

# TEACH Bulletin

## Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

Number 7

July 1997

### “Home Schooling was a Shambles.”

#### — ERO Minister

The Minister in charge of the Education Review Office, Hon Brian Donnelly, was cited in the media on Friday 11 July in the following way:

*The Minister in charge of the ERO, Brian Donnelly, says home schooling was a shambles in 1990 and he fears the next review will show the same.*

This is the latest in a series of statements made by Mr Donnelly which could be construed by home educators as a cause for concern. He has already said that he intends “to ensure that children being home schooled are in a safe environment.” He has said this on more than one occasion, so it seems to be more than rhetoric. In addition, this “shambles” statement is totally incorrect. In 1990 the government’s *Tomorrow’s Schools* policies had just been instituted, and all the schools were struggling with boards of trustees, charters and other administrative innovations. The ERO had only just been established and was struggling to determine its role in life. Home schoolers had just banded together and successfully convinced the MOE why the imposition of charters upon home schoolers would not be a good idea. I’ll tell you what was in a shambles in 1990: both the MOE’s and the ERO’s methods for keeping track of home schoolers, but certainly not the home schoolers themselves.

Today I received an e-mail message from a home schooler of

long-standing from Auckland. She says in part, “I heard this man (Donnelly) talking about home schooling before the election last year. He was then the principal of a school in Whangarei and was VERY anti-home schooling then. If I had any intention of voting NZ First I would have changed there and then on hearing his negative comments!”

The Hon Mr Donnelly must be made aware that allowing such comments as the ones above to be attributed to him does nothing for his credibility! Get everyone you can to write objecting to his inaccuracies. Let’s flood his desk with mail to let him (and others) know that home schoolers are keeping an eye on him and that we are not going to take such irresponsible comments lying down.

#### The ERO is Being Reviewed

The government has appointed an independent panel to review the entire ERO’s procedure. They are asking for submissions, but unfortunately they must be in by 25 July. The discussion paper can be obtained from the internet at: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/external.htm> or from the Panel’s chairperson, Hon Margaret Austin, “Review of the Education External Evaluation System” Panel, PO Box 329, Wellington, ph. (04) 472-5639, fax (04) 499-2887, and the finished submissions can be sent to ERO Review, PO Box 329 Wellington.

We need to keep an eye on developments here, too, because some of the issues could have far-reaching implications. For example:

1) Should reviews take place in our homes, especially in light of Mr Donnelly’s stated intention to review the home to see that it is a safe and secure learning environment. I see two issues at stake here:

a) to protect the privacy and integrity of home educators’ families and their legal right to see to the education of their own children, lest they be viewed in the same terms as registered schooling institutions; and

b) to protect the professional standing and integrity of ERO Review Officers themselves, lest they be accused of inappropriate conduct while reviewing the home learning environment which could include a visit to a student’s study desk in a bedroom or an experiment set up in a bathroom.

2) The Education Act requires us to teach as regular and well as in a registered school. To check the safety of our homes seems to go way beyond their brief. Is this a power grab?

3) Should our homes as learning environments be reviewed at all? Do we not have exemptions from enrolment in schooling institutions? Our homes are not the same as institutions, where the ERO does have an obligation to review the safety features.

4) The ERO does not have a clear procedure or protocol for making appointments to review home schoolers nor for carrying them out. For instance, it is not clear whether the ERO would routinely want to take a child apart and conduct an interview away from the parent.

5) The Education Act does not

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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 Conference fees.
- Coaching on how to participate in the Parliamentary process via letter writing, making submissions, lobbying MPs, etc.
- An annual free gift.
- Discounts on resources, books, T-Shirts, etc.
- Discounts on Sunshine Educational coach tours.
- An official TEACH tax-deductible receipt for your donation.

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.

### All correspondence to:

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

require home schoolers to submit to Reviews by ERO officers.

6) We home schoolers do not have clearly recognised rights and privileges regarding these ERO reviews. For instance, can we have an advocate present with us to advise us how to answer should we feel some questions are inappropriate or an invasion of privacy?

7) Home educators already have three types of reviews in place, unconnected with the services of the ERO:

a) The initial application for the Exemption Certificate.

b) The statutory declaration we have to sign for each individual child two times each year now.

c) The annual report we are required to write for each child.

8) As these three reviews in themselves constitute a much more detailed accounting of each individual child's education than is done in registered schools, even with the services of the ERO, it is doubtful whether ERO reviews of home educators would contribute to improving the quality of education outcomes for these students.

9) Schools are reviewed once every three years, early childhood centres every four years. Since we already have three review procedures in place providing a more extensive accounting on each individual student, it is suggested that home educators, if they need to be reviewed at all, be reviewed at the same frequency of once every three years or less.

10) According to the ERO Review Panel's Background and Issues Paper, page 14, "Once a report has been confirmed, it becomes a public document, along with all accompanying evidence, working papers, etc. Any person may obtain a copy of any report....Copies of confirmed reports may be sent to other relevant agencies such as the Police or the Department of Social Welfare. They are also sent on request to the news media, parliamentary parties, and are available to members of the public, including parents and educational researchers."

If the reviews of home educators are going to focus on the child and the learning environment (the private home), as the Minister has stated, then this public nature of these reports becomes totally unacceptable.

## Web Sites

We can keep an eye on what is happening in the select committees and get copies of discussion papers and have a tour of how our government works by looking at:

<http://www.govt.nz/>

The Ministry of Education is located at:

<http://www.govt.nz/edu/>

and plenty of connections can be made from each of these.

## Writing to a Minister of the Crown

1) Address it to the relevant Minister, c/- The Beehive, Wellington. (No stamp is required...but of course we taxpayers at large foot the bill.)

2) When it reaches the minister's office, it is noted in a register and a letter of acknowledgment is sent in return.

3) If seeking information or assistance, it is referred to the appropriate department and noted in another register.

4) Once information is obtained, a draft reply is prepared and returned to the minister's office for finalisation and signature.

5) Each office has a set "turn-around" time for answering all letters.

6) The ministers' staff do not regard campaigns where the office receives a lot of duplicated letters or mail-in coupons as particularly effective, as they just clog the system (but that may be the objective of the campaign!), and burn up taxpayers' money. The number of such letters is noted, and a standard reply sent.

15 July 1997



Mr Craig S. Smith,  
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Dear Mr Smith,

With reference to your letter of 5 July 1997 concerning the work test provisions now applying to recipients of Domestic Purposes and Widows Benefit.

As you are aware the work test provisions that have applied from 1 April 1997 require recipients of Domestic Purposes and Widows Benefit, where the youngest child is aged 14 years or older, to participate in training or part-time employment of no less than 15 hours per week.

The intention of this provision is to facilitate independence from the benefit, through exposure to meaningful opportunities that will enhance the recipient's employment prospects.

In determining this policy the Government has recognised a number of situations where the benefit customers are not in a position to readily undertake training and/or employment activity. Accordingly they have sanctioned a number of exemptions to this work test policy.

As you have noted, this includes situations where there are health or special needs children issues. Other circumstances that have an exemption include during the six month period following the death of a widow's partner, or separation in the case of a Domestic Purposes customer; during pregnancy; where the spouse of an Unemployment Benefit customer has already commenced a course of study at the time of application.

These exemptions are specifically approved by Government.

There is no exemption for the situation where parents choose to teach their children in a Home Schooling environment. Home Schooling is regarded as a matter of choice, and people in receipt of a benefit with work test requirements need to make their schooling decisions/arrangements in the knowledge of those requirements.

I hope this clarifies the situation for you.

Yours sincerely,

Allan Child,  
Operational Policy.

## Some Home Schoolers Forced Out of Home

The above letter tells it all: Income Support needs to shave some "customers" from its books as the government continues to push its programme to see social welfare concerns returned more and more to private hands.

There are a number of home schoolers on either Domestic Purposes or Widows Benefits who will now have the added burden of seeking and obtaining 15 hours of

work or training a week on top of their home schooling/family/household duties as well. Some will be home schooling more than one aged 14 or over. It seems unfair that people in this situation are not also exempted. Rules can be re-written. If you want to do something about it, TEACH is happy to act as contact point/clearing house for making contact with others wanting to act.

## Information Workshop to be Repeated

Many thanks to Kate Jaunay, editor of HENA (Home Educators' Network of Aotearoa), for the report on the following page. This Workshop is to be repeated on Saturday, 22 November 1997. There was a vast reservoir of wisdom and information at that workshop AMONG THE ATTENDEES THEMSELVES, from which anyone else attending could freely draw simply by striking up a conversation. The real home schooling experts are the ones doing it, the ones you meet at such workshops.

## Triple Treat in Palmerston North

Similar opportunities to the Auckland Workshops will arise in Palmerston North, February 1998.

On Thursday the 5th, TEACH will hold its third annual **National Home Schooling Leadership Forum**. This is particularly for those involved in running or setting up or re-structuring a local support group, and is again designed to pool and share our expertise and discoveries for the mutual benefit of all. TEACH only acts as facilitator, as it too is committed to the independence and autonomy of your support group.

Friday the 6th (Waitangi Day) and Saturday the 7th is the sixth **CHomeS (Christian Home Schoolers of NZ) National Conference**. This is for all the family. As usual there are workshops and resource displays for the adults, but this time the children's programme will be incorporated into:

The First New Zealand National Home Educators Athletics, Swimming and Games Competitions, Friday and Saturday, 5 - 6 February. These will be professionally organised with cups and certificates. There will be a myriad of events on various levels: individual and support groups competitions, team games, something for everyone. (More information on all these to follow.)

## Homeschooling Information Workshop

On Saturday, June 21, 1997 a workshop was held in Mairangi Bay, organised by Shore Homeschoolers. About 160 people attended, of which 40 or so were men.

The key word for this workshop seemed to be 'convivial'. There was a very pleasant and relaxed atmosphere despite the rather chilly temperature in the venue. "It's character-building," we were told when there were mutters about the cold. "Christians are always trying to build character," I said, "Mine builds better when I'm comfortable!" But the good feelings more than made up for the want of warmth.

The keynote address was by Craig Smith, director of CHomes and editor of Keystone magazine and TEACH bulletin. He spoke on the subject of the relationships home schoolers have with the government, schools, other homeschoolers and the wider community.

One point he made is that the Ministry of Education is obliged to ensure that children get an education, so they must be convinced not only with your sincerity in desiring to do this, but your ability to do so. When you apply for an exemption, if they are not satisfied of your ability, they don't actually say "No", they merely ask for more information to be supplied, so that you can improve your application until they grant it.

He also spoke of the advisability of maintaining good relationships with local schools. Some home schoolers are able to attend particular classes, such as maths, science or the technological areas, and are able to take part in sports activities. This way everybody benefits - the home schoolers able to use the equipment and expertise, and the schools able to have keen, motivated students involved in the activities.

He spoke about the benefits of being aware of what other home schoolers are doing, and maintaining and expanding networks not only locally and regionally, but nationally as well.

Barbara Smith, coordinator of the Manawatu Home Educators, Inc announced that there will be a Home Schooling Awareness Week from October 13-19 inclusive. This gives groups the chance to publicise their activities by having displays in shopping centres, information coffee mornings, debates, and anything else they can think of to raise public awareness of the home schooling option.

The workshop sessions began after morning tea, and were very well attended. The selections were: Getting Started With Homeschooling, a panel which addressed not only pre-schoolers and their needs, but children who were being removed from school at a later age. In future workshops this will be split into two separate sessions to accommodate people's needs better. Craig Smith led one on Scriptural Principles of Homeschooling and Barbara Smith took one on Homeschooling Teenagers. Penelope Dawson and Marily Kemp took one on Raymond & Dorothy Moore's Approach to Homeschooling. Lyn Strong took Planning A Unit Study, and Lesley Clements and Penny Craft took Children's Literature (encouraging a love of reading through wholesome, inspiring books).

During lunch, which people were expected to provide themselves (with a McDonalds just across the carpark for those unable to prepare their lunch before 8:30 a.m.), there was time to browse through the resources for sale. Jabberwocky Book Shop, Christian Education Services, Marie-Louise Bennett and others had tables full of tempting material.

After lunch Craig Smith was kept busy with another workshop, the Father's Role in Homeschooling. Barbara Smith led one on Support Group Ideas, and Gail Abel, who had been on the panel in the morning, was unable to attend any of the other workshops because she was taking one on Teaching the Basics of Maths. Dorinda found time while organising the whole day to take a session on Teaching Reading Using Phonics.

Val Robb did a taste of her wonderful Encouraging Children's Writing seminar (which is usually a full day - how she decided what to leave out, I don't know). Denise Walmsley took one on Charlotte Mason's Approach to Education that sent me straight to CES afterwards for a copy of the book she quoted from, For the Children's Sake, by Susannah Schaeffer Macauley, so I could refer to it more in my own time.

After the sessions there was time for more browsing amongst the tables of resources, before we went home, some of us to thaw out in hot baths.

Much of my own time was taken up at the HENA table taking money for subscriptions to the magazine and network, and selling the Resource Directory, which was printed and stapled just the day before. I was determined to get the Directory out for the Workshop, so the magazine is coming out later than usual.

I found the workshop very inspiring and very fun from my not-at-all-involved-in-the-organising point of view. It sounds as if Dorinda, Lesley and Lyn enjoyed themselves too, as they are planning another one before the end of the year, very similar in content.

Kate Jaunay, HENA editor