

TEACH Bulletin

Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

Number 19

August 1998

The MPs' Debate Over Home Educators

The Education Legislation Amendment Bill which kept so many of us occupied with writing submissions earlier this year is still before Parliament, waiting for its turn to come before the Committee of the Whole. This is when the entire House, all 120 MPs, have an opportunity to comment on the Bill OR EVEN CALL FOR AMENDMENTS, as they go through the Bill clause by clause. In other words, there is still the opportunity for us to put the pressure on our MPs to add, drop or modify anything in the Bill. So fish out TEACH Bulletin No. 17 of June 1998 and have another read through the Bill as it stands to see if you would like to influence your MP to change anything.

In the meantime, it is really interesting to read what various MPs had to say about home educators when the Bill was debated on the 23rd of June. Below are comments lifted straight out of Hansard, the transcript of what they actually said on the floor of Parliament.

Hon. Wyatt Creech, Minister of Education: Home schooling has become another area of rapid growth in New Zealand with many pupils going into it. The issue is how they should be reviewed. Where people get an exemption from the normal schooling system so that they can home-school, we have to be certain that it is not a way for them to leave their children without any reasonable education at all. This Bill addresses that issue.

Trevor Mallard (Labour, Hutt South): I have one question to do

with home schooling that I would like the Minister in charge of the Education Review Office to deal with. Since the Bill was reported back, I have had a submission that expresses concern that the Minister will be able to see the individual details of particular reviews of the home-schooling situation. It is a question of privacy. In terms of reviews of State schools, there is not much argument about that; the Minister can and should have the right to read them. He should probably read them all, but I think he does not have time. But when home schooling is going on in an individual family's home, there is a privacy question — whether the Minister has a right to look at private details. It appears that that right has been extended in this

Bill, and I would like a response on that particular question. But I think that the select committee has done a good job in that area and has reached a point of balance.

Hon. Brian Donnelly, Associate Minister of Education, Minister in charge of the Education Review Office: I believe that home schooling is a valid schooling alternative, and I am very supportive of it. I believe that a large degree of the home schooling in this country is of very, very high quality. A recent Education Review Office report has pointed that out. But all that this legislation does is clarify existing powers. The existing Act is very unclear, and is challengeable as to whether the Education Review Office has the right to review. In terms of providing a degree of protection and assurance that we have a sys-

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Schools into Remedial Social Work and Pastoral Care

A 1996/97 financial year review of the Ministry of Education by Parliament's Education and Science Select Committee released on 11 February 1998 said the following:

"The Chief Review Officer commented to us that governing bodies, managers and teachers operate in the absence of any widely agreed legal definition of a school's role. Schools decide individually on the balance to be achieved between remedial social work, pastoral care and implementing the curriculum."

The Select Committee followed up with further comments in the "Vote E.R.O." part of their report on the 1998/99 budget estimates:

"We are concerned that many schools operate increasingly as social support centres within communities. This is a function for which they seldom have adequate resources. The Minister informed us that, although schools are expected to play a role in the social as well as the cognitive development of children, it is left to each school to decide what is the appropriate balance of roles for that school."

"We remain concerned that the reluctance of the (Education Review) office to comment on the performance of other Government social services agencies will limit the Government's ability to deliver social policy in a unified

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TEACH Bulletin

is a monthly publication of TEACH Publications, and is concerned with those things which may impact on home educators. Articles will deal with political developments, statist and professional trends, correspondence with educationalists, and other items of general interest to home educators. There is also a regular opinion poll regarding educational issues of the day that may impact home schoolers.

TEACH Bulletin is available for a subscription of \$16 per year for 11 issues (none in December), or by becoming a member of TEACH for a donation of \$30 or more. Some of the benefits of membership are:

- Discounts on Christian Home Schoolers of NZ National Family Conference fees.
- Discounts on TEACH National Leadership Forum fees.
- Coaching on how to participate in the Parliamentary process via letter writing, making submissions, lobbying MPs, etc.
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Your donation toward membership also helps to develop further services exclusively for home schoolers such as scholarships, summer schools, national tours by overseas experts, curriculum and home school resource fairs, national and international field trips.

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Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching.
— Proverbs 1:8

tem that works in the best interests of all children in New Zealand, this Bill simply clarifies what already exists.

Jill White (Labour, list): I certainly gained a great deal of insight into, and considerable interest in, this area through the submissions that were made to us. I pay tribute to the parents who appeared before the select committee. They are absolutely committed to the home education that they do. They do not all come from the same philosophical stance, and do not all have the same reason for wanting to be home educators, but those who appeared before the select committee made a very, very good argument for their case. I think some important amendments are proposed by the select committee as a result.

The select committee was not able to go the whole distance that the home educators wanted. Mr Mallard has already indicated one area that he intends to question quite closely in the Committee stage, and that is the question of privacy, which parents are concerned about. There is the possibility of very sensitive information inappropriately going to the Minister of Education, and I think it is valid that that question be followed up. During the Committee stage I will deal with another couple of concerns that those parents have.

A great deal of suspicion and ill feeling has arisen as a result of home-schooling parents feeling somewhat powerless and being concerned about possible abuses of power. During the hearing process I learnt that the Education Review Office is very concerned to get on a good footing, and to make sure that its relationships with home education families and organisations is positive rather than negative. That is a great responsibility on the Education Review Office, and the families.

One amendment that the committee is recommending, and I think

it is very helpful, takes home educators out of inclusion in the phrase "particular organisations". Their inclusion in the phrase "particular organisations" was a considerable difficulty because they felt it put them in the category of institutions. They are very, very strongly of the view that they are not institutions. They are home educators. We have been able to make amendments that deal with that. It was of very great interest and enlightenment to hear from the home schoolers during the select committee process.

Liz Gordon (Alliance, list): I too want to speak on what I think are the three key issues in this Bill — the home-schooling clauses, the suspension clauses, and the enrolment scheme issue. I will start with home schooling, simply because no one else has.

Jill White: I beg the member's pardon.

Liz Gordon: I am sorry, Ms White may well have —

Jill White: I spoke quite a lot about it.

Liz Gordon: I will follow my Labour colleague then in starting with the home-schooling issue. I have some major concerns about this, and they were echoed by the very large number of home schoolers who came along to the select committee from around the country and gave their views. Under this Bill the review office does not have the right to gain entry against the will of parents to enter the dwelling of the owner or occupier of the house where home schooling is taking place. However, once it has been invited in it has what I think are very large powers.

From the home schools that I have seen — and from my stereotype, I guess — my view of a home school is always of a very large farmhouse-style kitchen with the potbelly stove in the corner, a lovely pine and wood kitchen area, a fridge covered in magnets holding children's drawings on to it, and everything is very child-centred — there is a large

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Trading Post



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scrubbed table in the middle with lots of work taking place. Although it is a stereotype, it is a reasonably accurate one.

But into that environment will come a review officer who has the right under this legislation to require "any parent or other person to make or provide statements in any form or manner the review officer specifies about any matter relating to the provision of the educational service provided by the parents." At the same time the review officer "may require any parent or other person to produce documents or information relating to the educational service", and the persons "must permit the review officer to make copies or extracts of the documents or information."

These clauses, in their slightly different form before they were amended, caused huge concern to home schoolers, who felt that the language was extraordinarily heavy-handed for the kind of context within which the review would take place. What they were looking for was a more cooperative relationship. The power to take documents, to copy documents, and to require the provision of documents actually removes from parents, at the point of review, a lot of their power.

There also is not a very clear system of appeal or of complaint that parents might make about review officers. On those grounds the Alliance will continue to oppose the provisions relating to home schooling. I believe that the home schoolers still have a point. Whilst I do not have much warmth in my heart for the group — I do not think that home schooling is something we should be encouraging in the way it has been expanding over the past 10 years or so — I do believe that the home schoolers themselves have rights to respect as educators in a way that they are not getting under this legislation, and that the context is not being taken properly into account.

Belinda Vernon (National, Maungakiekie): One of the things I feel passionately about — and perhaps it indicates how jolly old-fashioned I am — is that children are children, not kids. Kids are baby goats. That was drilled into me when I was a child, and I still ascribe to that. Children are children.

The issue of home educators was a very passionate and emotional one. I did not appreciate the level of participation in home education until we had the opportunity to listen to the submissions from home educators. They are very passionate people. One can only admire their commitment to their children, demonstrated by their willingness to spend so much time and effort in the education of their children. I respect their right to do that. I have every confidence that the home educators in my electorate, with whom I have had contact, are doing a superb job in the education of their children.

It is important that the Education Review Office has the ability to review the education that home-school parents are providing. We have a responsibility as a Parliament to ensure that New Zealand children have access to high-quality education. We do that primarily through the State education system. We also do it through the provision of independent schools. Those schools are subjected to the review process, and I believe that home educators should be subjected to that process as well.


The home educators expressed concern about invasions of privacy. I think that many of those concerns were unfounded. It is quite clear from our discussions with the Education Review Office that it wants to work constructively with home educators in developing protocols and procedures to ensure we get the right outcome for our children. We heard the concerns of the home educators and I think we have gone some way towards removing the con-

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cern that was aroused in them by the implication that they were an institution. We have worked on that terminology and I hope that the proposed amendments will appease some of their concerns. The legislation states quite categorically that the Education Review Office will not be able to go into the home environment without the specific permission of the home educators. We need to ensure that this is upheld. It is clearly identified in the legislation. It is not something that I believe the home educators need to be concerned about.

Neil Kirton (at the time, NZ First, list, but now independent): I would like to turn to an issue that intrigued me, and I guess it also is about human nature — that is, the home-schooling environment. I am not concerned that people should decide that they want home schooling. I was greatly impressed by the passion and the skill and the abilities of home-schoolers, and by home-schooling parents, in particular, to want and strive for something very important to them and to their children. The powers of access to property that review officers may have were of concern to me. When we offer those particular powers over property I think we have to be very careful. The issue that concerned me also was that the review office staff were sufficiently skilled and really did understand what any particular individual home-schooler was attempting to achieve for their children.

I applaud what home educators are doing. Going back to that human nature quality, I point out that just because we have hit the 21st century does not mean we stop evolving and growing. The diversity that is offered by an alternative through the home-schooling environment, the choice that is offered, is an important element of New Zealand society. I applaud those people for going down that particular road. However, we do need the checks and balances around them. 

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fashion. We commend the (ERO) on its current efforts to gather from schools information relevant to social policy. However, we believe that if the Government is to effectively develop a unified social policy perspective, better information is required on the role of schools in the community as social service providers.


"We recommend, therefore, that the office gather information on the role of schools in the community as social service providers on a more systematic basis. We urge the Government to make use of this information to improve coordination of the delivery of social services."

Home educators should glean four things of possible concern from these comments. First, the state school system appears to be sliding into an identity crisis, not knowing what their role is. That is almost the same as not knowing why they are here or what they are supposed to be doing. Second, it is expected that schools' roles do include remedial social work and pastoral care (acting as community social support centres, for which they are not well resourced) as well as implementing the curriculum. Third, each school is apparently free to decide for itself the balance it strikes between its social support activities and what most people would consider to be its legitimate and traditional academic skills and knowledge teaching activities. Fourth, the Select Committee wants the ERO to collect more systematic information on the social services provided by schools so that the Government can coordinate the schools with the other social service providers of the Government, such as the health department, income support, the employment service, ACC, etc.

Combining all of the above with the item in last month's TEACH Bulletin (July '98) about there being no objective standards in the state school system, one sees a very consistent pattern of state

school provision operating according to a somewhat holistic approach of locally determined subjectivity. Some commentators would simplify this: one goes to school in order for the teachers to pass out warm-fuzzies. It appears to be the view of the dons at Massey College of Education that schools are there primarily as baby-sitting services, and secondarily to socialise children into the dominant culture. This all helps home educators to be ever more confirmed in their commitment to real education for their children, and that it be done at home.

But all of this also has implications for home educators as we compare it with the Education Act's requirements that we teach "at least as regularly and well as in a registered school". This phrase has always been vague and ambiguous, but now seems to be moving into the realm of meaninglessness...unless we do as the state schools apparently do: provide our own meaning by determining for ourselves the right mix of social, pastoral and academic activity. This should make the ERO's job, and our own often anxious review experiences, easier than ever. As long as we are doing SOMETHING, it will have to be considered the right mix, simply because we determined it for ourselves. In fact, if we were to do nothing, and had determined to do nothing, that too would have to be approved. But of course that then is not acceptable because virtually everyone agrees that you cannot do nothing.

So doing something is required, but there seems to be no agreement, or even clear guidelines, as to what that "something" should be. The implication, and indeed the apparent practice of the authorities, is that if parents are able to confidently and clearly describe an educational programme that appears to have some sort of regularity, balance and comprehensiveness about it, they will be able to both obtain and retain a certificate of exemption from enrolment in a registered school. 

North Island

Homeschooling Information Workshop No 4

Saturday, 17 October 1998

9:30am — 2:30pm, Windsor Park Baptist Church,

550 East Coast Rd., Mairangi Bay

\$20 per person or couple

Elective sessions include:

- Taking a Child out of School
- Preparing for Homeschooling: 0 - 6 year olds
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- Homeschooling Children with Special Needs
- The Father's Role
- Learning from the Masters: Literature, Art, Music
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- Teaching Reading Using Phonics
- Homeschooling Teenagers
- Implementing Charlotte Mason's Methods
- Ideas for Children's Writing
- Scriptural Principles for Homeschooling
- 20 different speakers (all current home educators)
- Many resource vendors and displays

Register by 10 October to:

Shore Home Educators

22 Paramu Ave, Birkdale, Auckland 1310

or ring Lesley: (09) 483-8036 or Dorinda: (09) 480-6878.

South Island

Canterbury Home Educators Inc. Camp

Fri, Sat, Sun

30-31 October, 1 November 1998

Hibburt Park, Spencerville (near mouth of
Waimakariri River, just north of Christchurch).

\$5.50 per adult (over 15) per night (bunkhouse, tent or
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Also day visitor rate. Food list sent upon registration.

Guest Speaker: Donna Awaterc-Huata, ACT MP and
Education Spokesperson.

- Kiwisports
- Beach swimming
- Field games
- Bushwalks
- Spencer Park and Wetlands Reserve
- Minigolf
- Nightwalk/Spotlighting
- Curriculum display
- Commercial book vendor

Register by 4 September to:

Joanna Hingston,

PO Box 95, Amberley, ph. (03) 314-6782.

The Y2K Problem is a Biggie

The Y2K (Year 2000) problem, or Millennium Bug, is a design fault built into the first computers. To save data storage space the years were written with two digits instead of four. 1965 became simply 65. But it became such standard practice, that soon only six digit spaces were ALLOWED for the date: two for the day, two for the month and two for the year. This mistake was programmed into computer chips embedded into all sorts of modern appliances apart from computers, such as cars, video recorders, microwaves, etc. So when the year 2000 arrives, they are not sure how hardware and software will respond to the "00" in the year slot, whether it will read it as "1900" or simply as an error and just stop (crash).

The problem is incredibly simple, yet horrendous to fix, as each line of data in any computer system has to be scanned manually and fixed one by one. For the large Government enterprises, it is just plain impossible to do in time. The "Assignment" TV programme of Thursday 20 August said the US Defense system will not be fixed until the year 2009!

Computer programmers who can fix the problem can earn up to £7,000 PER WEEK in the U.K.

The New Zealand Government Administration Select Committee issued a report on the problem in April 1998. The report is full of doom and gloom. For example:

Civil Disorder

If not enough is done to avoid or minimise Y2K problems then public safety, not to mention the health of the economy, will be at risk. Services such as power, water, sewage, communications, transport, transaction mechanisms, and security could be adversely affected.

Estimates put the cost of correcting the Y2K problem and associated expenses at nearly \$4.4 billion PER DAY worldwide.

Programmer Errors

As if the problem of correcting the turn of the century date change problem was not enough, organisations are finding that software writers used a string of unusual and inappropriate dates to indicate indefinite or unknown information. Most concerning is that many programmers used the year 99 for the indefinite future. For

example, the unknown retirement date of an employee. A particular favourite was 9/9/99 although other combinations were used.

Leap Year

A further complication is created by 2000 being a leap year. Every 400 years a leap day is required. Earth takes 365.2422 days to orbit the sun and so the leap day created every four years is dropped at the end of each century to compensate for the over-adjustment. However, this adjustment is an approximation. So every 400 years the leap day is resuscitated. 2000 is such a year. Many experts consider that many systems could crash on 29 February 2000 as a result of the February leap day. Many computer and embedded systems will be unable to recognise the 29 February 2000.

The Other Guy's Fault

Not every organisation will be Y2K compliant at the turn of the century. An organisation may find that its systems are still affected due to corrupted data and information being sent to it by external organisations. All the effort in the world may be made to ensure that a system is Y2K compliant but the business may still

fall over at the turn of the century due to its product suppliers crashing.

Losses Uninsurable

The New Zealand Insurance Council told us that losses arising from Y2K failure were not, and are not, insurable losses. However, there are questions over flow-on damage and the trigger for such damage. For example, if power supplies fail, resulting in material losses to consumers, are these losses covered?

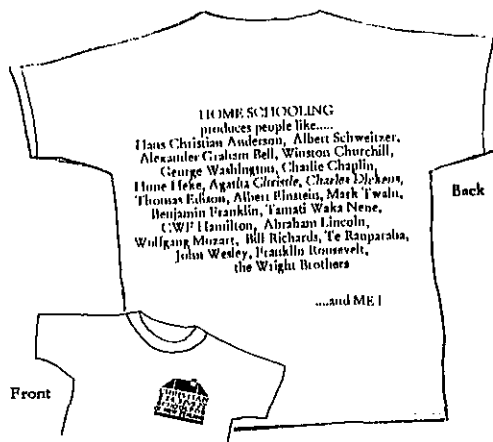
The above excerpts came from "The Y2K Inquiry: Inquiry into the Year 2000 Date Coding Problem", a report of the Government Administration Committee, April 1998, published by the Government. Bennets Books will have copies, or just borrow from the library. It is fascinating reading. Everyone WILL BE affected. I know people who have bought generators and candles, installed a water tank, are stocking up on tinned food, and will be withdrawing all cash before the middle of 1999.

U.S. Y2K specialists Peter de Jager and Phil Dodd have a great website: www.year2000.com. They have compiled a list of laws governing the countdown months ahead. These are brilliant! Deadly serious and yet absolutely hilarious at the same time.

- 1 The more you look, the more you find.
 - 2 The more you find, the more it costs.
 - 3 When management truly understands the problem, they make it their only priority.
 - 4 Create understanding, and funding is a non-issue.
 - 5 You will divert funds from critical projects to an even more critical project.
 - 6 You cannot solve Y2K, you can only minimise the impact.
 - 7 You cannot know what you do not know.
 - 8 There is a cycle of "awareness, understanding,
- and action." Many people are aware; a lot understand; and most have taken action. But only those who have acted realise the cycle is repetitive.
 - 9 Murphy's Y2K law — that which cannot fail, will.
 - 10 Murphy's other Y2K law — that which is compliant, isn't.
 - 11 You can't really test this stuff until 1 January 2000.
 - 12 The biggest risk is we don't know all the risks.
 - 13 There is a finite speed at which one can spend money effectively.
 - 14 Two digits are good — four digits are better.
 - 15 Only the Lone Ranger risks his clients' safety on silver bullets.
 - 16 Dates on the calendar are closer than they appear.
 - 17 Testing is the only insurance worth buying.
 - 18 Three things are certain in life: death, taxes and Y2K. Y2K will pass.
 - 19 If you rest easy at night, you don't understand the problem.
 - 20 The closer the date the higher the cost.
 - 21 Don't fix everything, fix everything that matters.
 - 22 A system of a thousand programs fails in a single line.
 - 23 Planning for failure is better than failing to plan.
 - 24 Delivering Year 2000 late is equivalent to never starting.
 - 25 Denial is never a long-term survival strategy.
 - 26 The more ingenious the fix, the higher the potential rate of errors.
 - 27 Fear of consequences is a great motivator.
 - 28 The weakest link in the supply chain is in your supplier's system.
 - 29 Chicken Little was an optimist.
 - 30 Compliancy means never having to say you're sorry.
 - 31 If it isn't critical, it's trivial.
 - 32 The only technology immune to the Y2K problem is unconnected to a power source.

(NZ Infotech Weekly, No 354, page 21.)

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