Thousands of parents ignore government register of children

Home schooling revolt

BY EDMUND BURKE

AN ATTEMPT by the State Government to overhaul home-schooling registration requirements appears to have failed.

A new system was introduced in January to make it easier for parents teaching their children at home to legally report to the state without fear of being forced to send them to school.

But Eleanor Sparks of Education Choices Magazine for home-schoolers said thousands of parents were reluctant to register with the Government.

"There is still a lot of distrust there. A lot of parents don't want to sign up and then have the department try to change the way they choose to educate their children," she said.

An Education Queensland report estimates up to 10,000 children are being home-schooled, but just 260 of them are officially registered with the State Government.

Education Minister Rod Welford does not accept the figure though it comes from his own department's Home Schooling Review.

He said he believed parents who have registered under the department's distance education scheme (4800 students) and the 260 students under the new system represented the "overwhelming majority".

"There may be one or two hundred who we still haven't captured because we don't know precisely the number of children who are not in school," he said.

He said he believed the "home-schooling industry" had an interest in exaggerating its numbers.

"I want to spread the message that it is against the law not to be registered, and secondly that it is in their interests to do that," he said.

"It is not a question of bludgeoning parents into some sort of Big Brother control system."

"By registering those students we can give them support such as advice on teaching text and give them some assistance through nearby schools if they want to access that." Parents who reject the school system say they do so for many reasons.

There are financial benefits to home-schooling as parents do not have to worry about fees, uniforms, textbooks or trips.

But parents say the decision to home-school also means financial sacrifices, as at least one parent must spend all their time with their children.

Amanda from Ipswich told The Sunday Mail she opted out of schools because she feared exposing her children to peer groups there.

"I know that a lot of people out there think that people like us are weirdos who want to live outside society but we're not. We just don't believe that schools are the best place to put your children."

Amanda, who asked that her full name not be revealed, has not registered any of her children with Education Queensland and has never followed a structured learning system.

Her eldest child, Gabby, 15, did not start reading until she was nine but is studying for a bachelor of arts at the Open University (an online higher education service that does not require any entry grades).

"I enjoyed it. It was a fun way to learn and now that I am at university I don't find the work too hard. I am able to handle it," Gabby said.

Parents must send their children to school unless they receive special dispensation from Education Queensland.

But Ms Sparks says governments have turned a blind eye to thousands of parents who choose to school their children at home.

AT HOME: Amanda and her children (from left) Maddy, Cara, Gabby, Sophie and Evie are among thousands who choose not to register with Education Queensland.

Picture: CAMPBELL SCOTT