

TEACH Bulletin

Thorough Education Achieved in a Caring Home

Number 2

February 1997

No Strings Attached

"I can advise that there are no strings attached to the (supervisory) allowance..."

So says Kathy Phillips, Senior Manager, National Operations, Ministry of Education, Wellington, in a letter to the Editor of TEACH Bulletin dated 22 January 1997.

The full text of the letter reads as follows:

The Minister of Education, Hon Wyatt Creech, has asked me to reply to your letter of 23 December 1996 concerning the supervisory allowance payable to homeschooling parents.

You have asked what strings, if any, are attached to the supervisory allowance, or what accounting measures are expected. I can advise that there are no strings attached to the allowance other than that it is payable retrospectively, once annually, to parents who have been educating their children "at least as regularly and well as in a registered school". The allowance is simply a recognition that parents who homeschool their children are inevitably involved in various

costs. The sums payable are exactly the same as those payable to parents whose children are fully enrolled students of the Correspondence School.

As regards accountability, the Ministry has an ongoing need to be satisfied that homeschooled children are being taught "at least as regularly and well as in a registered school" but this requirement has nothing to do with the supervisory allowance. Accountability is achieved via the annual statutory declaration and the annual self evaluation report.

This compares favourably with the reply to a similar question put to the then Minister of Education, Phil Goff, in a letter dated 6 August 1990, just when the supervisory allowance was first introduced to home schoolers. The reply on behalf of the Minister was written by Noel Scott, then Associate Minister of Education, dated 16 October 1990 and addressed to Craig S. Smith, National Director, Christian Home Schoolers of New Zealand. It reads as follows:

The reason for homeschooling parents receiving a grant can

be found in "Tomorrow's Schools" which set out the policy position the Government had reached having considered the Picot proposals in Administering for Excellence. The booklet states:

"5.4.4 Children being taught at home will have the right to enrol in Correspondence School courses. Their parent(s) will receive a home-based schooling allowance based on that currently given to the parents of Correspondence School students."

While there are no specific requirements set down regarding the ways in which a parent uses the home-based schooling allowance which is non-taxable, there is an expectation that it will be used for the purposes that it is made available. It is made available to parents who have been issued with a certificate of exemption and who continue to homeschool on the basis that the certificate was issued, that is, they have demonstrated that their child will receive an education as regularly and as well as in a school. The allowance, therefore, should be used for educational purposes and to assist a parent in providing for the education of the child.

I would point out that, as in the case with any allowance of this type, it is the prerogative of the possible recipients as to whether or not they accept it.

Don't forget to register for the TEACH Leadership Conference in Wellington 28 Feb -- 1 March!

DESK COPY

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 suggested donation of \$16 per year for 11 issues (none in December), or by becoming a member of TEACH for a suggested donation of \$30. 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 educational fieldtrips.

All correspondence to:
The Editor
Craig S. Smith
4 Tawa St.
Palmerston North 5301
New Zealand
Fax: (06) 357-4399

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

Home Schoolers and the Correspondence School

TEACH Bulletin editor Craig Smith wrote to the Ministry of Education suggesting that the MOE make the NZ Correspondence School lessons completely available to home schoolers free of charge. Provisional results of the TEACH Bulletin Opinion Poll #1 show that this would indeed be a popular move, with 82% of respondents in favour of the idea.

Your Editor's letter, dated 23 December 1996, pointed out the following benefits of such a move:

1. Being on The Correspondence School, home schoolers would not need exemptions, thereby eliminating vast amounts of paperwork from the various MOE offices in NZ.
2. They would not require Reviews by the ERO or annual reports or annual statutory declarations as they would be enrolled in a registered school and following the national curriculum step by step.
3. Not requiring the items in Point 2 would constitute quite a saving to the MOE in terms of money and manpower.
4. Having some home schoolers on the Correspondence School would relieve the concerns expressed by some within the principals' and teachers' groups.
5. If the Correspondence School lessons were available to all comers, it might encourage more parents to take up the

home schooling option. This would relieve some of the demand on teachers, classrooms and resources, yet the students would still be within the state education system.

6. The Ministry would be seen to be fulfilling its legal obligation to have all children under instruction as regular and well as in a registered school in a way that provides a greater amount of choice to parents with fewer rather than more administrative hassles.

7. It would be future oriented, as more and more activities are being centred around the home to gain the logistical advantages.

8. It simply makes more sense for the Government's Correspondence School to be teaching the next generation the approved curriculum, rather than the vast numbers of adults and prisoners who are currently on the Correspondence School roll.

The Correspondence School is quite a unique development in NZ and has a good reputation. It is a shame that it is denied to the very group that would benefit the most because of its current astronomical fee structure.

How many home schoolers would opt for the Correspondence School lessons once they became available free of charge is a matter of conjecture, but I personally suspect there could be quite a few. Since the number of home

schoolers is growing, there is no doubt that the number who would choose the Correspondence School would grow. But it would be growth of what the Ministry would surely see as a good thing: more children following the national curriculum with less administrative work for Ministry staff, and less demand on already scarce teacher time and classroom resources.

The MOE sent a reply dated 27 January 1997 which said the following:

Under Section 3 of the Education Act 1989 the Government accepts an obligation to provide access to free education and free enrolment at a State school for all students between the ages of 5 and 19. Some parents, however, exercise their option to enrol their children at private school. Others exercise their right to seek an exemption under Section 21 of the Education Act 1989 to enable them to homeschool their children.

As part of its commitment to providing access to free education for all New Zealand children and young persons, the Government resources the Correspondence School as a school of last resort for those parents who want access to state education but who find it impossible or impracticable to enrol their children in a regular school.

The Correspondence School, however, is not a school of choice. Parents who send their children to State schools do not have the option of choosing the Correspondence school. It follows therefore that the Correspondence School is not

an option for parents who choose to homeschool or send their children to private schools.

As you are aware, homeschooling parents do have the option of purchasing Correspondence School courses for use as the basis of their homeschooling programme. If Correspondence School enrolment and lesson material were to be freely available on request, this would completely change the character of the school.

I appreciate your desire to offer a constructive suggestion on a matter which concerns you. I trust that this explanation of current Government policy helps you to understand the wider context of the issue you have raised.

*Signed:
Kathy Phillips, Senior Manager
National Operations.*

This is a very nice reply, but it doesn't deal with the issues, since these kinds of letters can only work within what is current Government policy. Current policy is not to allow students free access to C.S. lessons, implying that with the right moves in the future it could well become future Government policy. What could be done is for those home schoolers who are interested in this issue to write to their own MP and ask his/her opinion on the matter, or whether s/he would be open to the idea of making C.S. lessons freely available, or at a modest fee, to all comers.

At present there are just over 2,000 full-time primary and secondary students using C.S. lessons. Yet there are about

20,000 on the C.S. role. The rest are adults, part time students whose schools do not offer those subjects, and prisoners. Oh, yes, and then there are the students who were expelled from the high school in Cambridge for smoking dope.

The bit about C.S. not being a school of choice is not totally accurate. There are the athletic students who want to put in extra hours training every day who have managed to talk the C.S. into letting them onto the role free of charge.

So if you are an athlete or get expelled from school or end up in prison you can have free access to the C.S. lessons, but not if you just want to study them at home. In that case you can buy the lessons at around \$3,000 per year. The Editor has known parents who have themselves signed up for C.S. lessons, since they were virtually free to adults, and then give the lessons to the children to do. This is not being suggested as a course of action, but it has been known to take place.

What Makes for High Quality Education ?

This question was asked of Dr Judith Aiken, Chief Executive of the Education Review Office. Here is her answer as reported in LEARN magazine, April 1996, page 30.

It depends on the person asking the question. If, for example, you're the Government and you're asking the question "what makes for high quality education?" then your view will be very broad and you will be

looking for the contribution that a formal education system can offer to the economy in terms of economic development, or labour market maintenance. The Government's interest also includes the impact that a formal education system has on social behaviour, social relationships, social control, as well as the opportunity that education provides for personal and individual development. So that's a very broad range.

From the point of view of the individual the question "what makes for high quality education?" is at the other end of the spectrum. It includes participation in a formal process which actively encourages and enables learning in a way that could not be provided outside of school. First of all, ideally the school student (or child) is acquiring knowledge in a formal and structured way. Secondly, the student is acquiring a range of skills and capacities and confidence, and thirdly, the student is enjoying the process of cognitive and personal growth. In essence, education is about the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. It seems to me therefore that what distinguishes schooling from other social institutions is its role in the intellectual and cognitive development of the community. Other institutions in our society specifically or generally address other parts of the human being. Schooling is about the mind and extending the capacity of the mind and from my point of view if schooling fails to address that and support it with an environment that's emotionally satisfactory then it fails.

It is very hard not to comment on the foregoing, so I will. It would appear that the State school system views our children as economic units which may or may not

contribute to the nation's economic development and labour market maintenance. We've all heard people bleat on about how our children are our country's most precious natural resource. I heartily resent my sons and daughters being compared to bales of wool and frozen sheep carcasses which will be used in the international trade surplus & deficit games.

In addition, Dr Aitken comes right out and says that the State schools are into social control. If our children are being compared to sheep, I guess the teachers are the dogs...they are there to maintain control of the mob. As long as the sheep all say "baaa" and move in the same direction, everything is OK.

Most would agree with Dr Aitken's statement that education is about passing knowledge from one generation to another. But we must not be misled here: the State schools are not purposefully doing this. In fact, they are constantly introducing new conceptions of old material and new ways of perceiving things. This has as one of its objectives the separating of the child from the views and values of the parents and encouraging the child to develop his/her own personalised value system.

The NZ Qualification Authority's Unit Standards

When Michael Fitzsimons interviewed Sir Neil Waters, former Vice-Chancellor of Massey University and current Chairman of the Board of the Qualifications Authority about his hopes for the new Qualifications Framework, the following exchange took place (LEARN magazine, November 1996, page 8):

The unit standards approach

to assessment is based on the needs of the individual student whereas our schools and, I think, much of our university teaching is time-based. It's based on courses of specific length so you study, say, for one year as a class, then the whole class is examined and ranked. On the other hand the unit standards approach is saying you are an individual who will be taught until you reach the required standard and then you should go on to the next standard. But our schools are not organised for that at all, there's a whole change in thinking and organising which has to go on.

Q. Is this a realistic model for schools?

A. Why not?

Q. Because they've got 35 students in their classes at different stages.

A. Right, but let me pose another thought. If you ask what schools are for the obvious answer is to educate kids, but there's an equally important answer. And that is to socialise them, to bring them up to be comfortable in adult society and I think this has always been a feature of the education process, otherwise it wouldn't take so long. You don't need 15 years to educate somebody but you need 15 years to socialise somebody. I think we should use the schools for the socialising role and we should somehow or other try to separate the educational role from that so that as a pupil you were in the class with every other 14-year-old but you might be doing maths with adults and Japanese language with 10-year-olds or whatever. So everybody learnt at an individual pace but you were socialised at a chronological pace.

Home education accomplishes these academic and social objectives far more effectively, without the bureaucracies.