

NEELB Focus Group 2 – 16/05/14

Present – 3 parents (P), Carol Johnston NEELB met for two hours

Two of the education parents present have contact with the Education Board.

Carol led the parents through each section of the draft policy to ensure that the policy was clearly communicated and to ask for feedback on its content.

The parents provided the education facilitator with academic research on home education and child welfare, and made a number of suggestions for improvement, including the following:

- requesting greater promotion of home education on the Board website, with any discussion of schools clearly communicating that the education is not legal requirement to send children to school
- encouraging the education Board to recognise that home education parents subsidise the Board's schools, and that home educated children should be able to benefit from the resources
 - o greater flexibility in opening up the education resources of school to home educated children,
 - o allowing the them for example to take part in science, PE or music lessons as appropriate, or
 - o inancial grants to help parents provide resources
- clarification that Board representatives should not be able to interview children, certainly not without the parents
- the parents also made suggestions for improvements to current practice:
 - o creating a new provision for training EWOs in home education history, method, variety of approach etc
 - o promoting better professional practice, story of inspectors turning up early (in one case, 2 and a half hours early) for a home inspection.

Observations by parents

- Carol appears to have been thrown in at the education deep end.
- suggestion made that the person who drafted the education policy might like to meet with everyone and be accountable for it . We would have a better idea of just what exactly is on home her/his mind.
- Once the boards have finished the consultation they would need a meeting with everyone as there can't be 5 different policies in each board
- Carol seems to think it's all quite innocent and the boards have home educator's best interests at heart.
 - o but as we all pointed out - that's fine today - tomorrow someone who isn't quite so sympathetic could be in charge
- Though some of the parents were happy to meet with the education Board they felt those who weren't willing to meet should have their privacy respected.
- Home Education is too diverse bring under one umbrella - we felt providing a programme (even though she said it wouldn't be assessed) wasn't something many of us would like to do .
- expecting an area set aside in the home for educating was unreasonable because it just isn't like that for many families - the 'classroom' can be a kitchen table, lying on the floor in front of a fire, a forest or a beach - we aren't 'school' and don't want to do what schools do.
- Also mentioned that it was unreasonable to expect home educated kids to be average or above, Carol agreed.
- Asked her if the government or the board had instigated all this and she was adamant that it was the board.
- We expressed a concern that there was a hidden agenda
- We also pointed out that other boards weren't necessarily so understanding of the home educating approach as Carol was suggesting the NEELB are.

Carol:

- the education draft policy is not intended to change current practice, but to formalise it.
- There will be no requirement to register home educated children with the education Board (the education Board "expects" but cannot require registration), and neither will there be any change in practice for those who do register.

- the education draft will not police the intellectual content of home education "programmes", and that those who teach from a particular philosophical, political or religious perspective have their rights to do so enshrined under Section 75 equality legislation
- was unable to explain whether the education draft policy engaged with the substantial multi-disciplinary scholarly literature on home education.

It seems that this whole policy is a very long way off being implemented

At the education very end we all agreed (the 3 home educators) that it was all about just being free to do what we want to do without government restraint - the children belong to us not the government and we want the freedom to be left alone to home educate in our own diverse way.