

An Introduction to Home Schooling

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This paper will highlight that homeschooling is not new to the educational landscape. It will address key issues relevant to home schooling including academic validity, the socialisation of home educated children, the reasons that parents choose home education and the recent growth of this pedagogy.



Definition of Home Schooling

Home schooling, also known as home education, is the practice of parents educating their own children themselves, rather than sending them to schools for their formal education. It is characterised by parents taking the full responsibility for their children's education instead of delegating that responsibility to another person or institution. Home schooling's key pedagogical context is the family, the family home, and the family's local and broader communities (Harding, 1997, 2011).

Home Schooling is Not a New Educational Phenomenon

Given that formal schooling was rare throughout history for most people, home-based education has traversed all of human time and cultures. Thus, home education has been the normative educational practice in most cultures for millennia (Eastman, 1971; Parker, 1912; Radin, 1963), including the educational practice of the western world over many centuries (Good, 1962; Nakosteen, 1965; Wilds & Lottich 1970). Parents and tutors educated both the children of nobles in palaces and the children of peasants in humbler dwellings and surroundings, ushering them into their adulthood. For example, Jewish parents going back as far as Old Testament times have been admonished to teach their children:

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. *You shall teach them diligently to your children*, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)



Parents taking on the task of nurturing and teaching their children is both as old and as up-to-date as parenting itself.

In more recent times there have been many notable people who were home schooled including Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Thomas Edison, Agatha Christie, Alexander Graham Bell, Florence Nightingale, J. R. R. Tolkien, Jane Austen, Mary MacKillop, the Jonas brothers, Banjo Patterson, Jessica Watson, Bindi and Robert Irwin, Justin Bieber, Bethany Hamilton and Julian Assange.

Whilst home schooling is rare in some countries and illegal in others, the modern home schooling movement is growing significantly, across the globe, including in Australia (English, 2019; English & Gribble, 2021; Green-Hennessy and Mariotti, 2021; Hamlin & Peterson, 2022; Harding, 1997, 2011, 2022b; Harding & Farrell, 2003; Ray, 2003, 2013a, 2021 a, b & c, 2022c). The resurgence of this educational movement in Australia from its eighteenth century origins to current times is making a significant change on Australia's educational landscape.

Home Schooling's Origins in Australia

In Australia, home education would have characterised indigenous peoples prior to European colonisation. However, it is significant to note that formal education in Australia commenced at the outset of European colonisation, in the late eighteenth century, in the family home.

The inclusion of seventeen children of the convicts and nineteen children of marine personnel at the arrival of the first fleet in Australia in 1788, flagged the obvious need for education in the new colony. This need was met by Isabella Rosson in Sydney, Thomas McQueen on Norfolk Island and Mary Johnson at Parramatta, who each taught children in their homes from 1788 onwards (Austin, 1961; Barcan, 1965, 1980; Cleverly, 1971). Cleverly (1971) explained that these home-based, educational endeavours, known as "dame schools" were usually conducted in the living rooms and kitchens of the homes of women who would teach children for a small fee. Cleverly states that these home-based educators "taught the Children belonging to Convicts gratis (sic.)" while the military were required to pay a small contribution (Cleverly, 1971, p.36).

Similarly, the Reverend Richard Johnson, Australia's first minister of religion, and his wife Mary, taught their children at home given the lack of a formal school in the colony. Eliza Marsden,

wife of Australia's second Minister of Religion wrote of Richard and Mary Johnson's home educated children:

"Milbah and Henry are two fine children. Milbah you will see what progress she has made in her writing and it is a great pity she is not in England." (Marsden, p.20)

In like manner, the Reverend Samuel and Eliza Marsden, also embraced the home education of their children. Eliza wrote to her mother, of her young daughter, Ann's literacy whilst living in a colony devoid of schools and suitable private tutors:

"and there not being one good school that I should have been very happy to have heard of her being safe with my mother. She is now 5 1/2 years old, she reads a little and works very neat." (Marsden, 1799, p.20)

Thus, the beginning of formal education in Australia has its roots in the family home.

Formal Schooling's Origins in Australia

Formal schooling in Australia was initially deemed to be the responsibility of the churches and commenced with a shaky start in 1793 when the Reverend Richard Johnson built a cruciform, wattle and daub church building that served for worship on Sundays and as a school during the week. Unfortunately, after five years the building "was maliciously burnt down" in 1798 (Mackaness, 1954).

During the early nineteenth century Christian denominational schooling was conducted by the "Established Church" (Anglican), Presbyterian and Catholic churches, each of which were in competition for government assistance. The state later entered the educational field toward the mid-nineteenth century, presenting a secular focus to education. It is important to note that this secular, state-provided form of education merely meant a departure from denominationalism, not from what was known as common Christianity, and that it was to be "Christian in spirit" (Austin, 1977, p.35).

Governor Fitzroy's educational reforms of 1848 included the appointment of a Board of National Education which created government schools. The scene was set on the Australian educational landscape to usher in the seminal "dual system" comprising both the independent and government schooling systems, which continues to serve Australian education today.

The most dramatic resurgence of home schooling has been in the United States, where leading US home schooling researcher, Dr. Brian Ray has documented the steady growth of home schooled student numbers for more than thirty years [...] there were an estimated 3.135 million school-age (K-12) home schooled students in the United States during the 2021-2022 school year.

As formal schooling took root in the colonies, serving the needs of many, home-based education was common in remote regions, where there were no schools. Wyeth (1955) described nineteenth century educational gender discrimination in Queensland, where boys were given access to available schooling but "girls were taught at home by their mothers." (Wyeth, 1955, p.41). The precluding or withholding of formal schooling necessitated home schooling.

The Modern Home Schooling Movement

Fast forward to the late twentieth century, and the modern home schooling movement made an initially humble return to educational practice in the West. However, over the past forty years, home schooling has emerged as a rapidly growing educational phenomenon in developed nations. This is especially apparent in the United States, Australia, Europe, New Zealand, and South Africa (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Harding, 1997, 2003, 2006a; Harding & Farrell, 2003; Hunter, 1994; Kerslake et. al., 1997; Meighan 1984, 1996; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1998; Ray, 1992, 1994, 1998, 2022c.; Taylor & Petrie, 2000; UNESCO, 2002).

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GROWTH OF HOMESCHOOLING IN THE UNITED STATES

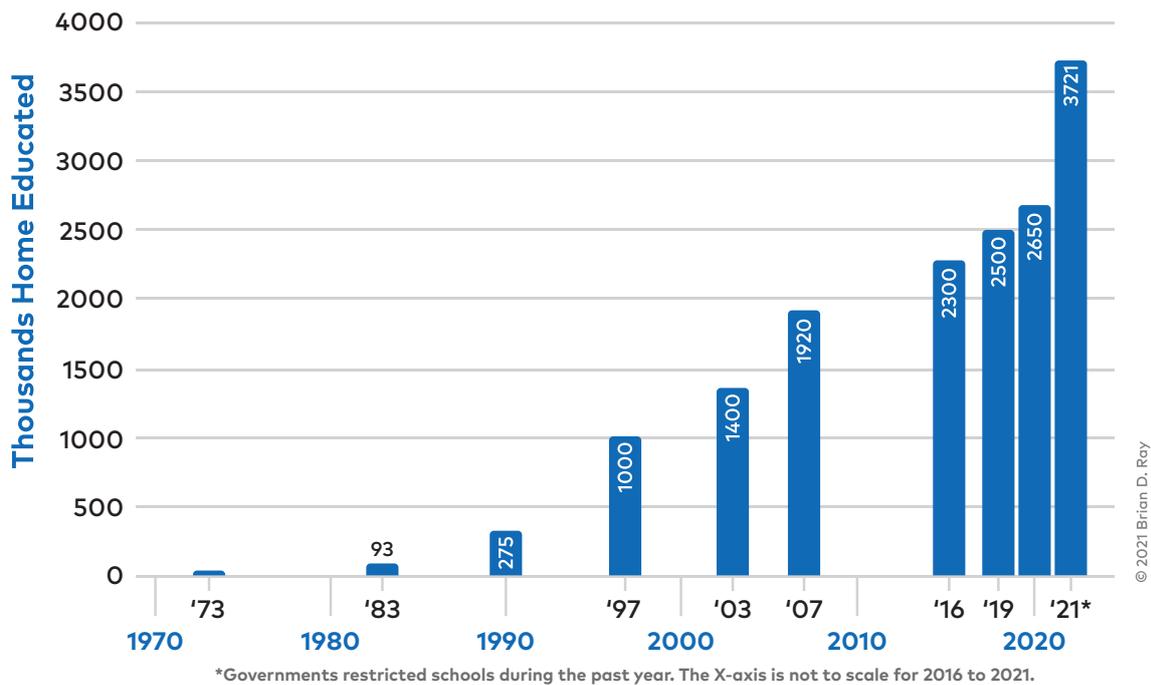


Figure 1. Growth in Home Schooled Students in the United States (Ray, 2022c.)

Similarly, in all Australian states and territories, increasing numbers of parents are choosing to educate their own children at home. With access to the world's information via the internet, a vast range of high quality curriculum materials, and the availability of home schooling networks, this home-based education movement is flourishing (Bryan, 2022; English, 2019, 2021; English & Gribble, 2021; Hamlin & Peterson, 2022; Harding, 2022a & b; Henebery, 2022).



Reasons Why Parents Choose Home Schooling

Researchers (Collom, 2005; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Harding, 1997, 2003; Harp, 1998; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Murphy, Gaither & Gleim, 2017) have cited multiple reasons why parents are choosing home schooling. These motivations include:

- Religious and philosophical reasons - in that parents want their children's education to be consistent with their family's religious beliefs, philosophies, morals and values;
- Academic reasons – where parents are dissatisfied with the quality of education at their children's schools; they may be attracted to a specific curriculum or a pedagogical form; they seek better educational opportunities to challenge gifted and talented children or to remediate poorly achieving children or those disengaged from learning; and they seek a real-world educational experience rather an institutionalised educational experience;
- Parenting reasons – where parents believe that their children's education is their responsibility, not the state's responsibility and that they want to be engaged in that responsibility; to provide an environment that is conducive to learning and child safety; and to develop deeper family relationships;

- Socialisation reasons - to build or remediate the child's self-confidence; to learn to relate to all age groups of people in natural settings; and to avoid negative peer influences and bullying extant in schools;
- Pragmatic reasons - to facilitate learning whilst the family travels; a Christian school was not available; the family could not afford private school education;
- Special needs - the child has physical, psychological, behavioural, or educational special needs; the child is gifted and talented academically, in sports, in the arts, or in the media.

The various reasons given by parents who choose home schooling for their children align with what those parents see as fulfilling their fundamental responsibility of raising and caring for their own children.

Home Schooling and Academic Issues

Because home schooling is a radical alternative to the traditional school-based educational system in the West, there have been anecdotal challenges, without evidence, to the academic validity of home schooling (McFarlane, 2003, 2004, 2006; Queensland Teachers' Union, 2001, 2003). This critique has even extended to the point of alleging that "home schooling is 'child-abuse'" (Queensland Teachers' Union, 2001). However, there is a growing corpus of research spanning forty years, which indicates that home schooled students are not disadvantaged academically. In many cases these research findings show that in terms of academic learning, home schooled students do as well as, if not better than, their traditionally schooled counterparts (Harding, 2003; Kunzman et al. 2020; Ray, 2021b & d).

The academic performance of home-educated students has been the focus of this educational research, especially in the US. For example, early US research in the 1980s and 1990s showed that home-educated students scored well above national norms in the academic areas of reading, mathematics and language (Calvary, Bell & Vaupel, 1992; Delahooke, 1986; Frost & Morris, 1988; Alaskan Department of Education, 1984, 1985, 1986; Rakestraw, 1987, 1988; Ray, 1986, 1992, 1998; Richman & Richman, 1988; Scogin, 1986; Tipton, 1991a, 1991b; Wartes, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990).

This research extended into other cognitively related areas including, language development in early preschool children (Perkel, 1979; Ray, 1990; Tizard, Hughes, Pinkerton & Carmichael, 1982, 1983a, 1983b; Tizard & Hughes, 1984). Tizard and Hughes (1984) for example, found that the language of home schooling mothers in England was more cognitively demanding than the language of early childhood classroom teachers, in that conversational interactions covered past experiences and future hopes; better language stimulus to promote cognitive development; and the opportunity for children to initiate conversations and to ask questions (Tizard, Hughes, Pinkerton & Carmichael 1982, 1983a, 1983b; Tizard & Hughes, 1984).

Oliveira, Watson, and Sutton (1994) researched the critical thinking skills of home schooled and traditionally schooled students. They found no significant difference between the two. Similarly, Quine and Marek (1988) compared the intellectual development of home-educated and traditionally schooled students. While Quine and Marek (1988) found the intellectual development of both groups to be similar, they also found that home educated students moved into formal thought operation earlier than their traditionally schooled counterparts. Such results confirm the view that home educated students are not disadvantaged in their educational and cognitive development.

More recent research into the academic achievement of home educated students also reinforces the earlier research results that they are not disadvantaged academically (Belfield, 2005; Cogan, 2010; Harding, 2003, 2006b; Martin-Chang, Gould, & Meuse 2011; Murphy, 2021; Ray, 2009 a & b, 2010, 2017; Ray & Eagleson, 2008; Rudner, 1999).

The academic value of home schooling can also be indicated by the ability of home schooled graduates to enter tertiary educational institutions. Harding's research (Harding, 2006b) into the post home schooling study pathways of 438 home schooled graduates of Australian Christian Academy found that after completing their home schooling, 36% of students were accepted into bachelor's degree studies at universities around Australia, 21% commenced diploma studies and 43% entered apprenticeships or certificate studies at TAFE colleges. Figure 2 shows the percentage breakdown of the direction of home schooled students after completing their schooling. Home schooling had not hindered these students from pursuing tertiary studies.

Home Educated Graduates - Study Pathways

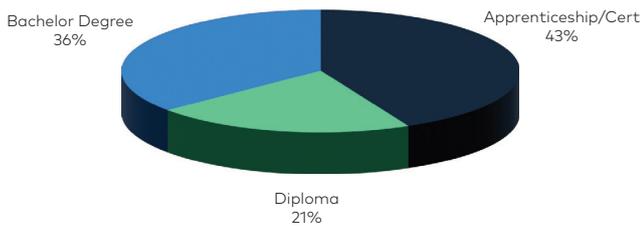


Figure 2. ACA Graduates and Tertiary Entrance (Harding 2006b)

Carins' research (2002) of educational outcomes of a small sample of adults, who were home educated students in Tasmania, indicated that 78% of graduates had entered university courses. Since successfully completing their tertiary studies, they have been employed in either the technical, scientific, teaching or nursing fields as indicated in the graph below (Carins, 2002). Thus, Carins also demonstrated that home educated students are not only gaining entrance to tertiary institutions, they are also successful in their chosen career pathways. This small Tasmanian study aligns with Ray's (2004) larger study of 7,306 adults in the USA, which indicated that their home education had enabled them to enter tertiary institutions and lead productive livelihoods.

Home-Schooled Graduates by Profession 1986-2000

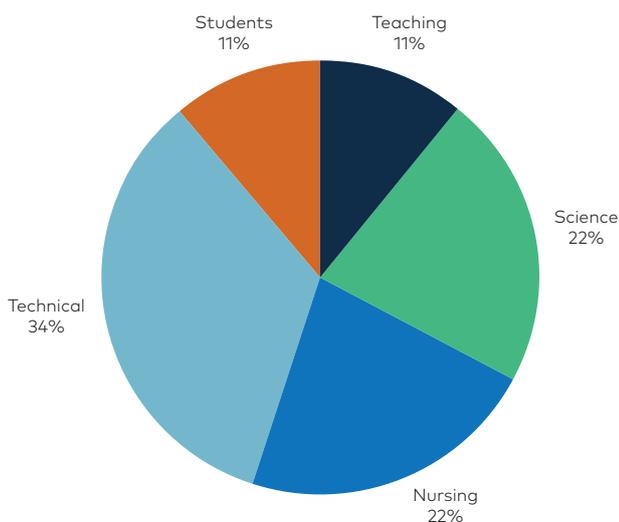


Figure 3. Home Schooled Graduates by Profession (Carins, 2002)

McColl's research of Australian Christian Academy graduate student satisfaction levels indicated a high level of student satisfaction with their home schooling experience. McColl (2005) reported that:

- 90% of the research cohort stated that their home schooling education had prepared them well for life after home schooling.
- 81% agreed that home schooling had not limited their educational opportunities.
- 98% stated that their education had not limited their career opportunities.
- 92% agreed that it had advantaged them as adults.
- 94% agreed that they were happy with their educational experience and
- only 5% of the cohort stated that they would not access a similar educational methodology for their own children.

Anecdotal suspicions that home education would disadvantage students is found wanting, considering the evidence over forty years which demonstrates that home schooled students are able to do well academically and cognitively and are able to enter tertiary educational institutions, and subsequently pursue positive career paths.



Home Schooling and Student Socialisation

As is the case with academics, it is also anecdotally assumed by some that home schooled students are not well socialised because they do not attend school. Again this critique comes with no evidence (Carter & Winch, 2001; McFarlane, 2003; Monk, 2004; Queensland Teachers' Union, 2003; Romanowski, 2001; Sawford, 2004). In the 2003 Home School Review in Queensland, the reviewers stated that the implied belief that home educated students are socially disadvantaged emerged as a commonly held view in the wider community (Queensland Government, 2003).

Implied in this assumptive critique is the corollary that school attendance provides the key formation for the social development of children. This critique also ignores the warnings of The Honourable Justice Roslyn Atkinson, Judge of the Supreme Court of Queensland (Atkinson, 2002) who stated at the time of the Review of Home Schooling in Queensland, that school phenomena, such as negative social aspects including bullying, herald a litigious future for education in Queensland.

In spite of these unfounded allegations regarding the socialisation of home schooled students there is a significant corpus of research, spanning decades, that supports the view that home educating parents are able to provide an appropriate environment for the socialisation of their children. Relevant to this discussion, is to define what is meant by the term "socialisation".

American psychologist, Richard Medlin (2000), defined socialisation as social activity, social influence, and social exposure. For the purposes of his research Medlin adopted Durkin's (1995) definition of socialisation from the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Psychology* (1995), as: "the process whereby people acquire the rules of behaviour and systems, beliefs and attitudes that equip a person to function effectively as a member of a particular society" (p. 614).

All the aforementioned studies indicated that the home educated students were not disadvantaged in their social development when compared to traditionally schooled students. Rather, the home educated students consistently showed higher positive results in all of these studies when compared to their traditionally schooled counterparts.

Durkin (1995) argued that the socialisation of children takes place as they participate in "daily routines which immerse them directly in the values of their community" (p. 618). Medlin (2000) noted that attending school is only one agent of socialisation, and that psychologists such as Bronfenbrenner (1989), Durkin (1995) and Gecas (1992) supported the view that any interactivity between children and other members of their community is a contributor to their social development. These researchers brought to the fore that it is possible for children to acquire the rules of behaviour and systems, beliefs and attitudes in order to function in society, without attending school.

Because of the significant growth of home schooling in the US much of the research has been conducted there, however, there is a growing body of research into this educational alternative in other countries. Many comparative studies across the US have shown home educated students to be socially well developed when compared to students educated in traditional schools. Various aspects of the social life of home educated students have been examined.

These studies have included examinations of: social/emotional adjustment in California (Delahooke, 1986); cooperation, assertiveness, empathy and self-control (Medlin, 2006); problem behaviour and social maturity in Florida (Shyers, 1992); communication skills and daily living skills in Virginia (Smedley, 1992); leadership skills in Washington (Montgomery, 1989a, 1989b); family interaction patterns (Carson, 1990); and social opportunities available to the home educated in Iowa (Chatham-Carpenter, 1994) and Washington (Wartes, 1987). The self-esteem and the self-concept of home educated and of traditionally schooled students have been compared by many researchers (Taylor, 1986; Hedin, 1991; Kelly, 1991; Kitchen, 1991; Smedley, 1992; Medlin, 1994; Tillman, 1995). White, Williford, Brower, Collins, Merry, & Washington (2007) compared the social adjustment of previously home educated college freshmen with traditionally schooled college freshman.

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Several studies found that home educated students participate in a wide range of extracurricular and community activities outside the immediate family, both with age peers and with those of more than two years age difference. These activities included play groups, choirs, drama groups, music lessons, interactions with neighbours, organised sports, camps, community service groups and church related activities (Delahooke, 1986; Montgomery, 1989a, 1989b; Medlin, 2000; Rakestraw, 1987; Ray, 1994, 2003; Tillman, 1995; Wartes, 1987).

Moreover, Carwile-Johnson (1991), Meighan (2001a, 2001b) and Thomas (1998) found that home educators tend to create small communities for learning and socialising beyond the family. Wartes (1987) found that home educated children spent, on average, around 20 to 29 hours per month in such activities. Home educated children actively participate in their communities, rather than being isolated from them. These researchers concluded that home educated students were not socially isolated from group activities with other youth and adults.

Shyers' study (Shyers, 1992) of problem behaviour among primary-aged students in Florida provides an example of one of these studies. Shyers found that home educated students in Florida, not only showed significantly higher assertiveness and self-concept ratings than traditionally schooled students; but they also demonstrated significantly lower problem behaviour as a means of resolving social issues, than did children educated in schools.

Shyers' comparison of the problem behaviour of 70 home educated students with 70 traditionally educated students, matched for age and gender found that the problem behaviour of home educated children ranged within accepted norms (0-6), whilst that of traditionally schooled children significantly exceeded those norms. Table 1 is a summary of Shyers' research comparing the problem behaviour of home schooled and traditionally schooled students.

Problem Behaviour Rating

Normal Problem Behaviour Rating = 0 - 6

	Male Age 8	Female Age 8	Male Age 9	Female Age 9	Male Age 10	Female Age 10
Home Educated	4	2	4	1	6	4
Traditionally Schooled	16	21	16	15	22	16

Table 1. Problem Behaviour Rating Comparison (Shyers, 1992)



Shyers concluded that:

"traditionally schooled children tended to be considerably more aggressive, loud and competitive than were home schooled children of the same age. ... This finding supports the belief held by home school proponents that home schooled children are socially well adjusted." (p. 6)

More recent studies (Francis & Keith, 2004; Harding, 2003; Madar & BenDavid-Hadar, 2021; Medlin, 2013; Ray, 2004, 2013 a & b, 2021d, 2022 a & b) have aligned with the earlier findings that home schooled students are not disadvantaged in terms of social development. Ray's (2004) study of 7,306 adults who were home schooled for the last seven years of their schooling found that these young adults were active social participants and contributors to their communities. Further, Siever and Pope (2022) found that formerly home educated young adults scored higher in volunteer activity, political participation and higher in terms of "openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness and lower in neuroticism" when compared to publicly schooled or privately schooled peers. Siever & Pope (2022) found that young adults who were home educated have been "adequately socialized so that they can fit in within their social milieu, and that their personalities may have been positively affected by their family's homeschool strategy." (p.1).

Home Schooling's Recent Growth In Australia

Data from Australia's Home Education Association (HEA) shows that home school registrations have increased by at least 9 percent in all Australian states and territories between 2019 and 2021 (Champ, 2021). All states and territories apart from Tasmania have reported over a 19 percent increase. From 2019 to mid-2021, Queensland had the highest increase in home school registration with a 46 percent change (Bryan, 2022; Champ, 2021; Henebery, 2022). Figure 4 shows the number of home educated students who are registered for home schooling with the educational authorities of all Australian states and territories.

Australian Christian Home Schooling (ACHS) is the nation's original supporter of home schooling families, supplying both curriculum and educational services since 1981 (Risser, 2006). ACHS was known initially as the Parent Home Education Programme (PHEP), later as the Australian Christian Academy (ACA) and in 2012 it was renamed Australian Christian Home Schooling. ACHS has provided curriculum resources for tens of thousands of students ranging from Kindergarten to Year 12 since its inception. It has also provided enrolled students and families with educational services such as academic diagnosis, academic support, assistance with graduation and tertiary entrance, and parent training and support.

In concert with the general growth of home schooling around Australia, ACHS has also experienced continual growth over the decades. However, student numbers have significantly risen by 62 percent over the past three years (Harding, 2022 a & b).

The rise of the number of home educated children around Australia has awakened an interest in home schooling by journalists and educational authorities. It has been conjectured that in the wake of COVID-19 restrictions having been imposed for two years and then lifted, that there may be a correlation between the effects of the mandated restrictions on traditional schooling and the rise in home schooling student numbers (English, 2021). However, data (see Figure 4) show that home schooling numbers were increasing before COVID-19 restrictions (English & Gribble, 2021). Nonetheless, this conjecture highlights the need for research into why parents have chosen home education for their children prior to COVID-19 restrictions and why they have done so after the imposition of those restrictions. Australian Christian Home Schooling has conducted research into that question and is currently collating and developing the parental responses to why parents have chosen to educate their children by home schooling with ACHS before and after the COVID-19 restriction periods.

Registered Students

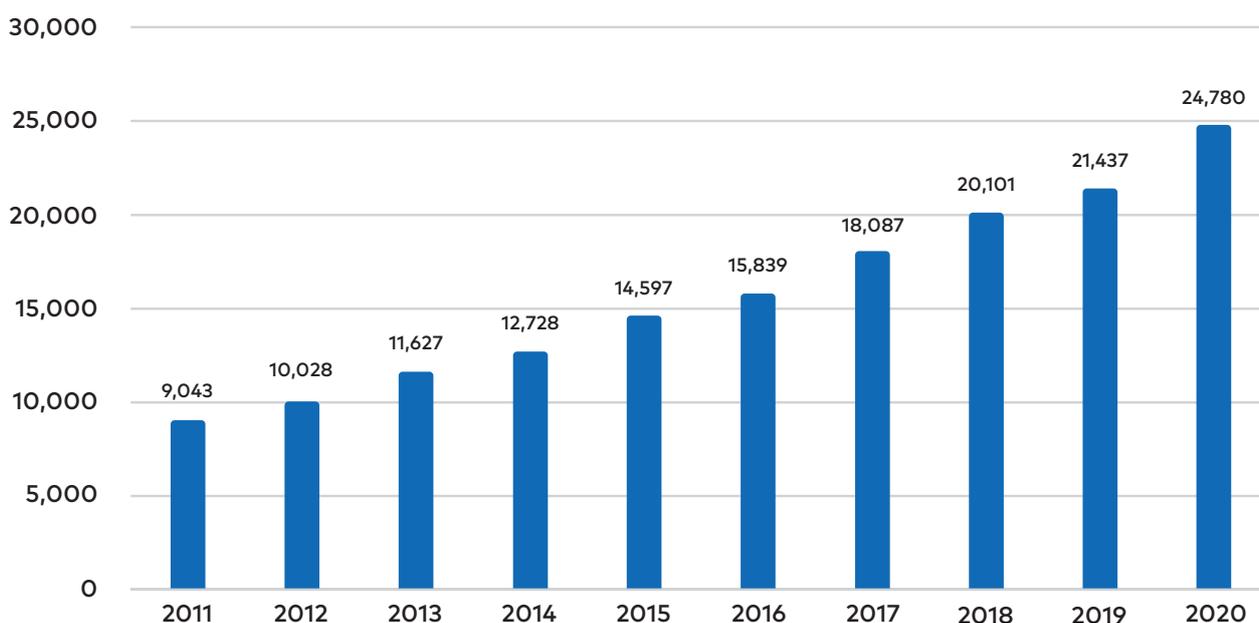


Figure 4. Registered Home School Students in Australia. (English & Gribble, 2021)

Concluding Remarks

Parents have home educated their children since the beginning of the human story up until now. They have done so by choice and often by necessity. The birthing, raising, nurturing, and enculturating of children has been authorised by God as expressed in many parts of the Bible. Exemplar Scriptures of this divinely mandated responsibility include Deuteronomy 6:5-7, Psalm 78:2-4, Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4 to name a few.

The assigning of educational responsibility to parents in both the Hebrew and Christian cultures has been a hallmark of education for millennia. Parents may rightly choose in the second instance, to partly delegate this responsibility to the Minister for Education in the form of Government and Non-Government schools. However, it must always be remembered that in the first instance education is the responsibility of the child's parents. This point was eloquently presented in a statement by Pope John Paul II in 1981:

"The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is *original* and *primary* with regard to the

educational role of others on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is *irreplaceable* and *inalienable*, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others." (Pope John Paul II, 1981, Article 36)

This statement recognises the link between education and the transmission of human life. It acknowledges that familial relationship fosters education at a deep level and that education is more than an academic experience. It recognises the unique biological and genetic factors associated between progenitors and progeny for education in a "loving relationship". Christian teaching clearly supports the view of the parent as an educator of the child.

Parents will continue to teach their children whilst humanity exists. However, home educating parents are one cohort of parents that seeks to take the full responsibility for providing bona fide education for their children and to nurture the socialisation and personal development of their children, on a full-time basis themselves, in their own families' settings and in and around their local and broader communities.



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