that are educationally inferior to their peers enrolled, and in attendance, at schools.

There has been much research that concludes that children whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to achieve academically (Mayberry and Knowles, 1989; Simmons, 1994; Lines, 1995). This is the basis of much contemporary educational policy and practice. Parental involvement is at a maximum when parents choose to home school their children.

⁴ Boyer, R. (1993). *The socialisation trap*

⁵ Tillman, V.D. (1995). *Home schoolers, self-esteem, and socialisation*

⁶ Shyers, L.E. (1992). *A comparison of social adjustment between home and traditionally schooled students*

⁷ Mattox, W.R. (1999). *Hidden virtues in home schooling spur growth*

⁸ Farris, M.P. (1997). *Solid evidence to support home schooling*

Home schooling is a conscious choice of parents. It is a significant investment of time, energy and family resources. It demands that parents understand and meet the educational needs of children. In an increasing two income family environment, it denies one of these incomes. It demands of parents a considerable personal sacrifice in the interest of the child. It is hard work. Parents who educate their children at home for pedagogical or philosophical reasons are unlikely to knowingly do anything that would jeopardise that development.

US research is more conclusive – Lines (1995)⁹ concluded that virtually all the available data show that the group of home schooled children who are tested is above average in academic performance. Van Galen and Pitman (1991)¹⁰ cite the results of the Washington Home School Research Project which has analysed the SAT scores of home schooled children in Washington State since 1985. The study demonstrates that the scores of these youth are above average. Harvard and Yale both accept home schooled students to their “freshman” classes on the basis of SAT scores and a portfolio of work. Rudner’s comprehensive US study (1999)¹¹ of 20,760 home schooled children in 50 states using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (sub-tests of Reading, Language, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science) demonstrated that these students out scored the control group by an average 26 (10 year olds) to 41 (7 year olds) percentile points.

US research cannot be simply applied to the Australian context, but it does provide some evidence of the educational outcomes of home schooling in a particular context. Anecdotal evidence in Queensland suggests that children who have been home schooled make a relatively smooth transition to schools. An analysis of dispensation data reveals that the majority of home schooled children spend a number of years enrolled in a school, with relatively very few being home schooled for 10 to 12 years. While their numbers decrease rapidly in the upper secondary years (possibly caused by the desire for Senior Certification) some youth complete all of their secondary years through home schooling. They in turn submit folios of their work, often complete the STAT test (administered by the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC)) and are admitted on the basis of QTAC schedule rank to TAFE institutes and all Queensland universities.

A third myth relates to issues of child protection. The argument sometimes put is that home schooled children by virtue of their perceived “social isolation”, are more at risk than their schooled peers to various forms of child abuse. The argument is largely constructed on the absence of a teacher who is now required to report any evidence of apparent child abuse to the Principal of a school. These arguments and their derivatives are spurious. There is no evidence, reputable research or judicial data to support this position.

The same argument is not applied to the thousands of students who are educated in State and non-State schools of distance education. The argument often stems from an absence of understanding of what is home schooling and a confusion of this with issues of parental neglect, truancy from a school that a child is enrolled at and should be attending on a full and regular basis, children lost to any system, process or program of education and parental and familial abuse of children. The *Child Protection Act 1999* and the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000* are the appropriate legislative instruments for addressing children at risk of harm.

⁹ Lines, P.M. (1995). *Home schooling*

¹⁰ Van Galen, J.A. and Pitman, M.A. (1991). *Home schooling: political, historical and pedagogical perspectives*

¹¹ Rudner, L.M. (1999). *Scholastic achievement and demographic characteristics of home schoolers in 1998*

A WAY FORWARD

The current legislative and regulatory framework of home schooling reflects the thinking of the time. It was clearly designed to constrain the number of parents who chose to home school. At the time of its enactment there was little recognition by the State of the home schooling movement as another legitimate education pathway. The requirements have resulted in an unintended consequence; the ever-growing (yet unknown) number of parents who home school outside of the current legislative and regulatory framework.

Aspects of its implementation have created hostility towards the State and the absence of any formal or State recognised network of “home schoolers” has resulted in poor communication, suspicion and alienation. There is an absence of trust of the State and the officers who manage the current administrative processes. Perceptions of parents who choose to home school their children are distorted and parents are often maligned by other community members.

The current processes and practices surrounding home schooling approval are not aligned with the existing Order-in-Council, and parents, in the absence of a supportive environment, are choosing in increasing numbers to operate outside of the law. This they do with great reluctance as for all intents and purposes, they are otherwise law-abiding citizens.

This situation cannot be ignored as without a new legislative and policy framework, increasing numbers of parents and their children in formative years will be alienated from our society, and the cycle of suspicion and mistrust will continue for another generation.

In order to move forward from the current context, it is imperative that home schooling be more formally recognised as the third option for education, in addition to the widely recognised State schooling and non-State schooling options.

EDUCATION – A PARENT RESPONSIBILITY

Throughout the consultation period and a common theme of many submissions was the issue of responsibility for educating a child.

Home schooling parents strongly believe that it is a fundamental responsibility of the parent to educate a child. This they do for a range of reasons, from the philosophical to the religious. They view their decision to home school as a continuation of their responsibility to educate, which commenced at the birth of the child. Unlike the majority of parents who delegate this responsibility to a State or non-State school during the compulsory schooling age (6 to 15 years), they choose to retain this responsibility for a variety of reasons. They view the enrolment of a child in a State or non-State school as a formal delegation of their responsibility to others who then act “en loco parentis”.

Some home schooling parents view the compulsory enrolment and attendance requirements under s114 of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 1989* as a provision that ensures children are enrolled in a school and are in attendance on every school day for a program of instruction, but a provision that does not guarantee or ensure an education. This group of parents would posit that enrolment and attendance in and of themselves do not result in an education. They believe that by home schooling they ensure a quality education for their child, an education that is closely aligned with their family values and mores, one that they as parents can develop, offer and monitor closely. This child-centred approach was often stressed during the consultation and submission phases of the review.

Other home schooling parents are prepared to work in partnership with a school, whilst retaining the final responsibility for education. Thus they are prepared to work within the current legislative and regulatory framework and enrol their child in a school of distance education. While they acknowledge the quality of the curriculum offered and the range of support services afforded to them by the school, they still state most strongly that the responsibility to educate remains with them. They see the school as a support mechanism that provides a curriculum framework, curriculum resources and curriculum assessment to inform them in shaping the learning of the child. These parents while in the main working closely with the school, do retain ownership of the education program and are not averse to modifying the school program often in negotiation with the child's tutor.

If we accept that parents are the primary and most influential of a child's teachers, we are acknowledging the inherent parent responsibility to educate a child. To recognise this fact in legislation sends a powerful message to all parents of their role and responsibility in this regard, and provides the basis for consequent accountability.

RECOMMENDATION 1

1.1 That the current Education (General Provisions) Act 1989 s114 be omitted and replaced by a new section.

1.2 That the following amendment be considered:

s114 Education of children

- (1) Each parent of a child of compulsory school age shall cause the child to be educated and must -
 - (d) ensure the child is enrolled with a State educational institution or a non-State school; and*
 - (e) ensure the child attends the institution or school, on every school day, for the educational program in which the child is enrolled; or*
 - (f) be educated in some other manner as prescribed in regulation.**
- (2) A child attends an institution or school only if he or she complies with the institution or school's requirements about physically attending, at particular times, its premises or another place.*
- (3) However, despite subsection (2) -
 - (c) a child enrolled in a program of distance education attends the school of distance education by completing and returning the assigned work of the program; and*
 - (d) a child enrolled in another program that does not require physical attendance at the institution or school's premises or another place attends the institution or school by complying with its requirements about communicating with or contacting the institution or school for the purpose of participating in the program.**
- (4) Subsection (1) applies subject to this part.*

DISPENSATION

Under the current legislative and regulatory framework (Appendix 3), a parent who wishes to home school a child must first seek a dispensation under s115 from compliance with the compulsory enrolment and attendance provisions (s114) of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 1989*. It is also required under the Order-in-Council, dated 3 August 1989 (Appendix 2). Dispensation is required each calendar year for each child.

This requirement is the major issue raised in the majority of the submissions and throughout the consultation phase of the review.

In the minds of parents, it is firmly related to the previous issue, a parent's primary responsibility to educate a child.

In essence the position is put this way. If a parent has the responsibility to educate a child, so exercises that responsibility and chooses not to delegate that responsibility to a State or a non-State school, there is no need to seek a dispensation from compulsory enrolment and attendance at a school during the compulsory school age from the State each calendar year.

Home schooling parents in the main, recognise the right and responsibility of the State to ensure that all children are educated. They support the right of other parents to choose to educate their children through the State's provision and the financing of State and non-State schools. They support legislation that protects children but they see the dispensation issue within the context of primary responsibility and parental choice.

Of the 900 plus families who successfully applied for dispensation for the purposes of home schooling their children in 2002, only 35% agreed with the current requirement for dispensation. Many of these parents qualified this agreement and saw it as a means to an end, that being the opportunity to home school a child.

The dispensation requirement is also repeatedly cited as the major reason why significant (yet unknown) numbers of parents home school, outside of the current legislative and regulatory framework. This decision is not taken lightly and reflects the depth of thought and feeling about the issue, by otherwise law abiding citizens.

There is a range of views about the State's right to know of those parents who are home schooling their children, regardless of reason. Many parents are most supportive of this approach, applaud the transparency and seek the formal recognition of their right and responsibility. They clamour for acceptance and community acknowledgement. Yet they remain opposed to dispensation, and some seek it while others ignore it. Many seek what they refer to as "initial dispensation" but do not reapply in subsequent years.

Some other parents have fundamentally different views. They believe that the State only has a right to know under limited circumstances, if at all. Their position is expressed through a complex mixture of parent rights, civil liberties, personal freedom and disenchantment with the State arguments. They are often suspicious of the State, its motives and the use of such information by the State.

The current dispensation requirement is not working. It is ignored more than observed by home schooling parents in Queensland. It is seen as a requirement that is at odds with the recognition of a parent's responsibility to educate a child. Yet the State has an equal responsibility to ensure that all children are receiving an education. This is necessary for the future of our society, its social capital and the maintenance of a strong democratic society.

If you accept a responsibility, you accept the concomitant accountability.

If the State is prepared to recognise a parent's right to educate a child in legislation as proposed in Recommendation 1, and provide enabling provisions such as "be educated in some other manner as prescribed in regulation", then parents have a mutual obligation and accountability to inform the State of their intention to do so. This is in the best interest of the child, the parent and the State.

RECOMMENDATION 2

2.1 That the current dispensation requirements of a parent who wishes to home school a child be replaced by a registration requirement.

2.3 That the registration requirement be defined in regulation.

2.3 That registration be required annually for each child.

PAYMENT OF A PRESCRIBED FEE

The Order-in-Council of 3 August 1989 (Appendix 2) requires the payment of a prescribed fee (\$1,000 per annum per child) should a parent, having successfully applied for dispensation from compulsory enrolment and attendance at school, wish to access the program of a State school of distance education. This is often referred to as Home Schooling Option 1. Parents who access the services of a non-State school, approved to offer distance education programs for the purposes of home schooling (referred to as Option 2), pay the individual school determined fees and charges.

It is worth noting that this requirement, to seek dispensation from schooling then be required to subsequently enrol in another school, in itself, is a policy paradox.

In essence parents apply for dispensation from enrolment and attendance at a State or non-State school, and if successful are in turn required, in two of the possible three options for home schooling, to enrol the child in a State or non-State school (providing distance education). If that school is a State school, the \$1,000 per annum per child applies. This is in addition to other materials and subject charges that the school may determine.

The requirement to pay a fee (\$1,000) for service and resources from a State institution is an issue within the home schooling community. It is compounded by the fact that should a child be not of compulsory school age, the fee does not apply for home schooling enrolments. This means that a parent with a student in Year 10 for example, who turns 15 years of age during that year, pays for portion of the year only, with services and resources provided free of charge for the remainder of the year.

This appears to be another policy paradox; the payment of a prescribed fee for the years of compulsory school age provided by a State institution, but the absence of a fee for non-compulsory age programs. This issue must be resolved.

Members of the home schooling community have a largely negative view of this fee and legal opinion of its veracity is mixed. It has been the source of conflict and disquiet, and is often seen as a “penalty” for home schooling. There is no equivalent regime anywhere else in Australia.

While these fees are paid directly to the relevant State schools of distance education (usually in quarterly payments of \$250 per child), they do not constitute a significant proportion of the total resourcing of these State schools.

RECOMMENDATION 3

3.1 That the payment of a prescribed fee (\$1,000 per annum per child) for services and resources from State schools of distance education by home schooling parents of children of compulsory school age be abolished.

3.2 That as a consequence of the abolition of this fee, the resourcing models of State schools of distance education who previously received this fee be re-examined and adjusted where necessary.

ACCESS TO A STATE OR NON-STATE SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

In Queensland, seven State schools of distance education provide P-12 or P-10 education programs to over 3,200 children. Access to those programs are limited by s115 and s117 of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 1989* and by other provisions determined by policy pertaining to enrolment. In effect there are eight categories of enrolment; distance, overseas, travelling, medical, approved, home school, school-based and other.

Distance	Geographically isolated
Overseas domicile	Temporarily out of the country but permanent residents of Queensland
Travel	Currently travelling within Australia or Australian waters but permanent residents of Queensland
Medical condition	Unable to attend a school on a daily basis due to a medical condition
Approved enrolment	Home schooled youth over 15 years, excluded students, students at risk of not completing schooling, gifted and talented students, various other situations
Home school	Those choosing State school of distance education via dispensation and payment of a prescribed fee
School-based	Students from State or non-State secondary schools taking one or more subjects
Other	Includes adult learners, those in correctional centres, students in some alternative education programs

While the “mix” of enrolment varies from institution to institution, approximately 70% of the total enrolment in State schools of distance education are from categories other than distance as defined by s115.

Equally a smaller number of students who do not meet the “distance” criteria enrol in the four non-State schools approved for the purposes of providing “distance” education programs.

The term “distance” education may therefore be misleading as some student enrolments are within a few kilometres of these schools.

Home schooling families who access the services and resources of schools of distance education are well satisfied with these arrangements (Appendix 5). Throughout the review, a common theme at many of the consultation meetings and in formal submissions was that this option should continue to be available to parents.

State and non-State schools of distance education provide the full array of services and resources to home schooling families. Schools and teachers consider these student enrolments as no different to any other category of enrolment. Expectations are the same and while parents may modify programs from time to time, in the main the curriculum program of the school is followed, children complete Years 3, 5 and 7 tests of Aspects of Literacy and Numeracy and participate in a range of “school activities”.

Under the proposed amendments to the *Education (General Provisions) Act 1989*, currently before the Parliament, s76(3) proposes to omit the existing s115(2)(d) the distance requirement for access to State schools of distance education.

In theory this would make enrolment in these education institutions open to any child. In practice a policy framework will manage enrolment.

RECOMMENDATION 4

4.1 That home schooling parents continue to be permitted to access the services and resources of State and non-State schools of distance education.

4.2 That enrolment of a child in an approved school of distance education by a home schooling parent, be deemed to meet the requirements of registration as outlined in Recommendation 2.

THE “OWN” PROGRAM APPROACH TO HOME SCHOOLING

The current legislative and regulatory framework for home schooling enables parents to develop their own curriculum program subject to certain requirements. These are detailed in the Order-in-Council, 3 August 1989, (Appendix 2). This approach is often referred to as Option 3. While this is the least preferred approach by parents who apply for dispensation for the purposes of home schooling (7.9% average over the past seven years), it is the most preferred approach by parents who home school outside of the current legislative and regulatory framework.

This is due in part to the current requirement that in order to “own” program, one of the parents must be a Queensland registered teacher or the parent must “engage or employ” a Queensland registered teacher in order to teach the child at home (Appendix 2). This is a cause of much angst in sections of the home schooling community. No similar requirement exists in any other state or territory in Australia. Additionally, there is no research evidence to suggest that this requirement leads to enhanced educational outcomes for children.

The Order-in-Council also requires a range of other provisions, the majority of which are vague, paper-based and not aligned with current educational thinking and practice. They also include approval processes that have not been observed in more than a decade. They are essentially an input approach that once “approved” are not monitored in any way.

Parents who choose to home school through an “own” program approach are often labelled as “natural learners”, “unschoolers”, or a range of other terms that reflect a particular approach to learning. They make this deliberative decision for philosophical, pedagogical or religious reasons. While clearly in the minority of home schooling families, they have a passionate belief in what they are doing and are prepared to make considerable personal and financial sacrifice in the interest of their children. They come from all walks of life, all professions and circumstances, and live in all parts of Queensland. They have a long-term commitment to home schooling and rely heavily on each other through networks, associations and mutual interest.

To prohibit this option in the future would simply cause more parents to home school outside of the legislative and regulatory framework. This is not in the best interest of the child, the parent or the State.

The challenge thus becomes balancing the parent responsibility and concomitant accountability in this context.

If the State is prepared to recognise a parent's right to educate a child in legislation as proposed in Recommendation 1, and the parent chooses to follow an "own" program approach and registers this decision (Recommendation 2), then some form of reporting of this accountability should follow.

By requiring parents to report on the education of a child through an "own" program approach, the focus of accountability moves from inputs (the present approach) to educational outcomes (a preferred approach).

RECOMMENDATION 5

- 5.1 That home schooling parents continue to be permitted to adopt an "own" program approach to the education of their children.*
- 5.2 That such a decision be recorded as part of a registration requirement as defined in regulation.*
- 5.3 That the current requirement of a parent to be a registered teacher, or to engage or employ a registered teacher in order to teach an "own" program be abolished.*
- 5.4 That the annual reporting of educational outcomes be defined in regulation.*
- 5.5 That failure to report on educational outcomes result in cancellation of registration and consequent sanctions as defined in regulation.*

STATE SUPPORT FOR HOME SCHOOLING

Throughout the review many parents (as taxpayers) raised the issue of access to services and resources. These ranged from the capacity to access quality curriculum materials, child dental health services to career counselling and tertiary entrance information.

Some parents spoke of the need for professional advice on curriculum design, pedagogical issues and student assessment.

They spoke of their willingness to participate in statewide Aspects of Literacy and Numeracy testing in Years 3, 5 and 7 and other national testing regimes or competitions (for example Maths and Science), on a voluntary basis. This was expressed in the context of assuring a quality curriculum program for a child.

Parents often spoke of the difficulty of "getting started with home schooling" and many expressed a desire for an entity to support the home schooling community. In the absence of any substantive State support, they relied upon friends, networks or individuals to support them and provide advice on approach and resources.

If the existing divide between some members of the home schooling community and the State is to be bridged, then consideration must be given to the question, what services and resources should be made available by the State to support the education of children in approved home schooling families? A small dedicated unit could be established to provide a core of services and ensure access to resources, information and the articulation of learning pathways.

RECOMMENDATION 6

- 6.1 *That a central entity be established to provide a range of services and resources to home schooling parents including the facilitation of learning pathways and information.*
- 6.2 *That access to the entity be conditional upon registration of a child for the purposes of home schooling.*
- 6.3 *That such an entity be resourced by the Department of Education.*

A PARTNERSHIP WITH HOME SCHOOLING FAMILIES

The current legislative and regulatory framework does not promote a partnership between home schooling families and the State. There is an absence of formal communication channels, understanding and appreciation of each other's position and a shared focus on what is best for the child. Given that there are potentially thousands of 6 to 15 year old children being home schooled in Queensland (both within and outside of the current legislative and regulatory framework), this is not characteristic of an enabling State.

While parents recognise that the home schooling community is a broad and diverse community, what they have in common is a passion and commitment to home schooling though their approach and reasons for so doing may differ. With few exceptions, they expressed most strongly through the consultation phase and by submission, a desire for formal recognition and acceptance by the State and the wider community. Parents often spoke from personal experience on perceptions of State agencies and in some cases family and neighbours. These ranged from prejudice and hostility to expressions of suspicion, social stigma and inferences of neglect, failure and abuse. This was sometimes balanced by admiration, acceptance and support.

Many parents, who had successfully applied for dispensation, spoke of the embarrassment of having to explain to members of the Police Service why their children were "not at school". Others spoke of being visited by officers of other government departments, as a result of "referral" by community members. While parents accepted in the main that these officers were simply "doing their job", they spoke of the need for protocols to manage the circumstance of home schooling across government agencies.

While some parents had very mixed views of the role of government in society, often based on personal experiences with employees of government, there was a strong message of the need for the home schooling community to work with government in achieving their objectives.

But through all these diverse views there was an over-arching message; that home schooling was "here to stay" and should be recognised and celebrated in its own right as an option for a parent to educate a child.

RECOMMENDATION 7

- 7.1 *That a Home Schooling Advisory Committee together with its role and responsibility be established by regulation.*
- 7.2 *That the committee membership be reflective of the diversity of the home schooling community and include parents who have registered their children to be home schooled.*
- 7.3 *That the committee report annually to the Minister for Education.*

7.4 That the Home Schooling Advisory Committee work with the Department of Education to develop a set of protocols to manage the interface between registered home schooling families and government agencies.

HOME SCHOOLING AND THE COMPULSORY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION OR TRAINING PHASE

Under the proposed *Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill 2003* currently before the Parliament, a young person's compulsory participation phase starts when the person stops being of compulsory school age and ends when the person –

- (i) gains a Senior Certificate or Certificate III; or
- (ii) has participated in eligible options for two years after the person stopped being of compulsory school age; or
- (iii) turns 17 years of age.

There are six eligible options stated in the proposed legislation.

Eligible option	Provider
An educational program provided under the EGP Act	A State educational institution
An educational program provided under the <i>Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001</i>	A non-State school
A course of higher education under the <i>Higher Education (General Provisions) Act 1993</i>	A university or non-university provider
A course of vocational education and training provided under the VETE Act	A TAFE institute or registered training organisation
An apprenticeship or traineeship under the VETE Act	A registered training organisation
A departmental employment skills development program	The VETE chief executive

This has implications for home schooling families.

Provision has been made for dispensations in Part 3 of the Bill that extend to home schooling.

s25 Home schooling

The chief executive may grant a dispensation if the chief executive is satisfied that, through the period to which the dispensation applies, the young person will be receiving education –

- (a) provided by a registered teacher; and*
- (b) complying with the requirements prescribed under a regulation.*

The proposal requires an education provided by a registered teacher. This would exclude the youth from participation in some of the eligible options provided by persons other than a registered teacher; for example, a course of higher education under the *Higher Education (General Provisions) Act 1993*, a course of vocational education and training provided under the *VETE Act*, an apprenticeship or traineeship under the *VETE Act*, and a departmental employment skills and development program.

Additionally, this proposal extends the current policy framework whereby parents may offer an “own” program approach (Option 3). This option is approved subject to the “*supervision of the child’s education by a teacher registered in Queensland in the child’s home*”. To date, this has applied only to students of compulsory schooling age for the purposes of home schooling. The current level and nature of this supervision is largely unknown and is not defined in either legislation or policy. It is not monitored in any way.

The proposed legislation does not enable home schooled youth to participate in eligible options that might otherwise be open to them. It also denies what is often currently occurring with this age group.

RECOMMENDATION 8

- 8.1 *That parents of youth in the compulsory participation phase as defined by the Youth Participation in Education and Training Bill 2003 be required to meet the registration requirement as prescribed in regulation.*
- 8.2 *That the following amendment be considered as a basis for dispensation from the requirement that a young person participate in the eligible options provided by State or non-State schools.*

s25 Home schooling

The chief executive may deem a dispensation to be granted if the young person –

- (c) meets the registration requirement as prescribed in regulation; and*
- (d) will be receiving education complying with the requirements prescribed under a regulation.*

A TRIAL

Many of the proposed recommendations represent a considerable legislative and policy shift from the present. They could be interpreted as a considerable risk by some or not going far enough by others. If they are to be implemented, they do require a degree of compromise and cooperation by the home schooling community and by agencies within the State.

But they do capture the dominant themes of the review and provide possible solutions. All recommendations are framed within a broader context of mutual obligation, recognition of responsibility, consequent accountability and an enabling State.

They are framed to encourage all of the home schooling community in Queensland to work with the State within its legislative and regulatory framework, in order to achieve formal acceptance and recognition by the wider community. This can only benefit children in the longer term.

Yet checks and balances are required in the public administration of any complex issue, especially one that involves children and their future.

RECOMMENDATION 9

- 9.1 *That recommendations of this review so endorsed are independently evaluated within three years of their enactment.*
- 9.2 *That such an independent review be informed by the proposed Home Schooling Advisory Committee.*