



HEN Submission #2 to the Senate Inquiry into The National Trend of School Refusal and Related Matters

22nd March 2023

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On behalf of the Home Education Network

<https://home-ed.vic.edu.au/>

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Executive Summary

Going to school is an expectation that society puts on children and their caregivers. Most children cope with this expectation, but some cannot. This has far-reaching consequences for those children and their families.

The Home Education Network made a submission in December 2022 to the Senate Inquiry on The National Trend of School Refusal and Related Matters. In response to a request for witnesses to appear before the Senate References Committee, on 15th February 2023 we launched a survey to collect data to inform our responses.

When the survey was closed on 19th March, the survey data included 616 responses. The survey link was shared via social media Australia-wide, and also through some parent groups and professionals who were willing to share it with their clients.

A previous (interim) report tabled at the time of the Senate Hearing in Melbourne included 439 responses.

The survey results addressed two items in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

Terms of Reference Item (b): Effect of School Can't on young people and their families, and impacts on employment and financial security

The effects of School Can't on children and their families were, in many cases, severe. Almost every respondent reported family stress and worsening of the child's anxiety and ability to cope with everyday life. Financial effects, effects on the family unit, and on the child's friendships were also significant. There were cases of suicide ideation or attempts, marriage breakdown, declining mental health for all family members, social isolation, developmental regression and more. Children with a disability are overrepresented (80%) in the School Can't cohort.

Terms of Reference Item (e): Any other related matters

The survey results demonstrated the value of home education to children and their families. The effects of home education were overwhelmingly positive, with improvements in mental health, emotional regulation, interest in learning, confidence, relationships and engagement reported by caregivers. The words 'life-saving' and 'life-changing' were used by many respondents. However, it was clear that parents and caregivers who chose to home educate were frequently unsupported, and had to find their own way there. Friends, family and professionals could be supportive, but they could also present opposition. There were significant barriers to people commencing home education, including finances, misinformation, lack of information, lack of support, and lack of self-belief.

With a significant shortage of alternate school placements available, and children and families in crisis, home education can provide children with an education that will stand them in firm stead for a lifetime.

Key Recommendations

- Liaise with the Home Education Network to provide information and educational materials for families and professionals (education, government, and medical/allied health) about home education and how it works, and to dispel myths;
- Encourage educational institutions and professionals to recommend home education as an alternative, viable, and successful educational choice;
- Provide better support for caregivers who want to apply for home education registration but are struggling with the process;
- Ensure regulators understand that many children with School Can't need a minimal workload for a substantial time period, for them to re-engage with education and prioritise their mental health;
- Once registered, ensure that families are connected with their local home education community, preferably with volunteer mentors;
- Provide financial support to families experiencing School Can't to remove this barrier to home education; and
- Revisit and revise the assessment and requirements for the Assistance to Isolated Children (AIC) payment

Introduction

Going to school is an expectation that society puts on children and parents. Most children cope with this expectation, but some cannot.

'School refusal' (School Can't) is a common precursor to families choosing to home educate their children. This often comes after years of parents and children persisting in coming up with strategies to mitigate the anxiety and stressors that have led to School Can't, and/or attempting to reintegrate children back into a school setting (mainstream as well as alternative settings).

About 60% of home educated children who have been removed from mainstream education have exhibited emotional distress related to school attendance (Slater et al., 2022).

While based in Victoria, the Home Education Network (HEN) supports and advocates for home educators across Australia. We are a volunteer-run not-for-profit organisation.

The HEN School Can't survey was conducted in response to a request for us to appear as witnesses in the Senate Inquiry into School Refusal and Related Matters. We are keenly aware of the struggles that have been faced by many children and their families in both the home education and the disability communities. We collected data and information to inform our responses to the Senate Committee and supplement this additional submission.

The survey results and their discussion inform two items in the Senate Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

- Terms of Reference Item (b): Effect of School Can't on young people and their families, and impacts on employment and financial security
- Terms of Reference Item (e): Any other related matters

A note about the language used in this document: We believe that children who struggle with school attendance are genuinely unable to attend school without outward difficulties, rather than it being a willful choice. For this reason, we use the term 'School Can't' in place of 'School Refusal' throughout this report.

Methods

The Home Education Network ran a survey ([Appendix A](#)) on School Refusal (School Can't) and related matters from 15th February until 19th March 2023. The survey link was posted on the HEN Facebook page, and shared to 48 Australian Facebook groups that were related to home education (n=39) and disability (n=9), as well as being shared by *Accountability for Children in Education Western Australia*, *Parents of School Refusers Support Australia*, *Christina Keeble Consulting*, *Parents Victoria* and *School Refusal Clinic* on their home pages or with their client base. We thank them for their support. Over a dozen other related organisations declined to share the survey, or did not respond to our communications.

The only compulsory question on the survey was Q2. “Are you currently or have you ever home-educated the child with school refusal (school can't)?” to allow further questions to be tailored to respondents. All other survey questions were optional.

Results

The survey received 616 responses from parents and caregivers who had children struggling with school attendance.

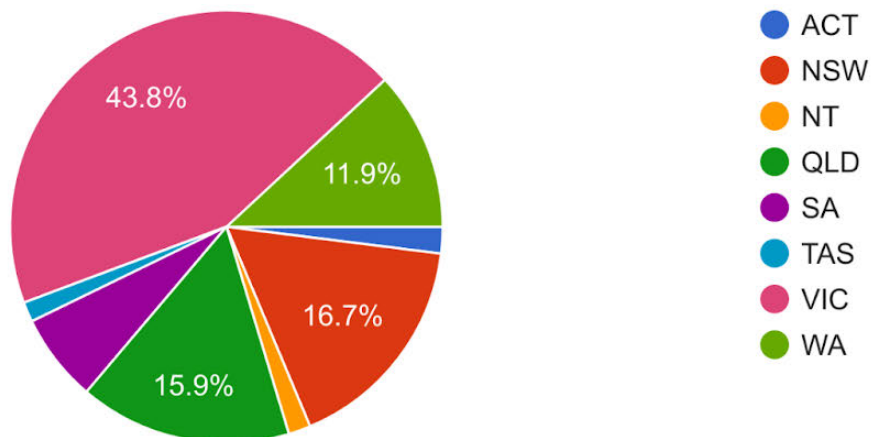
A. Geographic Distribution of Responses

Survey respondents were from all Australian States and mainland Territories (Figure 1). The bias towards Victorian respondents reflects HEN's Victorian base and our reach into local groups in Victoria.

Figure 1. Location of survey respondents

Which state or territory do you currently reside in?

605 responses



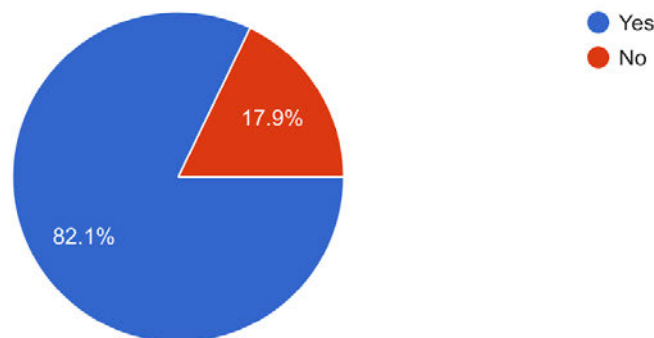
B. Home education status

The majority of respondents are currently home educating, or have in the past home educated, their child with School Can't (Figure 2). This reflects the unavoidable bias in our sampling due to logistical restrictions on access to potential survey participants.

Figure 2. Home education status of survey respondents

Are you currently or have you ever home educated the child with school refusal (school can't)?

616 responses



C. Children with School Can't who have been home educated (current or past)

1. About the children with School Can't who have been home educated

When the data for children who are currently home educating (n = 422) were extracted from the whole cohort of children with School Can't who have ever been home educated (n = 501), the mean and median ages both currently and at the commencement of home education were unchanged. The mean and median for both groups was around 11 years (range: 4 to adult) currently, and around 9 years at the time of commencement (Table 1).

The minimum age of removal from the school system recorded was age 3 (removed from a kinder setting), and the maximum age of removal was 16 years for children still home educating, and 17 years for children who are not (Table 1).

The range of years that children were home educated were 0 (for those who have recently commenced) to 13 years (some of this cohort aged out of home education and are involved in TAFE, University, or work).

Table 1. Children with School Can't who have been home educated (past or current)

		Current + Past home educated Children with School Can't	Currently home educating children with School Can't *
Number of Respondents		501	422
Current Age (years)	Mean	11.29	11.02
	Median	11	11
	Minimum	4	4
	Maximum	18	18
Age Commenced Home Education (years)	Mean	8.98	9.00
	Median	9	9
	Minimum	3	3
	Maximum	17	16
Years Home educated	Mean	2.37	2.04
	Median	2	1
	Minimum	0	0
	Maximum	13	12

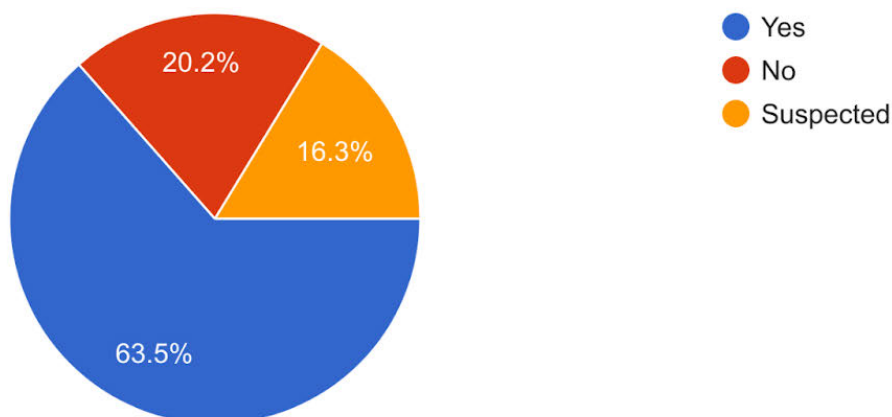
* This category excludes children who have aged out of home education and are currently in TAFE, University, part-time school or working

About 80% of children with School Can't who are or have been home educated have, or are suspected to have, a disability or additional needs (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Disabilities and additional needs of children who are or have been home educated

Does your child have any disabilities or additional needs?

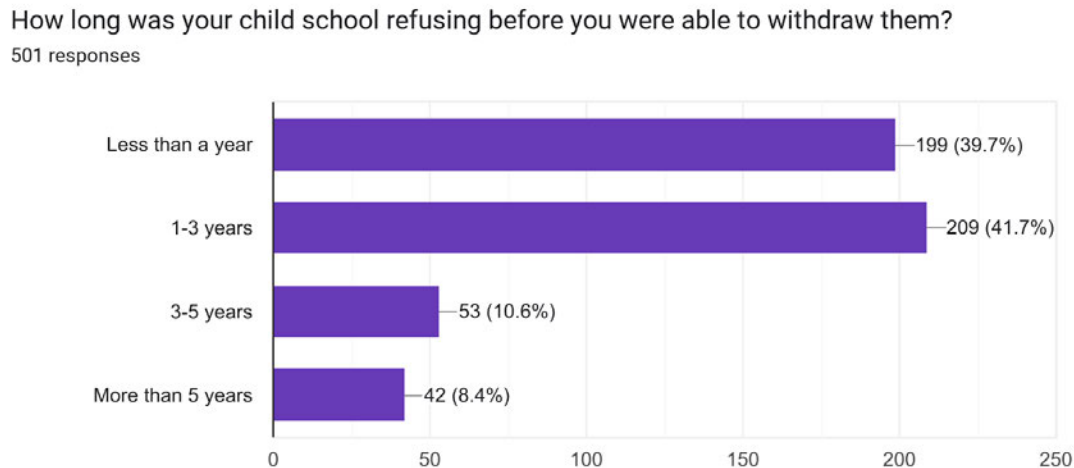
504 responses



2. The impacts of School Can't on children who are or have been home educated and their families

Most children were withdrawn from school within three years of the time they started struggling to attend school (Figure 4). However, for a significant number (over 8%), this time was over five years, and for a similar-sized cohort this was three to five years.

Figure 4. Length of School Can't before withdrawal from school



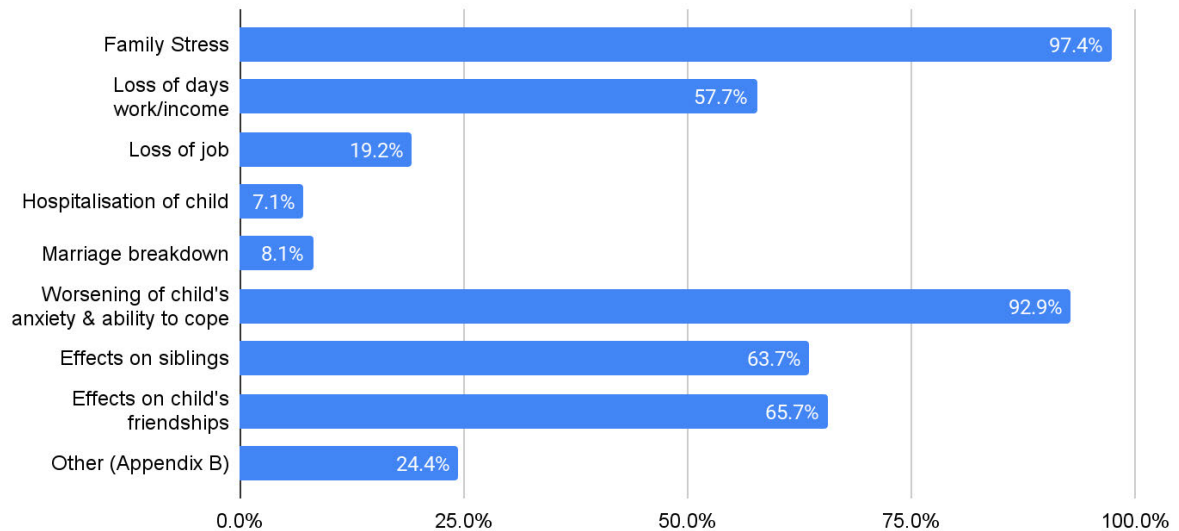
The impacts of School Can't on children and their families were large and varied (Figure 5). Almost all respondents reported family stress (over 97%) and worsening of child's anxiety and ability to cope with everyday life (almost 93%). Other large impacts were loss of work days and income (more than half), job loss (almost 20%), and effects on siblings and friendships (about two thirds of respondents for each category). A smaller but significant number reported marriage breakdown or hospitalisation of their child as a result of School Can't.

Over 123 respondents also selected 'Other' and added impacts (Figure 5 & [Appendix B](#)), and 182 added further information in response to Question 8 ([Appendix C](#)). These covered recurring themes, such as suicide ideation or attempts; self-harm; withdrawal; humiliation; judgement and pressure from school, teachers, professionals; developmental regression; aggression and physical violence (child towards parents/siblings, but also worsening domestic violence from male partner); worsening physical health conditions; effects on mental health for various family members (stress, depression, anxiety, PTSD); effects on relationships (between parents, between parents and child, between the family unit and extended family or friends, between parents and their friends); parental burnout; loss of career/vocation; poor sleep; social isolation (for parents as well as child); loss of social skills and more. We strongly encourage readers to read the comments in Appendices B and C for themselves.

Figure 5. Impacts of School Can't on children and families who have or are home educating

What impact did school refusal have on your family while your child was enrolled at school?

504 Responses



3. The decision to home educate

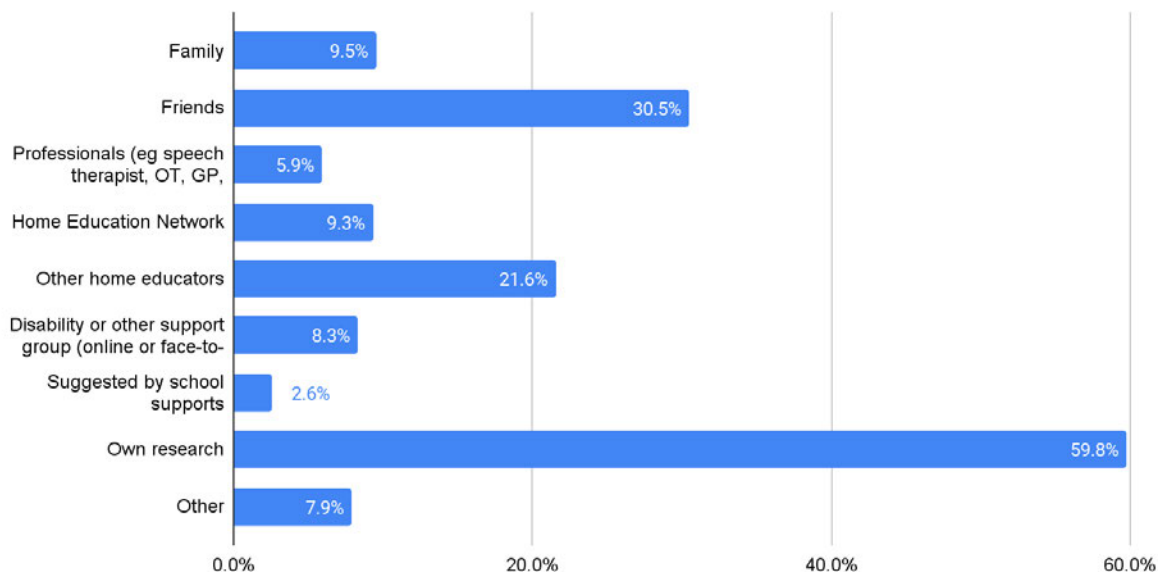
The majority (almost two-thirds) of parents responded that they first heard about home education from their own research (Figure 6). 'Own Research' was the only option selected by 191 respondents (63.2% of this group). Almost one-third of respondents heard about home education from friends, and about a third from other home educators or the Home Education Network. Very few people first heard about home education from professionals (5.9%), and even fewer from school supports (2.6%).

Responses in 'other' included own experience (home educated as a child, or a friend/family member was); the child asked to be home educated; another child in the family was already home educated; Covid lockdowns showed them they could do it; Steiner school normalised it; and home educated parents groups.

Figure 6. Source of first information about home education

Where did you first hear about home education?

505 Responses



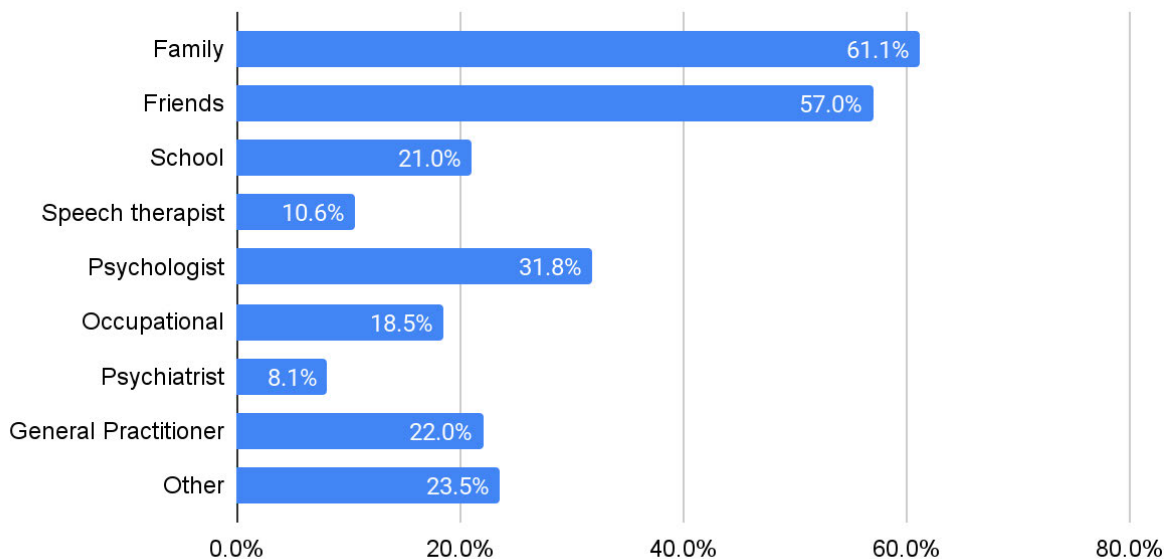
The most support for the decision to home educate the child with School Can't came from friends (57%) and family (61.1%). It is difficult to draw conclusions about the level of support provided by professionals, as the number of respondents who have contact with different professionals is unknown. However, it seems fair to conclude that professionals provided the respondents with less support than family and friends did.

The 'other' category for this question had some recurring themes, including paediatrician (7.5%); play or art therapists; NDIS supports; disability advocate; and well-being teachers. A substantial number of respondents said no one supported their decision, or only their partner (9%).

Figure 7. People and professionals who were supportive of the decision to home educate

Who was supportive of your decision to home educate?

481 Responses



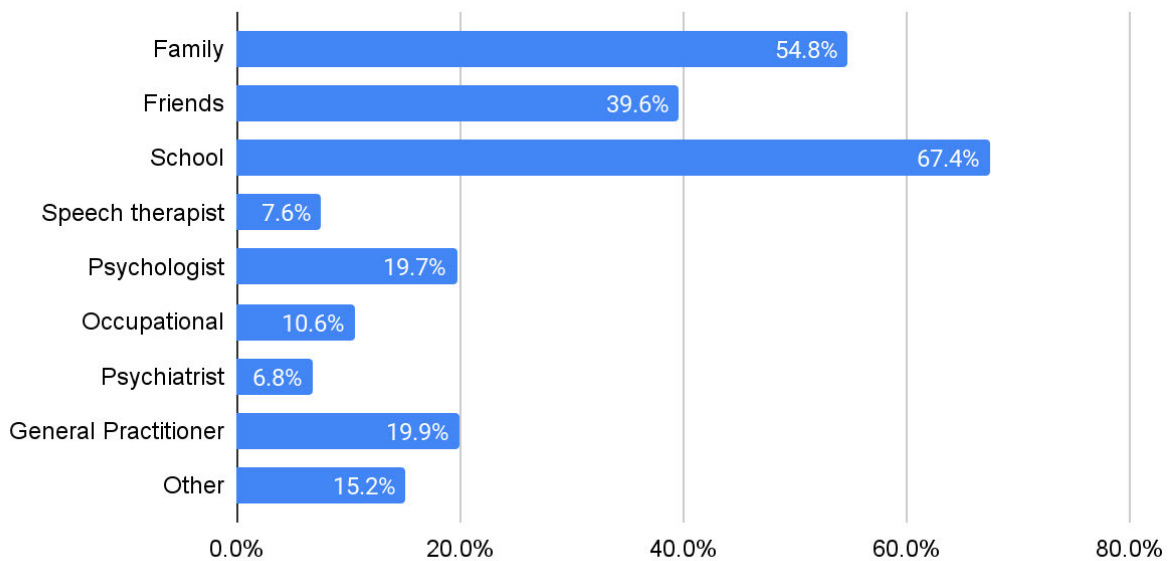
The most opposition for the decision to home educate the child with School Can't came from school (over two-thirds of respondents) (Figure 8). Family opposition was similar to family support (the total does not add up to 100% because a respondent will have some family members who are supportive, and some who are opposed), but opposition from friends was lower than support (almost 40% opposed). Opposition from professionals was generally low to moderate, and frequently at similar levels to the support received from the same group of professionals.

The 'other' category included paediatricians (4.0%) and government departments/NDIS (2.3%), and in smaller numbers everyone; ex partners; and current partners.

Figure 8. People and professionals who were opposed to the decision to home educate

Who was opposed to your decision to home educate?

396 Responses



4. The effects and outcomes of home education for children with School Can't and their families

The effects of home education on children with School Can't were overwhelmingly positive (Figure 9). In every category but one, the majority of respondents reported an improvement in the child and family's situation. Even in the category Friendships, only a minority reported a decline (20%).

Differences in friendships were the most variable. Those who reported a large decline in friendships were generally those whose children had been hospitalised before commencing home education, who reported greatly increased anxiety when at school, and those who had been home educating for less than two years. One child who has now been home educated for 3.5 years suffered severe bullying at school and now avoids all other children. Another child who has been home educated for 4 years is suffering from extreme PTSD.

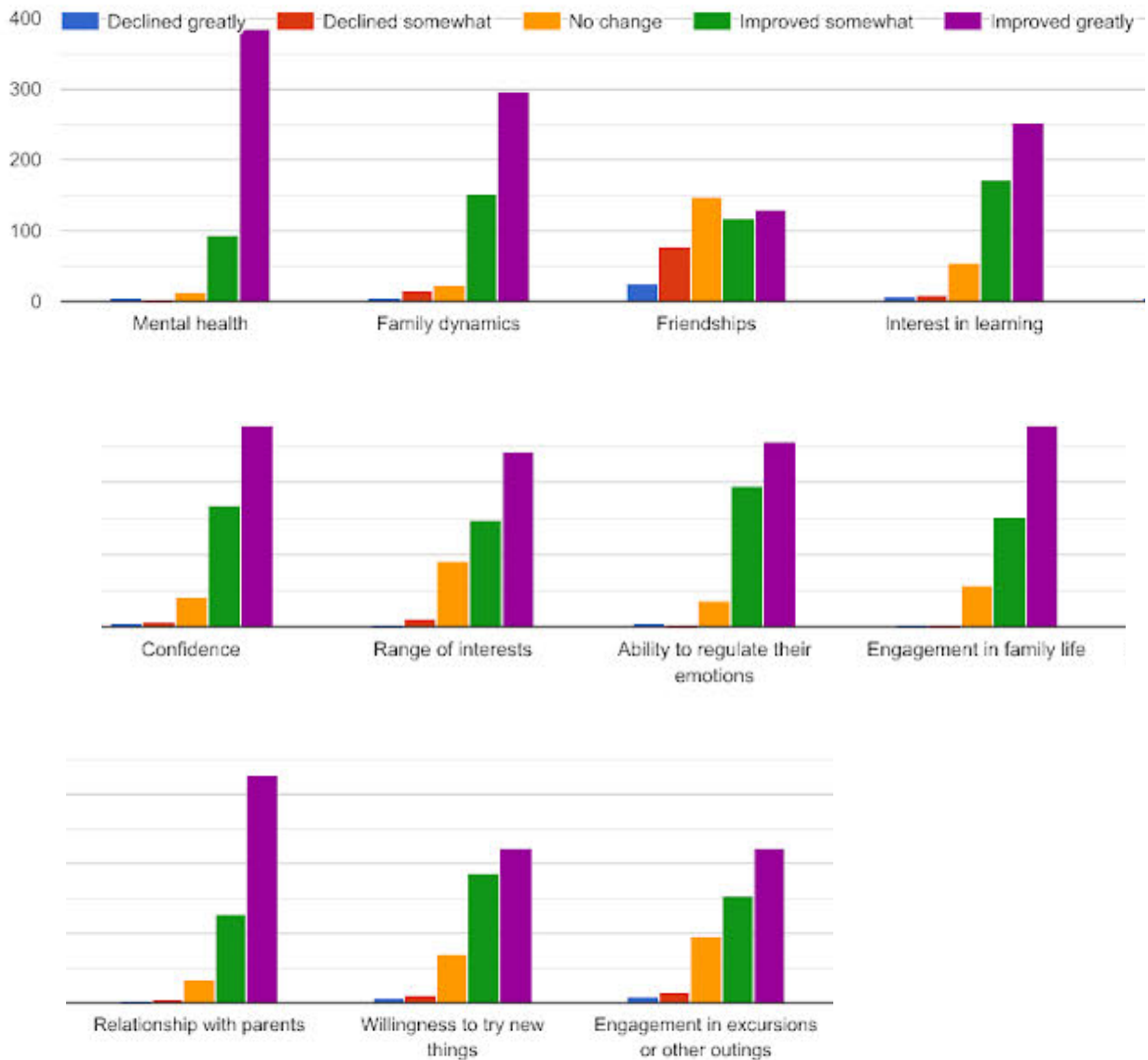
Some respondents noted that although the number of friendships may have declined, the quality of friendships that remained or were made after commencing home education were deeper and more meaningful. A few respondents noted that the onset of Covid affected their ability to make connections. One commented that they had recently started home educating and it greatly affected their ability to create connections in the home education community in Victoria.

All respondents whose family dynamics declined greatly (n=5) were influenced by marriage breakdown (n=3) and loss of employment (n=2), and in some cases further complicated by the child's PTSD and inability to engage, or the parents' complete financial ruin, social isolation, and extreme mental health decline due to School Can't. Those who experienced a slight decline in family dynamics were generally in the early days of home educating (less than 2 years), and/or had experienced a high financial impact and job loss.

Interest in learning, willingness to try new things and engagement in excursions or other outings were all affected by the amount of time a child had been home educated (for all three, average time home educating for children experiencing a decline in this area was between 1.5 and 1.8 years).

Figure 9. The effects of home education on children with School Can't

What difference (if any) has home education made to your child's life?



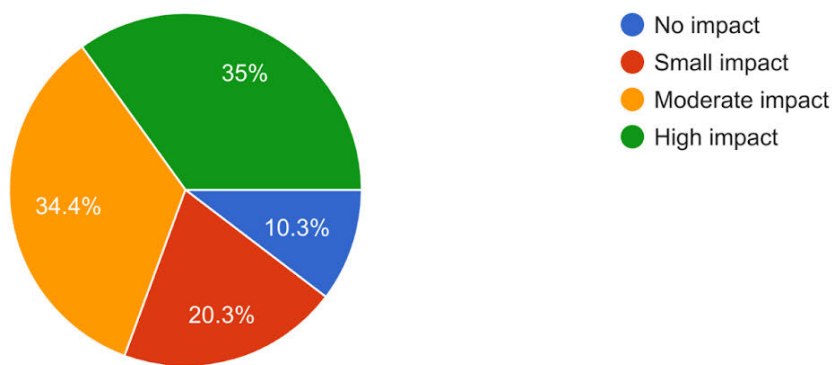
Respondents to Question 13 (n= 188) ([Appendix D](#)) have noted other great and significant improvements in their child's and family's lives since commencing home education. A lot of these centre around mental health (including no longer being suicidal, anxiety reduced or gone, PTSD effects reduced, signs of OCD reduced); having a better understanding of themselves and their needs; better sleep; better physical health; eating better; getting their sparkle /vibrancy back; becoming more social and wanting to interact with friends again; being excited about their education; feeling safer; starting to trust people again; being able to

reduce or remove medications; better self-esteem and self confidence; being calmer and more relaxed; and taking greater responsibility for themselves and their learning.

Financial impacts on families due to the decision to home educate are large (Figure 10). Approximately 90% of families report an impact, with about 70% reporting a moderate to high financial impact.

Figure 10. The financial impact of home education on families of children with School Can't

Has there been a financial impact on your family due to the decision to home educate?
503 responses



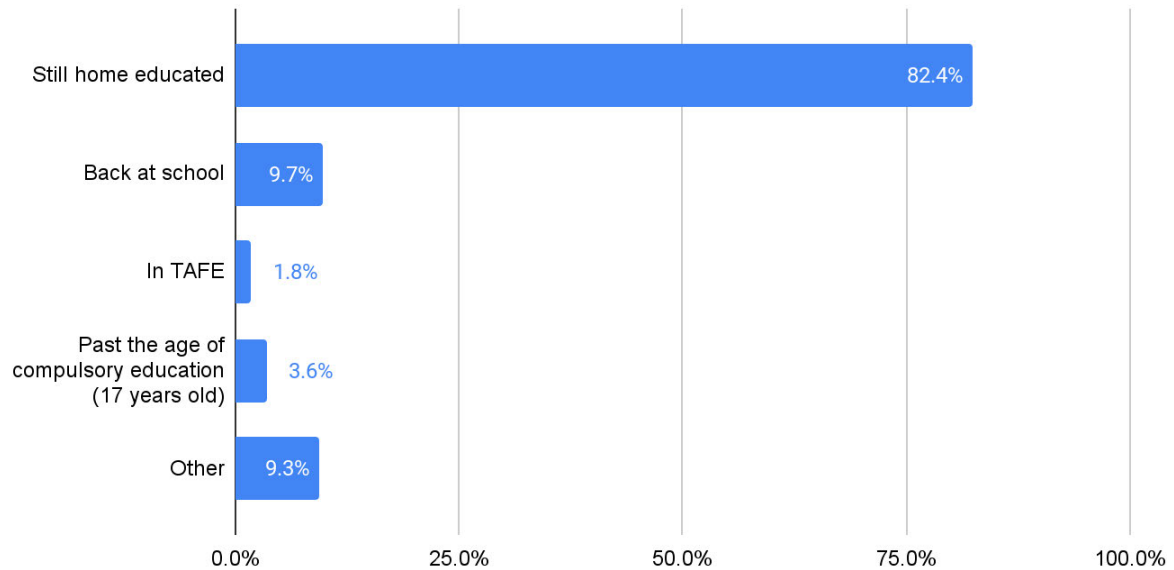
5. How families are managing education now

More than 80% of respondents are still home educating their child with School Can't (Figure 11). Of the respondents whose child is back at school, many are struggling to go (one reported that they had only attended two days so far this year, another is going for one hour per day, some have an agreement that they don't have to attend, and many are considering returning to home education), a few are going part-time, and some are in alternate school settings (such as a small, co-operative parent-run school) or the Steiner system. The 'Other' category includes children who are completing apprenticeships or traineeships; at school part-time; at university; enrolled in VSV; in a VET program; in alternate school settings; or returning to home education because of recurring School Can't. A few respondents report that their child with School Can't has started back at school at the insistence of the father and the family court, but is once again struggling to attend school and the child's mental health is declining.

Figure 11. Current education setting for children with School Can't who have been home educated

Which best describes the current educational setting for your child?

505 Responses



Forty-five percent of respondents decided to home educate their children who were not experiencing School Can't (n = 461).

6. Further comments from parents who have or are currently home educating children with School Can't

The personal stories people have shared ([Appendix E](#)) cover their experiences in the school system, advocating for their children, their experience of home education, the struggles they have faced and the triumphs their children have experienced. Some of the comments are shared here (but it is worth reading every bit of the Appendix) - please be aware that some of these comments may be triggering:

'The richness in the whole homeschooling experience is indescribable, from child's growth and improved health, family bonding and relationship, myriad of areas of learning which interests my child (and myself), various opportunities to explore in greater depths child's personal interests, closeness with fellow homeschooling friends (and families), among others.'

'I would have preferred not to have to home educate because I am a sole parent, which makes it a strain managing financially, but having a 5 year old who told me

they wished they were dead so they didn't have to go to school, along with the constant emotional turmoil, I felt, left me with little option.'

'I have told my other children if they would like to home educate its [sic] something we can discuss. The mental health / happiness of my other children has improved greatly since home educating my school can't child. And they can now play together and enjoy each other.'

'If i [sic] was able to financjally [sic] support my children on my own, they would still be homeschooled. Unfortunately since returnung [sic] to school, school refusal has started again, and his mental health has declined at a rapid rate, so much so he has attempted suicide twice in a 12 month period.'

*'The lack of flexibility in education is terrible. We are both teachers and feel that the schools, despite wanting teachers to individualise education, are stuck in the dark ages and totally unable to think flexibly around disability and complex needs. Even the schools (private) set up to eduaacar [sic] children who don't 'fit' are unable to manage - my daughter was refused a place at * school name deleted * as her needs are 'too complex' and state schools cannot manage her. She will not get a place in a 'special school' as her iq is high (she also wouldn't 'fit'). Something has to change. Schools need to be more flexible and teachers need to be educated in autism and other specific diagnoses.'*

'My child got raped in year 7 constantly. People were trying to kill her and yet the schools refused to do anything even when she was in hospital constantly.'

'School Can't is real and needs to be more widely understood and accepted by the education department in both school and home Ed settings. Parents are doing their best and so are the kids. Children do well if and when they can. In my experience, particularly with neurodivergent children, the education system claims inclusion without being truly inclusive. If children don't present "typically" then the professionals around them have no idea what they need.'

'Financial hardship is a major issue. From being an accountant to now giving up my career. When I go back I think I will be out of touch but my child went from suicidal to very happy and content. And re-engaging in society :) '

'I have had 3 children that were avoidant of school. One was suicidal and it was dismissed by the principle [sic] as "something all kids their age goes through". We were denied access to Distance Education and home education was our last choice, but ended up saving my children. I successfully saw my two older children complete their high school education and with the right supports in place, improve their mental health and overall functioning.'

'The committee asked the wrong question. It isn't what is wrong with our kids. The question is what is wrong with our curriculum and schools that our kids do not feel safe there. And the trend is so high that blaming the child with sentiment

such as “some kids are like that” does not adequately address what is clearly a systemic trend.’

‘I wish family court systems would see the overall undeniable evidence of positivity and benefits to children that are homeschooled and how these children are so much more capable of achieving a higher level of education and life skills and confidence and self worth.’

‘Home education has had a huge financial impact - not only were we unable to make that choice until we were in a strong enough position to do it, but it now also limits our earning opportunities.’

‘This was our first child we home schooled. We had all of the usual doubts that we’d be cutting off pathways, struggle with friends, that I wouldn’t cope, enabling her anxiety, etc. None of this is true and I now try to let as many ppl [sic] know as I can about how brilliant Home ed can be. If I had my time again I would homeschool from the start. I honestly believe that school not only impacted my children’s health, but held them back educationally. The first thing that happened for us through home ed was that she fell in love with reading. At school she would declare that she hated reading and she struggled to comprehend. Within 6 months at home we went from her struggling to understand the first Harry Potter, to independently reading the entire series.’

‘Refusal may not look like refusal for some kids - my daughter desperately wants to comply with rules and expectations so would often go to school even though it made her ill.’

‘It’s been 9 years, and she is a different child, but the changes happened soon after removing her from the kinder and the autism service. She is engaged, regulates her emotions well, makes and keeps friends, has an intense passion for learning new things, and loves life. She’s looking forward to her future, and is excited about all the possibilities. My one regret is ever sending her to kinder, and to the autism service. Home education is the best decision we ever made.’

‘There is currently no provision or understanding of Autistic children in public education. You need to understand that forcing Autistic children into school when they are overwhelmed and in an environment not built for them (and probably being bullied too) produces suicidal Autistic children. Stop forcing children to go to school. Some children do much better at home. Please listen to the families who have had to endure years of suicidal children. If it was an adult being forced to go to a job that made them cry every day, we would say, ‘Leave! that job is really affecting your mental health!’.. But we force children to go to school for years and it causes immense damage. School is not for everyone.’

‘I did not recognise, home education as a viable alternative to school, I had internalised society bias which I had not been consciously aware of until the prospect of not being able to continue at school was forced upon us. We only tried it on the premise it could not be any worse. I really wish I had known more

about it and not been so scared of it, because I delayed leaving school too long and increased the trauma my child suffered because of that fear. the fear of it failing or being too hard. It still bothers me to this day.'

'The psychologist, psychiatrist & OT, who were not supportive, were amazed at just how many severe problems were solved... simply by leaving the school system.

To their credit, all have told us they have changed their 'conservative stance' and now recommend it as an option to others.'

D. Children with School Can't who have never been home educated

1. About the children with School Can't who have never been home educated

The children with School Can't who have never been home educated are on average slightly younger than those who have, but the sample size is smaller (n = 110). Median age is the same for both groups. Minimum age is slightly older, but again this may be an artefact of sample size.

Table 2. Children with School Can't who have never home educated

		Children with School Can't who have never been home educated
Number of Respondents		110
Current Age (years)	Mean	10.64
	Median	11
	Minimum	5
	Maximum	18

74.5% of respondents with a child experiencing School Can't have considered home educating the child; 25.5% have not (n = 110).

2. Respondents who have considered home educating their child with School Can't, but not yet done so

Most respondents (over 90%) had multiple concerns, with some having four or five, and one respondent ticking every box available. The two most common barriers were concern about socialisation, and financial barriers (Figure 12). Other significant concerns were around

registration requirements, family opposition (sometimes the child’s father), and the parent’s own disability or illness. Every barrier listed was a concern for at least 12% of respondents.

Concerns listed under ‘Other’ included that the child would like it and never go back to school; not being able to provide a stable learning environment due to geographic isolation; work commitments; concern about the child’s maturity and attitude; concern about potential conflict between parent and child; concern about child lacking motivation to do their best; parental time commitment; high learning needs and the parent not feeling capable of meeting them; and the child fearing they will be teased.

What are the barriers to withdrawing your child from school and home educating?

82 Responses

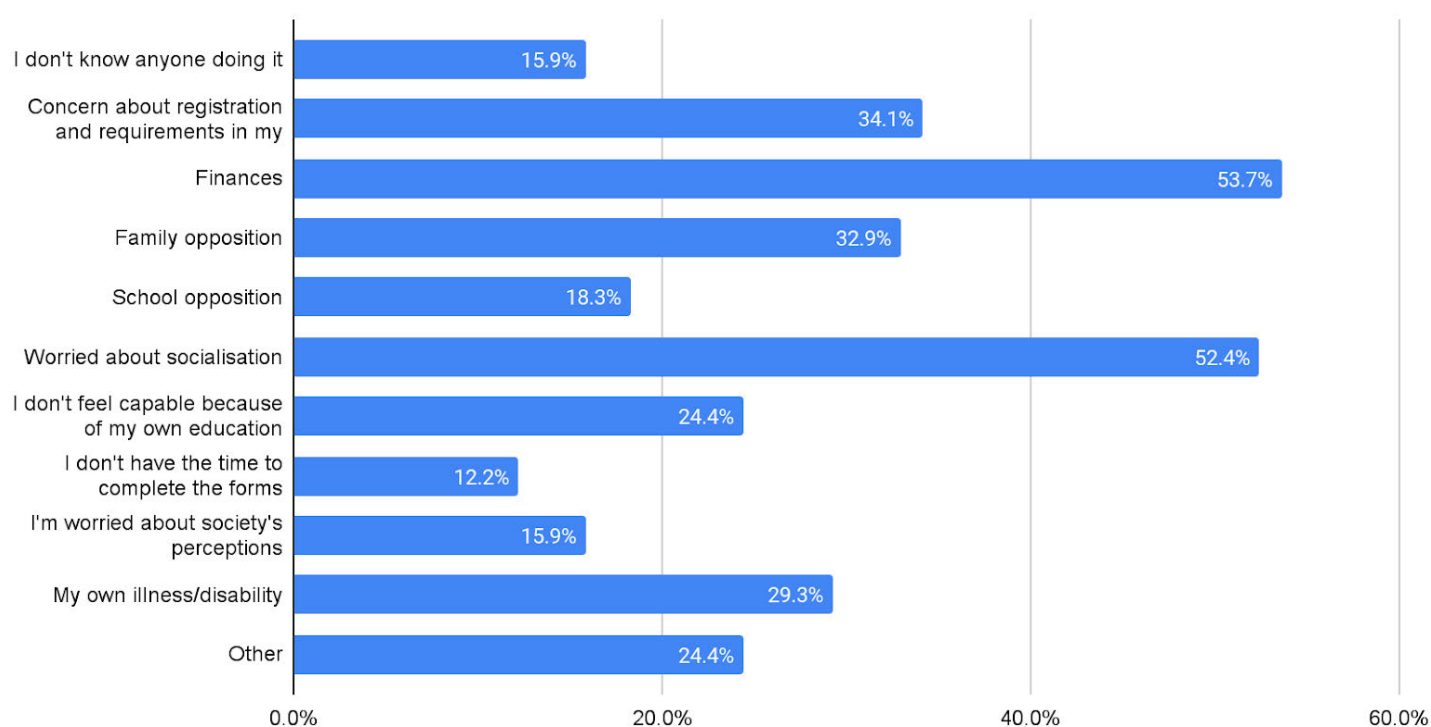


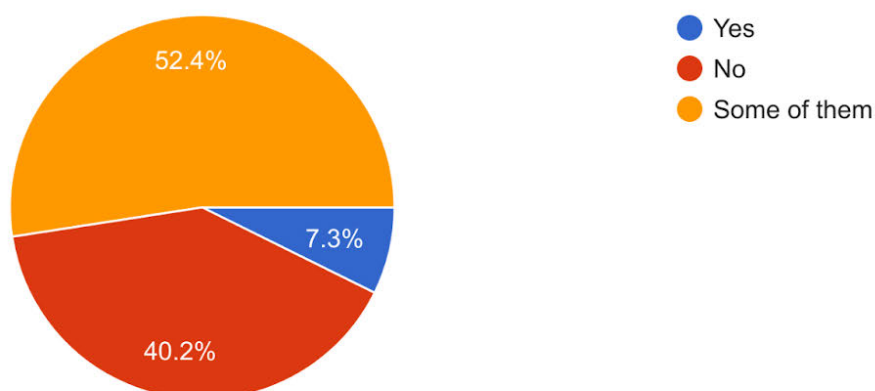
Figure 12. Perceived barriers to commencing home education

Only approximately 7% of respondents felt they knew where to find supports to overcome the barriers they faced (Figure 13). About half knew where to find supports for some concerns but not all, and 40% did not know where to find supports at all.

Figure 13. Respondents' confidence in overcoming barriers to commencing home education

Do you know where to find supports to overcome these barriers?

82 responses



3. Respondents who have not considered home educating their child with School Can't

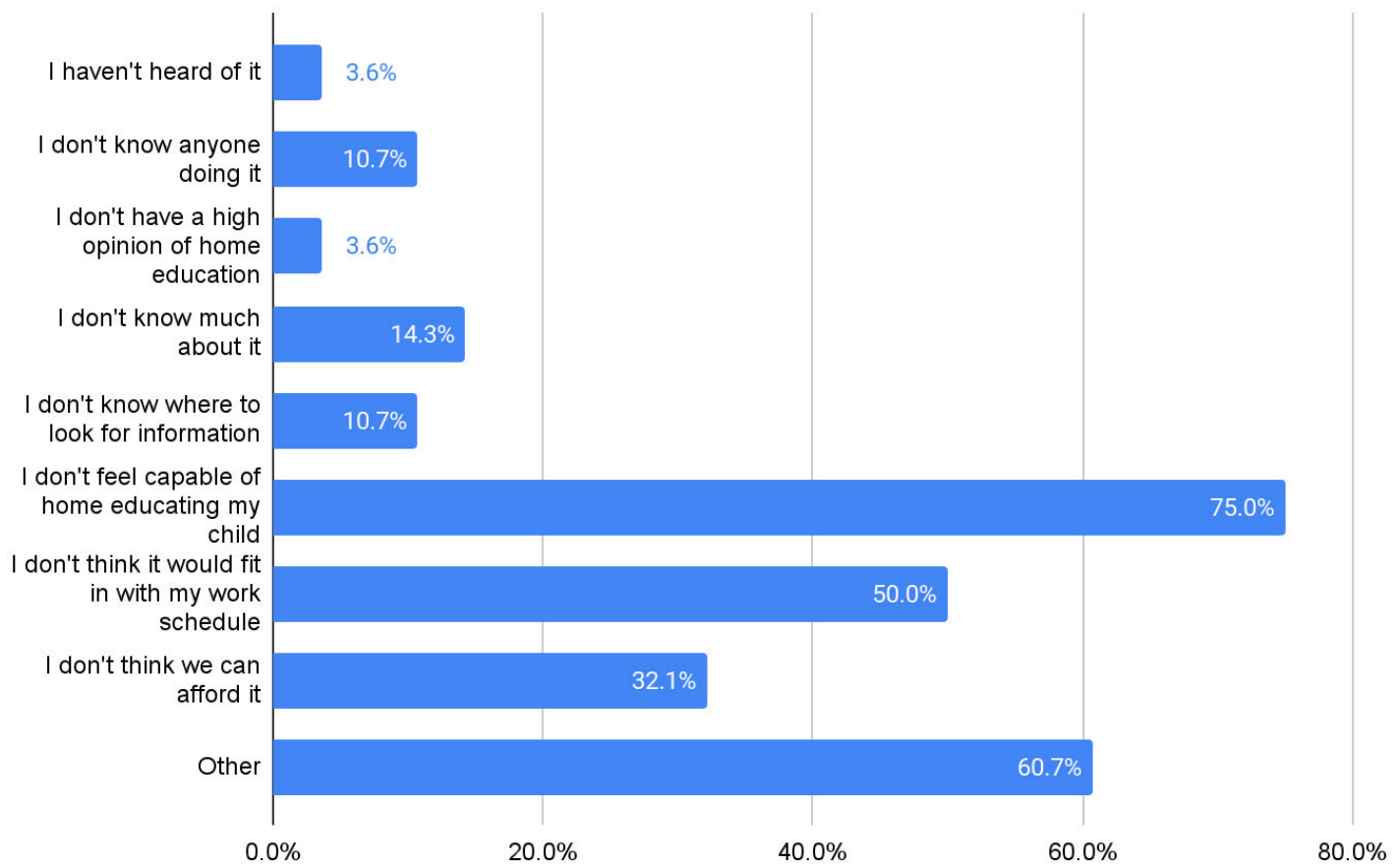
Three-quarters of respondents who have not considered home educating their children with school can't are concerned about their ability to do it (Figure 14). Half are concerned about fitting it into their work schedule, and one-third don't feel they can afford it. A smaller number cite the uncertainty of not knowing about it. One respondent did not have a high opinion of home education.

Concerns voiced under 'Other' included children not wanting their parents teaching them; children wanting to feel better about being at school; occupational incompatibility with home education; the child wanting to attend school; the parent needing the respite school provides; and wanting to access the public education system.

Figure 14. Respondents' reasons for not considering home education a viable option for their child with School Can't

Why have you not considered home education a viable option?

28 Responses



4. Home education recommendations to respondents who have never home educated their child with School Can't

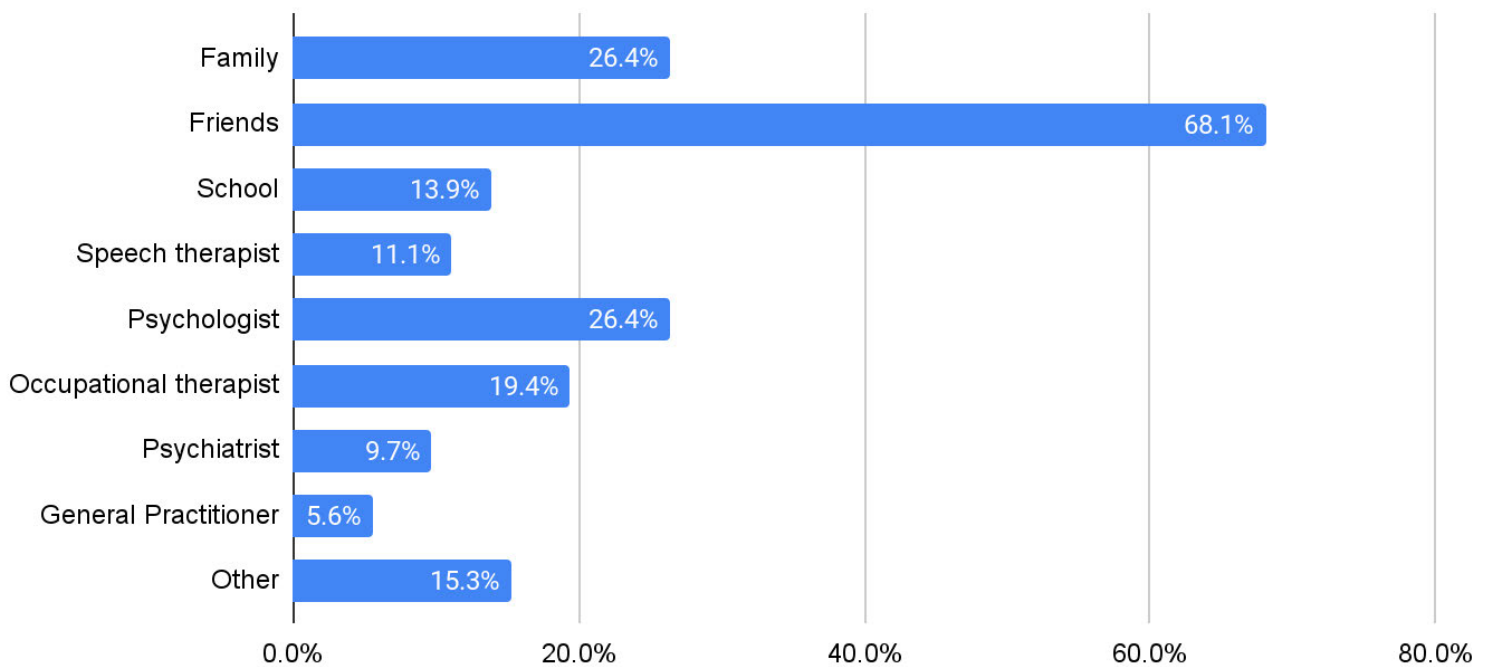
Eight percent of respondents who have never home educated their children have never had it recommended to them (n = 72). Friends were by far the most likely to recommend it to this group (over two-thirds of respondents, Figure 15). 'Other' sources of recommendations included paediatricians, neurodivergent consultant, a home educator and online support groups. One respondent did go on to home educate their younger children. Another has considered home education, has three barriers preventing them, does not know where to find supports, and is deeply concerned about the effects of forcing their child with School

Can't to go to school. A few professionals appear to have recommended home education to parents in this cohort.

Figure 15. Recommendations for home education to caregivers who have never home educated

Has anyone recommended home education as a solution to your child's inability to attend school?

72 Responses



5. Further comments from respondents who have never home educated their child with School Can't

Further thoughts from parents who have never home educated their child with School Can't can be found in [Appendix F](#). Some examples (the whole appendix is worth a read):

'My child has been at home for 2 years traumatized [sic] about school and can no longer attend. So traumatized [sic] cannot even do home schooling because anything academic triggers his trauma.'

'In retrospect it would have been a lot easier and better for my eldest child if I had of [sic] home schooled him. At that time I wasn't very confident in my own abilities to help him. I would cry myself to sleep at night worrying about what would become of him if I couldn't get him to go to school. He is 25 now and while he is doing ok as an adult I know he would have done better if I had of [sic] thought homeschooling was something I could have done back then. Before covid there was a huge stigma involved with homeschooling but I'm glad I pushed thru [sic] that with my other three kids.'

'Mostly it's discouraged which makes it really hard to learn about'

'Our story is so much more complex than a survey. I first considered HE in year 1. He should be in year 11 now. PDA, severe school based trauma over multiple states, schools and year levels.'

'We feel helpless. We don't want to fail her!'

'Son goes to school up until lunch time, he has said on many occasions he would rather be dead than go to school, he wants to die because I'm making him go to school. School currently is saying to the education dept that he [sic] not going to due to family reasons they said because the education dept doesn't like giving out exemptions for my son not to go to school. I feel like I am not capable of home-schooling because of my disability & I find all the information very overwhelming I wouldn't even know where to begin. My son & I both have disabilities and not much money left each fortnight to survive let alone be able to afford resources for schooling.'

'Current school only providing "accommodations" that teach compliance from our child, not acceptance from the school.'

'Everyday [sic] getting my boy to school is a battle. He cries every day. I cry most days too. And it makes me feel physically ill. There is not enough support for him at school because he doesn't meet the crazy criteria for an aid [sic]. He masks well so people think he is fine as soon as he stops crying. But he is not. He just holds it in. We are really struggling and nearing burnout.'

'My daughter is a young adult now and I really wish the level of advocacy around ADHD and girls existed even just 4 years ago.'

'We have persisted with mainstream school through 2years (sic) of on and off school can't and are ready to give up. I feel frustrated that we are letting the system off the hook by leaving, but there are mental health implications of continually trying to fit into a school system that doesn't welcome and nurture neurodiverse kids.'

'We employed a very expensive psychologist who refused to acknowledge time away from school was an option. Instead, we were to physical (sic) drag our daughter into the school grounds and threaten police action if she left the grounds again. This went on for a term, with the principal class at one point physically needing to hold her and try and pull her off the fence as I got into the car because 'once she was here, she had to stay on school grounds for legal reasons'. Children need to be supported when they say school is not for them, not beaten down until they give up.'

Discussion

The overwhelming feedback received from parents and caregivers about our survey was a feeling of gratitude for the opportunity to be heard. Many said it was the first time they felt like someone listened to them and their story.

It is clear from the survey results that home education can provide great improvements in the lives of children with School Can't, and their families.

Causes of School Can't are varied, and include physical and mental health issues (including anxiety), disability and behavioural issues (Watterston & O'Connell, 2019). Children with disabilities are over-represented in the School Can't cohort (Munkhaugen et al., 2017; Naylor et al., 1994). The implications for possible discrimination in the right to access quality education against children with disabilities is clear.

Our survey results demonstrate that parents and caregivers do not make the decision to home educate lightly. Many of them struggle for years to make improvements, advocate for accommodations, and adjust their family's and child's lives to make school work. Meanwhile, many children suffer dire consequences of being in a system that is not meeting their needs. Children's lives have been severely impacted, and worse, lost, while we wait for the system to recognise that it is not the children that need to change, nor to be 'fixed'. These children are not flawed.

The decision to home educate is affected by many factors, including the large financial impact of home education, as well as the caregiver's confidence in their own abilities, knowledge about home education, support from their partner, family, friends and professionals, knowledge and ability to access supports, and concern about the myths that surround home education. There is also the very real problem of carer burnout, and their subsequent inability to have the energy and the time to pursue information about home education, and then pursue registration.

Better information provision about home education, both to and from schools and professionals, would mitigate many of these concerns. There is also a clear need for support around registration, which, in Victoria, currently comes from HEN, and to some extent the VRQA. However, many parents are reserved about contacting a government authority about registration requirements, especially when they have experienced trauma in dealing with authorities (school and government) through their child's school years.

Home education can provide access to a quality education for children who cannot go to school, but this comes at a high financial cost. Over 85% of Australian home educated children receive no funding to assist with education costs (Slater et al., 2022). The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) payment is hard to obtain, and does not cover the education costs for many children (Slater et al., 2022). Other submissions to the Senate Inquiry have spoken about difficulty in accessing professional support, either due to limited availability or opposition from professionals, which is vital for a successful AIC application. Clearly, the assessment and requirements for AIC need to be revisited.

The survey results are consistent with previous research indicating that children with disabilities are over-represented in the School Can't cohort (Munkhaugen et al., 2017; Naylor et al., 1994), and in the Australian home education community generally (Slater et al., 2022). School Can't has become a discrimination issue. The lack of financial support and loss of income (Slater et al., 2022) disproportionately impact a vulnerable group of children and their families, who are trying to mitigate the effects of School Can't and provide their children with a quality education that the mainstream education system is unable to provide.

In addition to the extra costs that must be covered by families, the majority suffer an additional loss of income, in most cases well over \$30,000 per annum, and in at least one third of families in excess of \$50,000 (Slater et al., 2022). The financial stress on many home educating families is real. This is borne out in our survey data, with the vast majority suffering a moderate to high financial impact.

Children who become disengaged from mainstream education and become part of the "School Can't" cohort are at risk of becoming detached from education altogether (Watterston & O'Connell, 2019). Given that we do not have enough alternative schools/settings to pick up detached school aged young people when they detach from school (Watterston & O'Connell, 2019), home education could be recommended as a viable alternative, and as a way to re-engage young people in learning, education, and the wider community. Unfortunately, there is not enough knowledge in the mainstream education system and professional sphere about what home education is, and what it isn't. This very often means that it is not suggested as a valid option for families to explore.

Home education allows children to rediscover their love of learning, to find what works for them and how they want to direct their own learning. Autonomy is a wonderful, empowering experience. They can pursue their interests, in a calm, relaxed environment, make connections with other families in the home education community, and interact at a level that suits them. This leads to positive outcomes (O'Hagan et al., 2021), and their education trajectory can return to a path that leads to a fulfilling, productive and engaged life (Gray & Riley, 2015).

Our survey shows something that the long-time home education community has long recognised: the benefits of home education take time to fall into place, and when they happen they are overwhelmingly positive. The most consistent improvement is in mental health, and this cannot be emphasised enough. In a time when 'mental health' is the catch-cry of professionals, politicians and media everywhere, this is significant. Children with School Can't generally need time to heal, and time to rediscover their love of learning. Time

for deschooling during the transition from school to home education is vital for many children who are traumatised by anything that is reminiscent of school (Appendices C, D, E and F). It also takes time for families to form connections within their local and wider home education community, and this greatly influences the successful development of friendships and support networks (Appendices C, D and E).

The importance of connecting new home educating families to the existing home education community cannot be overstated. This is evident in the survey responses. The sooner that family connects with their local and wider home education community, the sooner the parents feel supported, and, when children are ready, they can begin to form friendships, take part in excursions and camps, renew their enthusiasm for learning, and re-engage with their education.

Many of the barriers to home education are based on misinformation and lack of information about what home education is, what it isn't, how flexible it is and how it can work for families. Engaging HEN's services to educate professionals, schools, and to support families would go a long way to mitigating these barriers.

The survey respondents were skewed towards people home educating because of our reach and our ability to collect data. However, these are also the people who are often no longer heard by the governments and the education departments of each state because they are out of the system. Their experiences of home education should inform our response to the current difficulties of children with School Can't.

Recommendations

- Liaise with the Home Education Network to provide information and educational materials for families and professionals (education, government, and medical/allied health) about home education and how it works, and to dispel myths;
- Encourage educational institutions and professionals to recommend home education as an alternative, viable, and successful educational choice;
- Provide better support for caregivers who want to apply for home education registration but are struggling with the process;
- Ensure regulators understand that many children with School Can't need a minimal workload for a substantial time period, for them to re-engage with education and prioritise their mental health;
- Once registered, ensure that families are connected with their local home education community, preferably with volunteer mentors; and
- Provide financial support to families experiencing School Can't to remove this barrier to home education.
- Revisit and revise the assessment and requirements for the Assistance to Isolated Children (AIC) payment

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Appendix A - Survey Questions

HEN Giving Evidence at Senate Hearing on "School Refusal" (School Can't)

A number of representatives from HEN will be giving evidence at the Senate hearing on School Refusal (you can read the Terms of Reference here: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/SchoolRefusal/Terms_of_Reference).

We are keen to take people's stories with us in case an opportunity arises to share them.

All responses are **anonymous**.

Please **skip** any questions you don't want to answer, and feel free to complete the form **more than once** if you have multiple children who were unable to attend school.

We are keen to hear from parents with kids currently at school, as well as those home educating.

Thank you for your help!

***Required**

1. Which state or territory do you currently reside in?

Mark only one oval.

ACT

NSW

NT

QLD

SA

TAS

VIC

WA

2. Are you currently or have you ever home educated the child with school refusal (school can't)? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes *Skip to question 3*

No *Skip to question 18*

3. What is your child's current age?

Mark only one oval.

18

17

16

15

14

13

12

11

10

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6

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3

Adult (over 18)

4. How old was your child when you began home educating?

Mark only one oval.

18

17

16

15

14

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4

3

5. Does your child have any disabilities or additional needs?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Suspected

6. How long was your child school refusing before you were able to withdraw them?

Tick all that apply.

- Less than a year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- More than 5 years

7. What impact did school refusal have on your family while your child was enrolled at school? (tick all that apply)

Tick all that apply.

- Family stress
- Loss of days work/income
- Loss of job
- Hospitalisation of child
- Marriage breakdown
- Worsening of child's anxiety & ability to cope with everyday life
- Effects on siblings
- Effects on child's friendships
- Other: _____

8. Are there any other effects your family experienced that are not covered in the previous question?

9. Where did you first hear about home education?

Tick all that apply.

- Family
- Friends
- Professionals (eg speech therapist, OT, GP, psychologist)
- Home Education Network
- Other home educators
- Disability or other support group (online or face-to-face)
- Suggested by school supports
- Own research
- Other: _____

10. Who was supportive of your decision to home educate? (tick all that apply)

Tick all that apply.

- Family
- Friends
- School
- Speech therapist
- Psychologist
- Occupational therapist
- Psychiatrist
- General Practitioner
- Other: _____

11. Who was opposed to your decision to home educate? (tick all that apply)

Tick all that apply.

- Family
- Friends
- School
- Speech therapist
- Psychologist
- Occupational therapist
- Psychiatrist
- General Practitioner
- Other: _____

12. What difference (if any) has home education made to your child's life? [Please note: If using a mobile phone to complete the survey, you may need to slide the scale sideways to see all 5 options]

Mark only one oval per row.

	Declined greatly	Declined somewhat	No change	Improved somewhat	Improved greatly
Mental health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family dynamics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interest in learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Range of interests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to regulate their emotions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engagement in family life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationship with parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Willingness to try new things	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engagement in excursions or other outings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Are there any other differences you have noticed that are not covered in the previous question?

14. Has there been a financial impact on your family due to the decision to home educate?

Mark only one oval.

- No impact
- Small impact
- Moderate impact
- High impact

15. Which best describes the current educational setting for your child?

Tick all that apply.

- Still home educated
- Back at school
- In TAFE
- Past the age of compulsory education (17 years old)
- Other: _____

16. Did you decide to home educate any of your other children who did not experience school refusal?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

17. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

Untitled section

18. What is your child's current age?

Mark only one oval.

18

17

16

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3

Adult (over 18)

19. Have you ever considered home education as a viable educational option for your child? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes *Skip to question 20*

No *Skip to question 22*

Untitled section

20. What are the barriers to withdrawing your child from school and home educating? (tick all that apply)

Tick all that apply.

- I don't know anyone doing it
- Concern about registration and requirements in my state
- Finances
- Family opposition
- School opposition
- Worried about socialisation
- I don't feel capable because of my own education
- I don't have the time to complete the forms
- I'm worried about society's perceptions
- My own illness/disability
- Other: _____

21. Do you know where to find supports to overcome these barriers?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Some of them

Skip to question 23

Untitled section

22. Why have you not considered home education a viable option? (tick all that apply)

Tick all that apply.

- I haven't heard of it
- I don't know anyone doing it
- I don't have a high opinion of home education
- I don't know much about it
- I don't know where to look for information
- I don't feel capable of home educating my child
- I don't think it would fit in with my work schedule
- I don't think we can afford it
- Other: _____

Untitled section

23. Has anyone recommended home education as a solution to your child's inability to attend school? (tick all that apply)

Tick all that apply.

- Family
- Friends
- School
- Speech therapist
- Psychologist
- Occupational therapist
- Psychiatrist
- General Practitioner
- Other: _____

24. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

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Appendix B - Responses to Question 7, 'Other'

What impact did school refusal have on your family while your child was enrolled at school?

It affected directly my relationship with my child. It existed almost only through didfusion of his behaviour.
Effects on child's inability to fall asleep and grinding down of child's molars.
Break down in our relationship with our child
Effects on child's mental health as a whole
Effect on relationship between two parents
Child regressed in development, physically and behaviorally.
Physical violence at home
worsening maternal health due to stress
Sick with viruses all the time due to stress
Our whole family life was living around their stress of school
My son was so withdrawn he wouldnt talk to friends
Mental health / suicidal ideation
Humiliation in a classroom next door, where my child was sent when crying
constant meltdowns after school, on Sunday afternoons, end of school holidays etc
Reduced income, relationship difficulties as one person had to work nights to look after child during the day. Extended fanily break down as they had difficulties understanding the situation.
Mental health deterioration for primary Carer- me
Extreme pressure on marriage
Anxiety, Depression, Vomiting aporox 4 days per week, low self esteem, inability to speak to Children even after 8 months and said hello to teacher for first time after 8 months.
PTSD for the child
Effects on mental health
Judgement from teachers, doctors and family
child withdrew completely when we attempted to make him attend, stress caused physical symptoms and flowed onto older and younger siblings refusing to attend due to worrying about him
Breakdown in parent/child relationship
Massive impacts on learning as they refused to participate in many tasks at achool
Worsening of my mental health.
The child's safety network was breaking down. Unable to trust their environment was safe and unable to access a trusted person mostly during recess and lunch breaks.
Mental health impact on parents

His aggression was taken out on us his parents and siblings
Effect on my child's mental health
Effects on child's ability to learn
Damage to self esteem/sense of self, damage to property
Confidence
Caused Functional neurologic disorder
Missed learning opportunities
Parental anxiety, depression and PTSD symptoms related to refusal
I lost my job and my husband had to work fewer hours too to try and help
Effect on parents friendships
Depression & isolation of family
Constant moving to seek an accommodating school
marital strain, financial loss
school targeted child and added to the above.
Suicide threats
Self-blame
Parental Burnout
Illness
Close to hospitalisation but got emergency support in time before anything physically serious
Parents mental health suffered
Negative effect on child's sleep and thus parents' sleep
Massive stress on the entire family from trying to negotiate with a school that had zero understanding that you can't just 'push' a child to go to school if they are at the end of their coping ability!
Interruption to work/study
Increased carer burden and decreased mental wellbeing for both parents
I had to stop studying nursing
Falling further behind
Child communicating a wish to die
Wouldn't sleep or eat
Severe Mental Health, Suicidal behaviours
Parental mental health
My own anxiety and social isolation
Exasperated my son's medical. Made his medical worst.
Decline in child's self confidence
Child depression and disengaging from interest in learning
Sleep
Our marriage came very close to breaking down
Deterioration of health and overwhelming fear and anxiety also contributed to many absent days due to

school demands pressure on child's already compromised immune system
Became negative, developed anxiety, trauma and was heading towards depression.
As a female and the main cater, I have lost all independence and am more vulnerable.
Worsening of mother's anxiety and ability to cope with everyday life and effects on mother's friendships
it happened after the first COVID lockdown and the 2.5 months at home. They did not want to go back in their words they did not want to be bullied.
Embarrassing having a child misbehaving at school drop off
child with early signs of depression
aggravated a medical condition [non psychological i.e. a physical illness
Effects on child's physical health
Marriage STRESS (not breakdown)
Development of eating disorder due to trauma
Long lasting trauma for both the child and the parent having to deal with it each day
Not full marriage breakdown, but certainly significant marriage pressure and deterioration
Parental mental health
Moving house
She developed very low self esteem because other kids looked fine, while she wasn't.
physical expires in if stress lead to serious damage to house
Parental illness
Financial stress
Loss of child's friends. Loss of confidence for being different and homeschooling.
worsening health of whole family due to stress
parent health
Effects on child
Difficulty learning and mental health concerns
Decine in one parents mental health
It was tiring for all off to manage the big emotions. She lost all her confidence
Worries that the moderator wouldn't accept our reapplication, worries that we'd need to send to school
Sleepless nights
Effect on parent child relationship
Trauma and disconnection from the system.
Ability to participate in normal class activities due to the situation at hand.
PTSD
Negative effects on marriage
Inability to learn
We never went so far as to enroll in school, she refused before we got that far

Effectuated marriage and decision to homeschool not supported by partner. An ongoing source of tension. Conflict and relationship impacts between my husband and I and our child. Mental health deterioration for myself as well as our son. and our c

Major stress on marriage

Impact on the actual child and their self esteem and academics

Extremely low self esteem of child

Educational & medical gaslighting, suspected of fabricated illness & my actually causing the trauma related anxiety

loss of the career I was in training for.

Appendix C - Responses to Question 8

Are there any other effects [of School Can't] your family experienced that are not covered in the previous question?

family trauma, isolation, financial disadvantage
Effect on physical wellbeing
Loss of the desire to learn
My daughters anxiety was so high she wouldn't leave the house at all, so as a family we were unable to attend things outside of our home
Suicidal ideations by affected child
Brought us all closer together
We were actually doing PT school at the child's request. We requested the Principal agree to how our child needed to structure attendance but the request was refused. This led to school policy becoming no PT enrolments accepted. It was parent preference to homeschool 100% but we wanted to let the child choose until we were sure it was not the best option.
My child was suffering greatly from stress - both physically and mentally. It was heartbreaking to watch.
Anxiety and stress on both parents.
Stress and anxiety, great sadness that our son was so withdrawn he couldn't communicate with friends he's had for years
She was slowly deteriorating
Its debilitating for everyone involved
My daughter developed a fear of schools and adults in general who were not myself and my now husband, she felt let down by the adults she spoke to including multiple doctors and paediatricians who told her homeschooling is a problem that needs fixing. She regularly asked how was she meant to learn when the room was so loud and busy and bright, note there were 18 children total in her school at the time.
Effects on older siblings- hitting biting punching
Long term financial impact of under-employment of carers (superannuation, capacity to save/buy home).
Pressure from the school to sort it out and have the child return
School not understanding of situation and punished child repeatedly for his fears
Marriage difficulties (not breakdown)
My child was never actually enrolled in school. He had kinder 'can't' and we thought we would try a long school transition starting in the middle of the year prior to him starting school. We thought the routine of school might be easier for him than the open play of kinder. We found an accommodating school that allowed us to try one morning a week with me staying in the class. He was so anxious about this that he did nothing else all week. Would completely refuse to leave the house and I would

bring him to this one day with him kicking and screaming. It was extremely traumatic for all of us.
Increase in anxiety meant more focus on the child with school refusal and less focus/time/energy for other children
Reported to Child Protection for neglect and munchausen by proxy / Child's father using school attendance against me in court to apply for sole care
Unable to work
Two of us went to therapists, until I removed my child from the offending school. This child happily attended a private school, until we began home educating.
Mental and emotional stress for both parent and child at drop off (once having first-year teacher restraining my screaming child from running back to me, as I leave).
Wanting to self harm
Judgment from school, added pressure from school, not listening to parents
Trauma
I spent all my time trying to support him so he could attend school and be included. Even his little sister had to attend with me a lot of the time because their dad was trying to work (but this was often impacted anyway). We tried all the supports imaginable, in a small, supportive school, and it was still not manageable for anyone. He ended up self harming (age 6), and we withdrew him straight away after that
Cost and time. Cost of seeking experts, cost of time taking to appointments. Stress of the required support not being available.
Feeling unheard by school staff who thought I should drag my child to school even though they were the ones who traumatized him by using punitive approaches constantly that completely broke his spirit.
Psychological, financial and emotional suffering on a regular basis.
Worsening of parents anxiety and ability to cope with every day life, overwhelming pressure from school to meet attendance requirements but no help with the reasons for refusal
We had 1 week old baby when school started and meltdowns every day due to anxiety, became non verbal, myself, husband and baby had to stay st school every day that we could get Child and Sibling to school for 8 consecutive months, teacher and teacher aide requested us to be there full time which we did, Child committing 4 days per week at night and morning, eligible for EAP, but no allocation of funding or resources used as we had to stay at school with him as he was so scared and crying/meltdown and unable to communicate,
communication deteriorated as did self confidence, inability to use some toilets even though full trained to use toilets ad 2x toilers had no doors and Children could walk in or see Child on toilet and Child scared and very private so started wetting pants. No support from School including principal to support Child to attend etc.
Breakdown of overall happiness and peace within the family members
Cps involvement because his teachers weaponised them against us. Child was bullied.
Stress on older siblings. Parent burn out.
Pressure from the school and lack of support
Child now has PTSD, social anxiety with selective mutism and vocal tics due to neglect, restraint and mistreatment at school.
Child was set up to fail by teachers not knowing what they are doing, and don't want to deal with

these kids so they choose to suspend. It's easy way out for them.
Stress on parents. Resulting in primary caregiver being hospitalised several times.
Self harm
Emotional stress
Terrible morning stress arguments tears walking on egg shells Will she go today or not
Lack of understanding from school authorities
Her OCD became much worse due to higher anxiety. All family members began "walking on eggshells" to avoid adding more stress to the child.
We are a family with very limited support around us and so as a couple we rely heavily on each other. This put a huge amount of pressure on our relationship and ultimately the stress has caused my health to deteriorate. "Self care" is very difficult to achieve when you don't have a village around you.
Guilt and shaming from school staff and colleagues
Being in an environment where no-one listens to or understands the child, where a label of 'school refusal' is just slapped on a very complex issue, and forcing the child back to school is the only option, made all 3 of my children, at different times, become suicidal.
Significant loss in income - moved house as a result. Mental Health issues across family members
Stress on the child
Loss of hope
Mums mental health issues
<p>Child's self esteem & self confidence destroyed as a result of being expected, by the school and by law, to stay in the school environment, which was not right for our child/children. We now know he was experiencing constant sensory overwhelm. Add to that the pressure to perform academically through auditory information retention, working memory and understimulating written work, and my child/ren still believe they are stupid, will never get a job, pay their rent, be independent of his parents. As a result, the child now suffers from PTSD & depression. The impact this has had on myself, as his mother, has been enormous. I still can't go and work and he can't either. So we both can't earn an income. The same is true of his 2 siblings. We are isolated at home because he was not listened to when he tried to advocate for himself in a calm manner and because high schools are too large for people with autism or other neurodiversity and sensory sensitivities. There are no quiet spaces or quiet natural spaces for these kids to learn. So many kids are caught in the middle, between very less cognitively or physically abled kids, and mainstream kids. I see the impact on families all the time, not just my own.</p> <p>My kids have interests and talents that lie outside the scope of mainstream Australian schooling. That are more aligned to their neurodiversity. They have a keen talent for attention to detail, as most autistic people do. My enjoys digital drawing, anime, manga, reading books, looking after animals and for a long time, wanted to be a Forensic Investigator. But after many attempts at mainstream schooling over the years, he believes he won't be able to achieve that degree. He just needs some different strategies and support. However, the anxiety and ptsd and feelings of failure have not yet allowed him to see a counsellor or other Allied Support Health professional. We are now looking at a shorter course in Private Investigating but he is still hesitant because of past experience with education.</p>
Parents mental health worsening
Effects on older siblings
Huge loss of time and effort attempting to resolve the same issue multiple times, without it ever

resolving.
Threat of fine, visit from police and DCJ involvement.
They way the principal made him & I feel was awful, she berated him in front of me and that was the last straw for me. He was sitting in her office: not eating, not drinking, not going to the toilet and not learning (this is abhorrent).
I put it in other lol
Physically hurt by refusing child, parents mental breakdown and needing to start anxiety meds, effect on older siblings, objects/home broken/damaged by refusing child
Cater burnout leading to mental illness that needed treatment
Financial issues, paying for education he was missing
Burnout
Parent burnout from advocating for child's needs. Financial insecurity from inability to work compounded by astronomical medical and educational support costs.
Yes my husband had an inpatient mental health admission that was triggered by his carer role for our school can't son.
Also I had to change jobs from my permanent part time role with good benefits. To lesser paid jobs and roles
Effects on parent's social time and hobby activities
Parent had to give up work to homeschool
Needing to move state to get better access to medical services due to psychiatric problems and physical manifestation Of the stress, dysautonomia/pots.
Financial and emotional breakdown
Trauma symptoms in parent and child. Child now has social phobia, extreme fear, disproportionate reactions to being approached, refusal to leave home for any reason, regression in behaviour and development, regression in writing skills, regression in sleep behaviour, refusal to sleep alone. Refusal to visit their non-custodial parent. Fear of being alone.
Difficulty getting younger child to kindergarten on time as was always still trying to get school can't kid to school. Worsening of child'd self esteem.
Withdrawn from any activity outside of the house.
covered above
I have only selected one of my children but all 4 struggled with school attendance, 2 refused due to depression, the other 2 pushed through whilst battling depression. Some days they couldn't go to school. Each was also worried about their siblings.
I felt very unsupported by the school
The child was so anxious she couldn't learn at school, so was needing to learn after school with me instead, meaning she didn't have time for any after school activities, or interests.
Extra costs with specialist help, child psychologist/counsellors, family therapist, art therapy, etc, due to this situation.

<p>Isolation of child Isolation and loneliness of parents Friction and stress in parent relationship Judgement by older generation</p>
<p>Our daughter experienced social isolation and exclusion due to being trans which impacted her ability to learn at school due to the anxiety this caused.</p>
<p>My child became extremely socially isolated because we were both working full time and live 10km from nearest town. My younger two children are currently begging me to home school and this is my biggest fear despite our work situation becoming slightly more flexible</p>
<p>Severe stress on relationship with extended family members.</p>
<p>Loss of income and career progression has been significant Impact on my own MH as a parent/carer Not being able to support my brother due to child needs/lack of education - Brother suicide</p>
<p>Parental friendship strain</p>
<p>Carer burnout, financial stress, loss of friends, increased social isolation, no support</p>
<p>Worsening of mental health conditions of other members of the family.</p>
<p>Child now has trauma around school and learning that impacts her ability to learn at home</p>
<p>Being judged by other people/ parents.</p>
<p>Our child was so explosive when not at school. He was put on antipsychotics which didn't lessen the meltdowns. They have stopped now he is no longer in school.</p>
<p>The costs associated with band aid therapies were massive. We spent tens of thousands of dollars on trying to help him cope with the daily trauma that was going to school. When we finally took him out of school the need for all the extra therapies peeled away and he now no longer needs an OT, counsellor, nutritionist and psychiatrist. And he is happier than he has ever been.</p>
<p>Cost of therapy and tutoring</p>
<p>His teacher was a yeller which scared him. My calm, positive child with wonderful emotional regulation became a negative yeller at home. He would constantly yell about how he wasn't believed at school so why bother explaining what had happened to the teacher at school. He was being bullied, the bully would then pretend that my son was the one hurting him. He would call out to the teacher and say my son had hurt him. I would see the bruises and bumps on the back of my sons head where his bully My son would then be blamed and because he was too scared to speak up and knew he wasn't believed, hence he was blamed for he must be responsible if he's not telling the teacher what happened. I watched the two at a party outside of school, I am a fair person and do not just jump to my child's defence but I saw with my own eyes what was going on. The other child was clearly jealous of my son, he was isolating my child and saying word for word what my child had been saying he was saying at school, telling the other kids not to play with him. My son had to sit by himself everyday whilst he watched the other kids work in teams. He did not feel a sense of belonging. He said he felt lonely and had to sit in his base in class in the corner by himself. This is not an inclusive classroom. I was ignored when I explained what I'd seen and what was going on. I was told to my face by the teacher that yelled that my gentle , caring and empathetic child was a bully.</p>
<p>I think you are asking the wrong question. Yes, school refusal had follow on effects, to me as my son's carer, but school refusal was caused. It was caused by lack of inclusive practise at school, lack of transition planning, behaviour management practises that shame and exclude. These things caused my son to disengage from education and left us both feeling traumatised.</p>

<p>Huge distress for Grandmother who was terminally ill at the time. Caused stress related health issues for mother</p>
<p>Increase of aggressive challenging behaviours caused by school related anxiety. Compared to no behaviours at all when school is removed.</p>
<p>Not able to contribute to the family and too overwhelmed to do basic daily tasks</p>
<p>Stress from school authorities refusing to let the child go.</p>
<p>Child falling behind in school work and taught concepts.</p>
<p>Hopelessness</p>
<p>Constant pressure to fit child into the requirements of a system not made for them</p>
<p>Anxiety for both parents, struggling to find answers or help.</p>
<p>Parental Blame</p>
<p>Cost of engaging psychological services</p>
<p>Anxiety and General Stress</p>
<p>Damage to car and home due to anxiety induced meltdowns, violence towards mother (who was the drop off /pick up parent) and siblings, impacted mother's health/mental health</p>
<p>General lack of support and understanding from Centrelink for complicated family and personal situations. And obviously it had an impact on my child's education.</p>
<p>Late for school and work</p>
<p>Parents anxiety and depression</p>
<p>Confusion about how to support our child in an environment we were not part of. When the doors close, there was no soft hand over for the difficult days. The child felt torn and unable to function during class time. Our whole after school life was difficult and an uphill battle to the following morning. Sleep, eating, excersising, socialising was all exhausting and the emotional toll was immense.</p>
<p>I felt at the time that it effected our relationship adversely- I'd take him to school even though he was crying and saying he didn't want to go and they'd hold him/ restrain him while I left. I felt this lowered his trust in me, that he couldn't rely on me to protect him. This in turn effected my mental health because it distressed me to leave him crying out.</p>
<p>It's created many difficulties in a solo parent situation and essentially I can't do anything without him with me. He has lost trust in adults.</p>
<p>We have had doctors refuse to help because we homeschool</p>
<p>Studies have shown that experiences of racism and discrimination can significantly impact school attendance and engagement, particularly for students from migrant and Indigenous backgrounds. For example, a study by the Australian Council for Educational Research found that "students who were the subject of direct or indirect racism were more likely to report negative school experiences and a lack of connectedness to school" (Mansouri & Trembath, 2009). Additionally, a report by the Australian Human Rights Commission found that Indigenous students experience high levels of racism in schools, leading to poorer academic outcomes and higher rates of school disengagement and non-completion (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019).</p>
<p>It's essential that schools and communities take proactive steps to create safe and inclusive environments that promote the wellbeing and success of all students, regardless of their race or ethnicity. This can involve providing education and training on cultural awareness and sensitivity, developing policies and procedures that explicitly address racism and discrimination, creating safe</p>

spaces for reporting and support, and promoting diversity and inclusion through the celebration of cultural differences.

In my experience, the insights and experiences of mothers, particularly those from migrant and Indigenous backgrounds, are often dismissed due to racism. This can lead to a lack of understanding and support for students and can contribute to school refusal. It's essential that we listen to the voices of all mothers and work together to create a more equitable and just society that values and respects all people, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

My son's case is a clear example of how racism can negatively impact a child's education and wellbeing. The school failed in its duty of care to respond to my son's undiagnosed healthcare needs and to provide him with equitable access to education because of entrenched racism. As a result, my son suffered from headaches and missed school, and when he did attend, he was forced to do work even when he was unwell.

Furthermore, during remote learning, the school failed to make any adjustments or modifications for my son, even though they were aware of his hearing, speech, and vision issues. This lack of support for students with disabilities has been shown to contribute to lower academic outcomes and higher rates of disengagement and non-completion (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017).

It's time for schools and communities to adopt a formal process for addressing incidents of racism and discrimination, just as Queensland Health has done with Ryan's Rule in healthcare. By taking proactive steps to create safe and inclusive environments, we can help prevent school refusal, promote better mental health, and improve academic outcomes for all students. It's essential that we work together to create a more equitable and just society that values and respects all people, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

References:

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2017). Leading for Change: A blueprint for cultural diversity and inclusive leadership revisited.

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/leading-change-blueprint-cultural-diversity-and>

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2019). Everybody's Business: Fourth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces.

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/everybodys-business-fourth-national-survey-sexual>

Extreme distress watching our child suffer so badly.

Negative and unsupportive reactions by community

Disruption to trust and safety in relationship with child. Making them do something that was actively harming them because assumed we had to or it was the 'right' thing to do

Child was physically unwell frequently on school mornings. Anxiety shy high manifesting physically

Mental health impact on parents expected to force their child into an environment they were not comfortable with.

Anxiety for the whole family, poor sleep,

Trauma

Unsupported by school system

Falling behind with school work

The whole families mental health was suffering and my son was becoming violent
Not marriage breakdown but significant relationship stress. Also I (mother) was recovering from severe autistic burnout and the stress associated with school can't resulted in me becoming burnt out again which impacted the whole family.
Anxiety, depression and huge amounts of stress
Never had time to do or plan anything as would get a call from Wellbeing at school to pick up or had to call them to say she wouldn't come in
Mental health of primary caregiver
I needed to respond to my child's needs and home educate them to reduce their anxiety.
She increasingly became stressed out and withdrawn at kinder. She was also attending a "social skills" group at a local autism centre at the time, and the lack of understanding even in that service affected her greatly. I couldn't understand how professionals who were supposed to be experts did not understand her basic needs for safety, and knowing she had an "out" if she needed. They broke her ability to separate from me by refusing to let her speak to me when she was distressed and asking for me constantly for over an hour. This is NOT how you build emotional resilience and emotional regulation skills in small children!
Serious impact on parental mental health and strain on father child bond
Caused mri hospitalisation even not being able to walk as well as loss of sleep
Increased isolation
Parents friendships breakdown and disappear. Money and parents relationship
Parents friendships
Family violence worsened due to me wanting to homeschool.
I couldn't return to work. I also suffered quite bad depression as a result of having a non-functioning child.
Extended family stress, huge mental health issues to primary carer
Self harming child
Health issues physical from stress
Illness
Inability to work - carers role, absent father no child support.
Child's sense of self-esteem deteriorated
Mental health for parents
Social isolation
Depression in both the child who refused and their sibling due to consequences of family stress etc to access education.
Parental exhaustion and therefore decline of mental health. Decline of healthy food being cooked etc.
Financial as we are now going to Steiner School to be in a calmer environed for him, which is very expensive.
School was not willing to acknowledge that their behaviour towards cognitive difference was the main problem and refused to adjust their teaching practice to assist my child
Violence & abuse; unsafe running away; development of an eating disorder; worsening of sleep

disorder; damage to property; loss of family & parental friendships; damage to wider family relationships
Feelings of being further isolated
Huge financial devastation.
Social isolation, parental trauma,
Enormous amounts of time spent writing emails and attending teacher meetings and advocating for my child.
sleep interruptions (evening anxiety), impact family activity on weekends
Mental health
Carer burnout diagnosed
Mental Health strain
Discrimination & humiliation by school Deputies and Principal & 'school rewards for attendance' or intentionally ostracising those with struggles.
Gaslighting by "professionals" in saying that school was the best place for my child when it clearly wasn't.
my own mental health n well-being plus loss of friendships die to issue as other parents didn't understand
Trauma from school experience
I'm a full time carer for my mum and had to juggle her appointments and illness whilst trying to organise my daughter's refusal to go to / stay at school.
Before the decision to homeschool my daughter my daughter's health was so bad due to stress and anxiety caused by the school and the school environment that I nearly lost my daughter. The school was so unhelpful and caused so many unnecessary problems for my daughter. The stress caused by the school not only affected my daughter but all my families health and wellbeing. It was definitely the best decision I made and would never go back to the mainstream schooling system again.
The stress from school affects all parts of life.
It was just not worth it sending her to school. She was loved by her teachers and she did well but at home we had to support her a lot
Regular suspensions and us being expected to continue child's learning without work being provided by the school
Impact on other family members mental health. Siblings missing out/ being late due to refusal.
Shamed by school staff and professionals, that it was our (parents) fault we were unable to get our child to school. That the child was the problem and not the environment.
Sleep deprivation, helplessness
No, it hasn't been negative for our family
The school had such a negative impact from a kindergarten level, our entire family suffered. We did not risk to continue into year one and also decided to keep our son home who is 4. We decided to turn our own disappointments into opportunities and homeschool.
Effects on siblings relationships
Uncertain as to what the future holds for our family due to school attendance related stress and anxiety being placed on our child and their reluctance to learn as it was considered schooling

Total breakdown of trust and feeling of safety
Child had to have a number of trips to GP and blood tests due to severe vomiting, lethargy, high fevers and inflammation by Wed/Thurs of each week. Anything medical was ruled out and school based anxiety was diagnosed.
Needing to move house to try and assist child
Economic. I was planning to start a business which I can't now.
Financial
Isolated and not supported
Residual trauma.
Instability/ inconsistency of 2020-2021 due to remote learning/ covid
Financial ruin. We were operating a small business that required me to manage the bookwork. As I had to give my undivided attention to our child we have subsequently had to close
<p>Cultural values & differences in our parenting has caused extreme resentment that is masked to preserve the status quo in the house.</p> <p>I have become estranged from the rest of my living family apart from my I have lost contact with many of my friends & am unable to go out 'anywhere' unless it's with my child. I often have to lay with him for him to fall asleep without the aid of an iPad etc & am so exhausted by that time that I end up falling asleep myself, meaning (my husband & I no longer share a bed most of the time). He also has ASD with a PDA profile meaning that everything is a battle. He feels that he/ we have no JOY in our lives & apologises to me every day. Very SAD. The costly various assessments which medicalise our beautiful, creative neurodivergent child..... some unscrupulous providers more interested in their business model than providing therapies or support. I willingly gave up my paid work because I see my role as 'mother' being my primary role, however it has been a constant battle fighting the notion that our child "just needs to go to school" because if he doesn't he'll be missing out! On what? or that "I need to go back to work", that I am in some way enabling.</p>
Loss of confidence in the systems that are meant to support families as we were well-connected with these

Appendix D - Responses to Question 13

Are there any other differences [due to home education] you have noticed that are not covered in the previous question?

Physical well-being by still getting an education when unable to get out of bed
Eating and sleeping better, generally happier
Other than a decline in friendships, home schooling has been extremely successful in improving her mental health and well being
Child has become self confident and happy in self. People say they have a sparkle
Being able to follow true child-led learning & now the child [adult] is enrolled to start Uni in 2 weeks.
My child was able to bloom in his own time.
General anxiety around everyday circumstances have lessened a lot. Daughter is more socialable than she has ever been. She's also never been happier, and it's the most confident she's been in every aspect of her life.
Sleeping better
With renewed confidence he has started communicating with friends again. He is now more sociable than he's ever been
She started to eat better now coz before homeschooling she cant eat always feels like throwing up & she lost a lot of weight
It was like a huge weight was gone, able to relax and concentrate on healing the brain instead of starting every day with an anxiety attack
Her PTSD is less overwhelming. She feels safer. She enjoys learning at her own level (often years advanced from her grade equivalent in main stream education)
Sleeping better
My child's learning in English particularly accelerated, as he was allowed to read books about his special interests and without pressure. His cooperation and empathy within our family improved greatly.
Yes. The above all improved but did not decline.
Ability to discuss emotions and reasons for them
Our teen no longer requires medication for anxiety and depression.
Was behind not able to read or write beginning year 1 Now at grade 3 level at beginning of year 2 and tested as gifted / 2e
Sleep has improved greatly for children and us parents
Massive sleep improvement
How can a 5 yr old have School Refusal Syndrome, when a few months before they didn't know what school is? Outside of that environment, my child felt very safe, did not feel safe at school. How is that okay?

Acceptance of personal differences and learning difficulties
NO MELTDOWNS- at all! They were almost entirely situational.
Sleep & eating have improved
Answered no change to family relationships as we are already a close knit family.
Less anxiety, better health
Better nutrition without lunchboxes at school
He is a completely different child. It has been almost 10 years, but super quickly after removing him he reverted to his happy, chirpy, sociable self. It took longer to regain his love of learning, though. He is dyslexic, and he left school with a complete refusal to have anything read to him, when previously he loved nothing more than being read to. It took 6 months before he accepted anyone reading him a story. His reading and spelling are excellent now. People always comment on how outgoing, friendly, sociable, and helpful he is. He works hard at his job, and his boss cannot say enough great things about him. He is curious, and thoughtful, and loves learning about all sorts of things.
My son was displaying clear flags for the development of an anxiety disorder. After 6 months, most of these flags reduced.
Decrease in stress
Physical health has improved
Complete and utter social isolation and lack of confidence in every and any social setting
My son now an adult is a good contributing member of society, and is employed, has under taken some Tafe study, has made new friends and met many new people. His horizons have broadened.
She is more confident in her choices, she is more balanced emotionally, able to process emotions as they arise, she is happier in general, she is more fulfilled
Improved continence. Anxiety based demand avoidance was so bad that he would avoid the internal demand of a BM and have multiple daily accidents.
Our Child can now communicate with other Children, can participate in a couple of Activities for the first time with others and make friends.
Health has improved greatly and overall calm n happiness in the child
I was able to access therapy such as OT and psychologist without the the school blocking me. The school actively was preventing me from seeking a diagnosis for my child, and cps over ruled them.
Social confidence has grown enormously.
Great improvement in Engagement in educational competitions, academic performance, academic achievement extension, life skills, motivation
My child is so much happier
Child has started to trust the world again. Child is still terrified and triggered of other children due to their school experience.
My child has resumed interests that they picked up in school "were not for their gender".
Has bought siblings closer together.
Not self harming, mental health improvement
My teen had huge mental health struggles due to school can't (and the impact of vaccination due to his anxiety). He could no longer attend things he loved following school can't. It has taken 18 months to get our happy boy back.
My child had sore tummies almost every day whilst at school (and even on weekends/holidays, so I

believe it was the long term stress impact). So much so that we trialled dairy and gluten free diets. They didn't work, but she now no longer experiences sore tummies at all.
School work has greatly improved
being able to control pain for his juvenile arthritis
Lessening of stress in whole family
Not suicidal anymore! Not suffering from crippling depression and crying every day!
Separation anxiety has disappeared
Greater ability to occasionally leave home to interact socially
Our entire family is so much happier
We are years ahead in learning for most subjects doing about 1hr a day on average. We couldn't even drop our kids to school and pick them up in the same time it takes us to get through the work now. Schools are a complete failure.
Once in higher ed, became a social butterfly because of strong knowledge of own processes
The kids spend their time in an environment where they have flexibility, understanding, choice and control. They can control their sensory input through lighting, comfortable furnishings, earphones, temperature with air conditioning, can eat and use the bathroom when their body tells them to (not on a rigid schedule and be told to hold their bathroom needs to suit someone else. That does not make sense to these kids). They can engage in stimulating interests, and also have the flexibility around when they engage with their pets (proven to reduce anxiety, stress & other health benefits) & immerse themselves in nature in sensory supportive situations.
All have improved not declined since being home educated.
Happy, calm relaxed anxiety decreased.
Wanting to learn new things and will try. Feela confident that i will npt teach somethong that triggers him into meltdown
Young person has better understanding of their preferred learning style, areas of interest, how to self-regulate, accommodations and supports required
Less Stress
He actually has amazing conversations with me about so many things.
Better sleep
Valuing himself. He no longer worries about being considered different to same age peers.
He's at Uni now and his enthusiasm and engagement is so great to see. Dives deep into his interests.
Learning to accept his weaknesses
It's hard to quantify but we feel like we have our son back. We had forgotten what his personality was like, it had been many years since we have seen the cheeky curious side of him
A much greater awareness of self and how to manage her difficulties. Attendance in learning days have doubled since homeschooling.
Attention span moderate increase with less distraction and stressors.
Being able to focus on their own health without trying to keep up with peers.
Ability and CAPACITY to learn greatly increased. Ability to feel joy greatly increased (spontaneously singing aloud and dancing, whereas they were previously unable to express themselves like this).
Greatly improved sleep

Greatly improved self esteem
Much happier
Academic performance has improved. Persistence with tasks has improved. Taking pride in work, much more committed to do a good job, puts in genuine effort rather than aiming for the minimum.
Time and motivation to pursue interests outside of usual school curriculum. E.g. playwriting, digital animation, archery.
So many less meltdowns. It's only been a couple of months, and he was traumatised by school in such a big way that is going to take a lot of time to heal
We have been home educating for four years and this covers broad development area so can't answer accurately for each stage. Our daughter could not read or write by grade 4 and taught herself how to read and write within 6 months of play at home.
My child is extremely self sufficient. Whilst they always believed that they were not achieving enough they made progress every day and connected with interests that are now becoming her career. I wish I could've been home with her. My child eventually went back to a very different school but continued to have difficulty engaging so is completing a university preparation program instead of VCE. My 15 and 13 year olds are disconnecting from school and will be heading towards home schooling in the next year or two.
Less suicidal ideation
Lessened impact of disability on education as able to set own schedule
My child had stopped eating, speaking, wearing clothes - all this is no problem now
Positive impact on mental health and anxiety levels. Homeschooling was a necessity due to extreme anxiety about attending school.
My son started eating better.
My child is in burnout and is currently deschooling
It's weird but it seems that because he no longer lives in a constant state of stress his ability to cope with foods (to which he was sensitive to previously) has increased exponentially. We used to have a long list of foods that would set off his aggression and fear response and which we therefore avoided giving him. Now that he is happy and homeschooling we have reintroduced everything and there have been no negative repercussions. It's incredible.
Improved sleep.
Better physical health, eating better
Life has changed. We are unable to mix with others due to covid, so socialisation has declined dramatically. We've gone from being extremely social to staying at home and minimising time with people that do not wear masks.
My son's mental health improved at first and then declined. I think homeschooling would have worked better for us if weren't for the pandemic as we haven't established homeschool connections. My son needs some friends.
Child is getting his vibrant personality back, no longer has asthma attacks and outbreaks of hives at the mention of school work. Child is able to interact with others outside the immediate family much better
He is now willing to leave his room. He became so anxious from preschool he would not leave his room and then the house. He is back to his old happy self
Complete change in behaviour, no behavioural incidents at all at home once removed from school.

Eats lunch, sleeps better at night, doesn't suffer separation anxiety
Is healthier. Able to drink more water, eat her meals slowly, go to the bathroom when she needs to. Doesn't get dehydrated, or have kidney issues now. Is happy and able to communicate. Isn't worried about being bullied by students, and teachers. Doesn't have nightmares or anxiety.
Reduced anxiety, reduced flight or fight response, in a state to learn, creativity and innovation flourishing,
Relationship with the unsupportive parent affected negatively
The ability to adapt to new situations. Openness with thoughts and feelings. Major improvement with desire to learn. Major improvement with learning and learning based anxiety.
There was a lot more improvement between the commencement of homeschooling until the last lockdown in Melbourne; confidence, interest in going out/excursions reduced and anxiety increased-we're still recovering from that now.
Sleeping and eating again and not self harming anymore.
Our child now feels safe and supported at home with us home educating. Our child did not feel safe and supported whilst going to school.
More emotionally sensitive in a good way; more in tune with himself and others
Sibling is also experiencing improved quality of life and is also much better off. She still happily attends school.
Our child more openly talks about their feelings knowing they're safe and we can adapt to their feelings on the day. Highly sensitive child in the way of emotions, to touch, can easily become overwhelmed and unsafe. The education system labelled this as needing to build on resilience.
He is reluctant to trust adults or leave my side
Siblings get along so much better
Increased participation
My child was very bored at home, but was too traumatized to go back to school.
My adult child is still traumatised from school such that any 'study' options provoke anxiety and are still avoided.
Child is able to be their authentic self. No longer needs to mask to survive at school.
No longer suicidal and crying and angry everyday. Instead have joy and hope and willingness to engage with life.
Meltdowns and certain behaviours (e.g. banging head against the wardrobe at the end of the school day) happened much less often.
Improved self awareness
Whole family dynamics is calmer
Physical health improved
We have only just started this process. I've not even enrolled him into a DE school just yet. This week we will. But he is a much happier young man not going to school.
He sleeps better and has become the sweet boy he was before school
No but please note child is still recovering from severe burnout and I expect to see much more

improvement in many of the above aspects over time.
Better relationship with sibling
Learning is remembered
The family is less stressed, siblings are less stressed and now able to attend school without morning drama
Overall my child's anxiety is so much better and he can regulate himself better too
Confidence in himself is slowly growing
Less stressed
Could be maturing, but she's a more self directed learner and just great to get her love of learning back
Brought an end to school bullying.
My child is happier, significantly happier
Calmer, more relaxed at home, able to learn emotional regulation skills, better at making mistakes and accepting them
Improved ability and speed learning new subjects
Decrease of Functional neurologic disorder symptoms
Actual physical growth and profound improvement in speech and communication
Better family connection
They have more drive to learn as they have more choice
Takes more responsibility for self and is better at dealing with problems that may arise
Happier disposition
Seeing disabilities in a positive light rather than feeling less than or put down
Able to cope with life. Not depressed or anxious
Wouldn't speak at all selectively mute- now won't stop talking.
Reduced medication
My child is happy again and learning higher secondary level stuff at 9 because of interest and freedom to choose.
The child seems to learn better at home, progresses more quickly, learns with and from older sibling
During homeschooling, the child had more freedom to choose reading material and be challenged. Our homeschool was bilingual.
She is kind and inclusive. Confident with engaging with adults. Happy to play/ care for/ interact with multiple age ranges.
My child is much happier in the Steiner system where she's not being pressured to write so young.
He feels safer at home.
More energy and better general health - ASD burnout caused by school.
desire to return to mainstream.
His mental health and self confidence improved greatly after almost a year of unschooling him. Only from that space could we go forward in his individual learning plan
Almost complete cessation of violence against himself, property & others. No panicked & dangerous absconding. No longer a danger to himself & others.

He likes himself so much more now that others like him too.
Kid was happiest & healthiest when we were homeschooling
Within in a month of commencement, neighbours commented on how much healthier our son looked
Homeschooling improves everything, but dealing with the views from others brings us down. Professionals have an unprofessional and distorted view of homeschooling.
My child's academic progress has been enormous
better sleep, cessation of stress-related physical issues (colds, hives, rashes, lack of appetite, nightmares, bed wetting, tantrums)
Ability to learn has improved greatly
It is still early days for us, but my child is more able to talk about how they feel, which helps us problem solve
My child had no self esteem at school. He would go but refused to do any work. School blamed his home life but he was being severely bullied by his teacher, who he had for 2 years in a row.
Increased independence
Literacy has improved more than it had for years of school.
Happiness rather than depressed and anxious
No longer talks of ending life when grown up and “ has to get a job”. Because all the prepping for their future in school put so much pressure on my autistic child that they could not see how they could exist in this world
Sleep improved
Interest led learning has improved his confidence, concentration, learning new information.
Not stressed about life and able to learn at her own pace.
Child can learn the way that suits them without stress.
We always had a great relationship and as parents we always want to do what is best for our children. Home education is very freeing and rewarding for all of us
Seems happier. No angst with how they need to behave around other children all day
Child is now able to learn daily living skills as part of home education. Child was previously to overwhelmed and has used up all of their executive functioning at school to even attempt to learn these tasks.
Child's self confidence and self worth has Improved out of sight.
Significant improvement in her overall well-being
Too many to mention.
Improved sleep for child and family members. Interest in learning and curiosity for life has returned.
We have a completely different child - so much happier.
Takes more initiative
I discovered that my child is dyslexic in the first couple of weeks working one on one with my child. The school never reported any learning problems to me in all the years she attended, even though she was receiving many failing grades in many subjects over the years she attended. They just continued to put her up in grades even as her gap in learning got larger.
Our child is now in term 3 at homeschool (through EUKA) and will have completed the entire year in 6 months. School and understanding is so quick and confidence to rock climb, talk to people and be

outspoken are all responses from homeschooling even her diet and intake has changed for the better
Has a more predictable routine which is most important for his current outlook on life.
Long term post traumatic stress disorder.
His anxiety decreased greatly and now he is more confident in situations that are out of his comfort zone
My child is home because there was violence in the classroom and she was academically board. Now she is happy.
No sudden vomiting/inflammation/fever/lethargy as we were experiencing post school days by day 3 or 4 each week.
Able to better understand her own learning style and what does and doesn't work.
Academics. He is profoundly gifted and could work at his speed and level which had massive positive impacts all round.
Less sickness
Ability to provide learning opportunities at our child's level. Our child is gifted and needed much more extension than was offered in school, i.e. Year 10 level maths in Year 5.
He is starting to notice that there are differences in all people & an acceptance of his own differences, however at mainstream school he is 'always' comparing himself to others. His PDA profile means that he 'considers' himself equal to adults & resents the way the teachers have a prescriptive authoritarian tone. The way he is expected to do as he is told rather than explore & evolve in learning with curiosity. It's like there is a sense of distain & distrust of the adults in the school environment. That he feels 'trapped' & can't wait to get home to the 'safety' of his own environment. When we go on excursions or outings as learning experiences, even if there may be safety issues, we are able to talk about things calmly & where things go wrong, we can work out a plan for how to navigate it next time. He doesn't have to 'mask & hold stuff in until the end of the day' then explode a volcano of feelings when he gets home. There are still opportunities for challenges, but there is more stability around them.
Ability to explore own deep interests (and gifts)

Appendix E - Responses to Question 17

Do you have anything else you would like to share?
[Children with School Can't who have been or are home educated]

It was by far the best decision we have ever made. Our children are thriving and are currently grading higher than they ever did at school. That is due to the fact that we can tailor their learning to the way that they learn best. Both our children have different learning styles and yet they are thriving when neither of them were at school. In fact my eldest child was put into a lower maths class at school and has spent the last two years doing the highest level of maths and averaging 98%. She would never have been given that opportunity at school.

The Home Education Network has been so supportive and helpful in our transition to home schooling. We couldn't have done it without their help

School refusal was caused by extensive bullying by "friends" that left my child suicidal. School's response was to "just drag him here".

Some family are very vocal about not approving of homeschooling and causing trouble, fracturing their relationship with us. Calling child names. I had to stop work to homeschool. Youngest came out to homeschool at same time due to medical condition hindering school learning. School teachers didn't understand diagnosis of older child and quite often refused to accept it. Why if a child is so scared to go home do teacher do anything to protect them. Yet when a child is scared to go to school or do an activity are they forced, coerced and bribed to go.

My younger child is also homeschooled & never wanted to try school. [Last 3 years] - not sure if the survey setup will let me do another submission.

Children have the ability to recognise a toxic environment. School refusal is a symptom of a system that is not working, not of a child that is deficient.

Organisations like HEN, simply homeschool, and various Facebook groups have made it possible to make the decision to homeschool. The volunteers are very knowledgeable and have great advice.

Our 10 year old suffered burnout last year, this affected the 13yo also. We now home educate both. Thank goodness for the help of HEN, and other organisations for their advice and continued help.

I would like to have more access to free access to home education program coz at the moment we are paying for everything that we do for her.

It was a wonderful experience

Best practice for each child is different and accepted as being different by every professional. The exception being when it comes to education where most of the people who could help the most (paediatricians, child protection, psychologists, etc) in relieving the stresses and anxiety of parents attempting to meet the best practice needs of their child, are under the impression that the one size fits all of main stream schools are always the best thing for every child. We have a range of medications for the same issues, because every person is different. We have a range of foods to feed the same population because everyone is different. We have a range of entertainment options because everyone is different. Why are our professionals caught up in a one size fits all (main stream schools with main stream times and ages and curriculums) when it comes to our education?

The school education system is broken

<p>Home education has improved mental health of the whole family.</p>
<p>School refusal is a behavioural response that showed my child was not coping with school. School refusal is not the 'cause' of all the above issues so much as the inability of the education system to provide an inclusive education, starting from the foundation years. If the public school system used an evidence-based, explicit and systematic approach to teaching literacy and numeracy the anxiety associated with going to school would be greatly reduced. My son entered high school unable to read and write to learn.</p> <p>Our public school system blames the child for not learning, pathologies difference and hands the emotional, financial and practical responsibility of 'catching them up' to the parents/carers.</p>
<p>older children experienced same issue n home educate him as well</p>
<p>Home education has been such a blessing for my child. I wish we would receive the same financial support that schools do. It would also be great to have the option to be included in some lessons or activities, or borrow some of the local school's resources.</p>
<p>Violence from a teacher in the school (towards another child in my child's class) was the absolute limit for myself and my child. After trying secondary school for about two months my child had more than enough of the ugly behaviour and negative attitudes of both staff and students and returned to home education.</p>
<p>Homeschooling is the most positive thing we could have done for the health and well-being of my son.</p>
<p>My child is still scared of school, nearly 3 years in. He will avoid walking near the school, even though we live only a couple of streets away.</p>
<p>Homeschooling was the absolute best decision for my son. I don't think it's possible for any school to accommodate his needs, even if they are very knowledgeable about neurodivergence. The only downside has been that I had to resign from my job as an RN as I didn't have the support available to work and be with my children as required. The financial impact has been tough but it is a trade off that I would choose again in a heartbeat.</p>
<p>PBS/ABA/behaviourism does not belong in schools and if harming autistic and ADHD children</p>
<p>Supporting parents mentally and physically to home educate is a must for society to get a grip on.</p>
<p>I first started homeschooling my eldest at 7yrs and did so for 3.5yrs along with my other children as they each became school aged. Then after 3.5yrs they went back to school as I needed to work. They attended school for 3yrs before school refusal reared again and I then pulled out my middle and younger children. Eldest chose to stay in school for another year before deciding this year to go back to homeschooling due to anxiety in the school environment.</p>
<p>I believe school closures and lockdowns during my child's final year of primary school and first year of secondary school led to her anxiety and school refusal. Prior to lockdowns she had been happy to attend school and I had never considered home schooling. My two older children have both been through the mainstream system without school refusal issues.</p>
<p>Supporting families with children with needs and disabilities is greatly needed for home educating parents and families. Therapy teams need to be brought up to speed on the latest data and research of home schooled children and recognise the great benefits shown in the many reports you can access from the likes of universities, so that everyone supporting the child is on board on the same page. Saying negative, ill informed things to parents and families about homeschooling isn't helping anyone. Homeschool is actually an amazing opportunity and as many studies show mainstream schooling is only suitable for 40% of children, the other 60% are STRUGGLING if they can not be homeschooled for an array of reasons-usually financial reasons for the parents. More financial support is needed for homeschooling. Also many psychological studies show children aren't developmentally ready and shouldn't be away from their primary carers before age 12. It's damaging to both the child and the adult involved.</p>

No regrets homeschooling
We didn't wait for the younger child to have the same experience. Why would we want that to repeat?
The richness in the whole homeschooling experience is indescribable, from child's growth and improved health, family bonding and relationship, myriad of areas of learning which interests my child (and myself), various opportunities to explore in greater depths child's personal interests, closeness with fellow homeschooling friends (and families), among others.
I decided to homeschool both because both were experiencing school cant.
I would have preferred not to have to home educate because I am a sole parent, which makes it a strain managing financially, but having a 5 year old who told me they wished they were dead so they didn't have to go to school, along with the constant emotional turmoil, I felt, left me with little option.
Giving parents more options to better support their children can only provide better outcomes for children and their families- and communities in general by proxy.
I have told my other children if they would like to home educate its something we can discuss. The mental health / happiness of my other children has improved greatly since home educating my school can't child. And they can now play together and enjoy each other.
School refusal was due to unresolved bullying from other students and a teacher. Student was then left out of activities and events due to lowered attendance percentage which only served to worsen the situation. School was unwilling to provide basic supports for disabilities despite repeated discussions (Phone calls, emails & meetings). No previous history of school refusal prior to that year.
Homeschooling has been wonderful for my daughter, less stress, better health, learning more, focusing on her interests.
The lack of flexibility in education is terrible. We are both teachers and feel that the schools, despite wanting teachers to individualise education, are stuck in the dark ages and totally unable to think flexibly around disability and complex needs. Even the schools (private) set up to eduacac children who don't 'fit' are unable to manage - my daughter was refused a place at SASY as her needs are 'too complex' and state schools cannot manage her. She will not get a place in a 'special school' as her iq is high (she also wouldn't 'fit'). Something has to change. Schools need to be more flexible and teachers need to be educated in autism and other specific diagnoses
only child so last question not applicable.
My child got raped in year 7 constantly. People were trying to kill her and yet the schools refused to do anything even when she was in hospital constantly.
School Can't is real and needs to be more widely understood and accepted by the education department in both school and home Ed settings. Parents are doing their best and so are the kids. Children do well if and when they can. In my experience, particularly with neurodivergent children, the education system claims inclusion without being truly inclusive. If children don't present "typically" then the professionals around them have no idea what they need.
Home education saved our family. It saved my boy's life in so many ways. I can't even imagine what life would be like now without it. I am so grateful that we decided to tread this path. The effects on my career and our finances were severe, to say the least, but I would do it all again in a heartbeat. My one regret is ever sending him to school in the first place. He is still dealing with the trauma of that experience, however short (part time for 3 terms of prep). But I look at him, a happy, well-adjusted teen who makes friends easily, genuinely and deeply cares about the people around him, is looked to as a mentor by younger kids (a role he gladly accepts), is respected by his own mentors, keeps a level head (most of the time - he's a teen!) and supports his friends when they need it, and I feel gratitude every day.
I have had 3 children that were avoidant of school. One was suicidal and it was dismissed by the

principle as "something all kids their age goes through". We were denied access to Distance Education and home education was our last choice, but ended up saving my children. I successfully saw my two older children complete their high school education and with the right supports in place, improve their mental health and overall functioning.

The committee asked the wrong question. It isn't what is wrong with our kids. The question is what is wrong with our curriculum and schools that our kids do not feel safe there. And the trend is so high that blaming the child with sentiment such as "some kids are like that" does not adequately address what is clearly a systemic trend.

I experienced school refusal and school anxiety with both children on and off so began homeschooling them both at the same time.

I am home-schooling my younger two kids now because the school system is horrendous and I do not like the high schools here. The public high schools are well over numbers and we cannot afford the ridiculous fees in private schools.

Three years in and both my kids are actually thriving and my 15yr old has just started a part time Tafe course this year and will be seeking work experience in the industry and possibly some casual work while Home-schooling.

My personal experience has shown me that kids who are Homeschooling are often at a greater advantage to their peers who are attending an actual school as they are in the real world while gaining an education and they have so many more opportunities while learning at their own pace. Minus the indoctrination of schools with the Globalist agendas and narratives that are only there to dumb people down and gain control over their minds and bodies.

To add in, my personal experiences with my adult son also taught me that with the love and care of a parent who is really invested in their education and future, kids can get ahead and be like everyone else in society. One does not actually need a regular school setting to achieve great things in life and had I not taken him out when I did, he wouldn't have stood a fighting chance at graduating High school and have a career in his chosen field.

Home-schooling is the best.

Government distance education was pursued after mainstream school and before home educating.

Homeschooling has saved my child and our family. The education system broke my child completely. They didn't fit and the system could not be modified enough to fit their needs.

Home educate oldest Sibling as they suffered from Bullying from Preschool to Year 2, Self confidence improved as well as participation in Activities and had started self harming at 7 years old and doesn't self harm now anxiety reduced as we had to stay with Sibling every day for over 2 years until they were ready for us to go, reduced stomach pains and vomiting for Children since stopping school etc. Eldest Sibling was sexually abused at school which wasn't dealt with properly from school and started wetting pants for time at school though had not wet pants for years at home. Self confidence improved now, can participate a bit better now and no melt downs for school every day as home schooling.

I wish family court systems would see the overall undeniable evidence of positivity and benefits to children that are homeschooled and how these children are so much more capable of achieving a higher level of education and life skills and confidence and self worth.

Instead of being controlled in a box with others they are forced to socialise with and made to behave like a robot and conform to someone else's expectations only to fail

The school system here is so broken. Teachers verbally abuse students, allow them to be bullied, and actively segregate/punish them for learning differently. If this was done by a parent we would be in jail

for child abuse, why do teachers get away with it? I've seen great teachers be bullied out by other teachers for trying to support students who need help. Until there is a system that recognises that not all children are the same, we will homeschool. Not only for our kids mental health, but for their physical safety.

Feel unsupported and exhausted. Still a lot of trauma from teacher assaulting my child and school denied it with department of education witness. Still no justice.

I think the education system is in crisis. Teachers are unhappy, strained and disconnected to kids due to work overload. Kids are unhappy, confident bullies who aren't properly supervised take it out on nicer kids. Bullies are literally running riot. Kids are stressed. It's idiotic the way the government runs our schools. And for what, research shows current system doesn't ready kids for today's careers

Home education has been the best decision we've made

The system broke my son. Like it has broken many others.

I'm very grateful for the option to homeschool. School was so stressful for my child although they tried and tried they could not be themselves or accept the limitations school were setting on them. You can only do what you've been told, there's no room for creativity unless you're creative at the right time and in the right way. It paralysed their mind, they shut down, and would not do anything.

If i was able to financjally support my children on my own, they would still be homeschooled. Unfortunately since returnung to school, school refusal has started again, and his mental health has declined at a rapid rate, so much so he has attempted suicide twice.in a 12 month period.

My child has a better education at home than he did at school. The principal told me in an email that he would be shut down for hours at school each day. Getting the child back to school should not be the ultimate goal for school can't kids - the goal should be to support them in what will work for them and their family.

This was our first child we home schooled. We had all of the usual doubts that we'd be cutting off pathways, struggle with friends, that I wouldn't cope, enabling her anxiety, etc. None of this is true and I now try to let as many ppl know as I can about how brilliant Home ed can be. If I had my time again I would homeschool from the start. I honestly believe that school not only impacted my children's health, but held them back educationally. The first thing that happened for us through home ed was that she fell in love with reading. At school she would declare that she hated reading and she struggled to comprehend. Within 6 months at home we went from her struggling to understand the first Harry Potter, to independently reading the entire series.

Home schooling has allowed my child to have one on one learning whereas the teachers weren't able to provide this so he kept falling behind. He is now improving in leaps and bounds which has improved his confidence. He learns at his own pace and in comfort not having to worry about other kids being too loud and distracting as he has inattentive ADD and finds it hard to concentrate when there is noise or too much going on around him.

Need more help

There was no other choice but to home educate as the school system is not set up for everyone

School can't/school refusal wasn't about the child trying to control me. It was the high levels of anxiety and trying to escape the stress themselves.

School refusal negatively impacted my child's learning. There was so much trauma from their needs not being met at school (autistic and masking so supports would be initially put into place and then removed because they weren't disruptive in the classroom) that it took time to get back into the love of learning. So many gaps in their learning have needed to be filled due to not being able to learn during school time (too overwhelmed and shut down). Homeschooling has given our child back their spark!

There is currently no provision or understanding of Autistic children in public education. You need to

understand that forcing Autistic children into school when they are overwhelmed and in an environment not built for them (and probably being bullied too) produces suicidal Autistic children. Stop forcing children to go to school. Some children do much better at home. Please listen to the families who have had to endure years of suicidal children. If it was an adult being forced to go to a job that made them cry every day, we would say, 'Leave! that job is really affecting your mental health!'. But we force children to go to school for years and it causes immense damage. School is not for everyone.

School needs to accept and respect homeschooling choices. In some case, I believe they could even suggest it...

All schools need to be educated and willing to understand formal education is not in the best interest or suits every child.

Home education has had a huge financial impact - not only were we unable to make that choice until we were in a strong enough position to do it, but it now also limits our earning opportunities.

Her younger sister (9) refused school after the two long Victorian covid lockdowns in 2020. She has not returned to school since.

There are no other educational options (bar homeschool) for children who are of average intellect and are behaviourally complex.

My older child also has occasional school refusal which was very high before moving to her current school (upper primary school). She has been given the option to undertake online schooling for secondary school (special needs also).

Home education has helped my children grow up to be healthy well educated individuals.

Home education saved my child and our family. Mainstream school just didn't work for my child and after years of mental anguish home school such as blessing

Financial hardship is a major issue. From being an accountant to now giving up my career. When I go back I think I will be out of touch but my child went from suicidal to very happy and content. And re-engaging in society :)

Variety needs to be possible. Micro schools or twice a week schools would have been helpful

The school system seems unable to support anything outside of their set guidelines. There needs to be more flexibility and more support for children who find a full heavy curriculum load unsustainable. Had my child been allowed to do minimal subjects and focus on core such as English and maths then she may have stayed in school. Homeschooling has allowed us to integrate cross curriculum learning without moving from class to class every 50 min. We wish school had worked, she misses her school friendship base.

All 3 of my children, _____ have had similar experiences and school can't. Especially when all 3 reached 10 & 11, once all 3 (all female at birth) reached menstruation. The impact that big life change had meant they could no longer 'keep it together' and mask all the sensory overwhelm, pressures to perform and appear okay, hormonal and body changes and lack of necessary understanding and strategies to compensate for any areas their Autism, ADHD, associated Generalised Anxiety Disorder, their Sensory Processing Disorder or their Executive Dysfunction weakened and impacted. It is well known in the Neurodivergent community that we have a strong moral code, want to do the right thing and that we want to please people. So if we are refusing/can't do school, that means there is a strong need for change in the education environment, the delivery and the content. Kids need to make connections with the learning. They need to experience it through their senses, more than predominantly hearing and writing. Kids also need responsibility, flexibility, choice and some control. They need to experience the natural, real world, it teaches so many transferable life skills. Kids need lots and lots of opportunities to care for animals, plants, people, to learn to cook. In today's society, many families have 2 working parents. When do kids and their parents have the time, opportunity or energy to learn all these things outside of school. Or to have enough down time to learn about their

interests and passions, their strengths and their weaknesses and how to have a full life with those. Outside of what their families or society expects or says is acceptable. I am currently investigating the Big Picture Education Australia model to see if it would be possible to bring it up here, <https://www.bigpicture.org.au/welcome> There is one called Jabiru Community College, in Zillmere Brisbane. It appeals to me as it celebrates all diversity, culturally especially First Nations, gender and other identity as well as neurodiversity, through interest based and small size.

<https://www.jcc.qld.edu.au/>

Thank for reading my submission and opinions.

The private school we were at were more interested in ticking the boxes, yet put my child in a box. She has Sensory processing disorder and they did not understand or want to adjust how they taught the kids, if you didn't fit in the box you got left behind or pushed aside. Best decision we ever made was to Home educate our youngest of 3 girls

In reference to support & opposition of home education: we received lots of opposition from all sectors (family, friends, professionals) from the start of school refusal until the time we made the decision to home educate. Lots of different reasons we're cited - each relevant to the persons area of expertise and personal opinion. Most have seen the change in our young person and now support our decision. School was interesting - they were very keen to keep our teen enrolled despite months of disengagement and non-attendance (basically from start of covid until April 2022 when registered for home education). Once notified of our decision, they were supportive and admitted they didn't know how else they could help us.

It seems that for many, the opposition comes partly from lack of knowledge about Home Ed, and pathways to further study /employment, along with this awful assumption that institutionalised socialisation (in schools) is the 'only way' or 'right way' to socialise, when in fact, our children have opportunities to socialise - to gain experience communicating with others, forming friendships, sharing special interests, negotiating conflict, etc - in all aspects of life.

Not all children can be bribed or manhandled to school, at 14 my son is both heavier and taller (6'+) than me. Many absences aren't the doing of the parent and to threaten them, is counter productive and won't achieve the desired result, only adding more stress, anxiety and hardship.

It would have been great to have found Home Education Network in the first year. It would have been great to have health professionals on our side but they are just judgmental and wanted my son to go back to school.

Thanks for being a voice.

Choosing to home educate has improved our family life/mental health significantly. I hope the government will provide greater access to more things that would benefit/increase access to educational resources/opportunities/experiences to children of low income families who need to homeschool due to medical/mental health/refusal etc.

The need to be school enrolled to access VET program is discriminatory. Despite VSV being very flexible, the content is not interesting to my son and is contributing to returned disengagement. All so he can tick official boxes to be allowed to follow his automotive interest.

Had to stop working after 18mo supporting at school almost daily while child attended, covid lockdowns prevented any gains, school did not prioritise meetings or making plans to address needs, all efforts were pushed by parents, getting a clinical psychologist to attend meetings helped make school listen and implement changes but was too little too late. Home education is also a challenge as my child struggles to separate from parents so there is limited time to be separate, can no longer work as a mental health professional myself. Please consider imploring the committee to consider NDIS view of home education- it was a forced choice for my child and it feels very unfair to be considered a choice therefore no extra support worker hours etc by NDIS. Ed dept don't pick up these children, they seem happy to let them go but then parents of children with disabilities unable to attend school are left with more responsibility and no additional significant support, other than the tokem Assistance for isolated

children and carer allowance. I want to be able to work but can not at this point due to my child's needs.
Only homeschooled my youngest but 2 of my grandchildren are now homeschooled because of their uncles experience with homeschooling.
More support for home education when it is the best option for the child
With the support particularly of family and friends, it was a most encouraging and an eye opening experience to start educating children at home instead of struggling to keep them at school and expecting teachers to solve problems for us.
Yes the Mainstream School system is not capable of supporting many Kids with additional needs. Both my kids are neurodivergent and have struggled in the school system. We are lucky to have had access to many supports and NDIS funding as well. However nothing has made such a big impact on his well-being as having removed him from school.
One child in private school, second child home schooled
They're no respite options for home educators. It's largely shunned in society.
I have another child that is four years younger and I go through the same stress and anxiety every day trying to get her up, out of the house and into the classroom . Due to her sister's higher needs, I am not able to give her the education I am giving her older sister as it is very labour intensive. I still have another neurodivergent child in yr 2 developing greater anxiety by the day. Despite being in a new and very supportive school, the numbers are large, the days are long, they won't eat, they come home exhausted .
Have only started exploring options for 2023 regarding DE of Home Ed after a disastrous 2022 of school refusal/can't due to high levels stress & anxiety
Single parent, one child. Parent is well educated and academically minded.
The impact of school can't on our family was enormous. I feel as if children are disrespected so much in this situation but the stress on the entire family is often overlooked. Both parents and sibling were unhappy as well as school can't child. Advice given by the school to physically force our child to school was damaging to both my child and our family.
Our decision to return to Home Ed is purely due to trauma our child experienced while refusing to go back to school. His anxiety was extremely high and didnt feel safe going back to school. His mental health is far more important than anything else.
Homeschooling brought my girl back to me, but undoing the damage of forcing school for those last 3 terms has been a very long process. With hindsight, I should have withdrawn her at mid year, and minimised the damage.
This child is whom we care for. The decision to home educate was very difficult, and not supported by one of her parents. But she wanted to leave school altogether because her anxiety and negativity towards going to school was so great. So this was the compromise. Now she attends one class a day, learns at home and has started a VET program. Early days but we are thrilled with how the flexibility and changing things up has affected her mental health and daily well being
It is very "child-led" learning which she needs. School tried very hard to help but it is not a suitable environment for her. Her deteriorating mental health and the strain on the family got to the point that we had no choice but to find another way of "being" and to educate her. Massive adaptation for the family. Two years later and it has been well worthwhile.
We have 5 children under 12 who are very different individuals. My husband and i believe it is in their best interests to home educate each of them when they begin their first year of high school, that is Year 7, until they wish to go into a trade or onto university. A positive, encouraging and rewarding home

school environment at this particular age, pre-puberty, is better accommodated at home 1 on 1 for more a stable, safe and healthy teenager today. Our view on this may change over time, that is we may home educate all our children before they reach high school, if the school environment continues to erode their self worth, individuality and capacity to learn in different ways. There is no "one size fits all" with education; there never was and never will be.

Our daughter did not "school refuse" - she loved school and never refused to go despite the challenges - school could not meet her needs and she was beginning to think she was "dumb" - that's not ok! We took her out and have "unschooled" her ever since. I had to leave my job, we had to sell our 6 bedroom house and move into a one bedroom apartment. Our child's mental health and her feeling loved, valued and supported is more important than material assets. We gained a slower, richer lifestyle deciding to home school - this way of being aligns much more closely with our family values.

My children are lucky enough to be supported by small alternative schools who have provided an inclusive fun education with extremely low fees. If we were stuck with public school we would have no choice but to homeschool. We would've needed to sell our home to survive

Our son only did Home Education for a few months. He hated it and loves being back at high school. I would describe him as an extrovert, whereas our daughter is introvert with anxiety. However, she loved primary school and had a lovely group of friends. She never missed a day unless she was sick. As soon as she started high school at a private school though, she didn't like it. It got worse and worse, instead of getting better as I expected. My husband and I had a meeting with the Principal about the things that concerned her but that only made things worse when she found out about it. So we withdrew her. I have never had any interest in Home Education but in the end I had to do what was best for her. Luckily, I was a SAHM so it didn't affect us too much, in fact we saved her very expensive school fees but there is the constant worry of educating and socialising her. Luckily, there are many resources around. Her brother, who is 16 months younger than her and now in Year 8, loves everything about the high school she used to go to. The difference I have noticed is that he just shrugs off the things he doesn't like. Whereas, for her they were insurmountable. Although, I will always wonder if she would still be at school if we hadn't spoken to the Principal, the best thing about home educating her is that she is no longer grumpy or untalkative like she used to be. She wasn't sleeping or eating as well, whereas now she loves to eat, although still picky. Of course, the other thing that was of concern to me was teenage suicide, so to see the positive changes in her is wonderful. Every time she smiles and laughs now makes it all worthwhile. As a much older parent, I am fully aware of the decline in the education system over the last few decades, and have bitterly complained about it whenever faced with it since our children have started school, so I was quite confident I couldn't do any worse than the schools, most of whom can't spell or use grammar correctly.

We had a partial home schooling arrangement - So no formal home schooling arrangement/requirements - More described as a modified time table in high school - At school for core subjects - At home for electives ie Finding and Keeping a Job projected funded by NDIS

There needs to be more alternative learning schools, big picture schools for children at an earlier age.

Paediatrician is currently reducing medications due to improvement away from school. Last 3 years has been a combination of homeschool and transition programs back into school in order to keep my job, this year and beyond is full time homeschool

Refusal may not look like refusal for some kids - my daughter desperately wants to comply with rules and expectations so would often go to school even though it made her ill

it is tough when you have to lose an income to home educate and there is no support financially for home educating. A big thing for our family was the cost of petrol as we are in a rural area and fuel prices just kept going up. So even when choosing free activities and meetups it was costing up to \$150 a week to get to places

My child's school refusal was triggered by blame and pressure around her hesitance to go in to class

one day, and then following weeks. I couldn't help her to confidently trust the school because the blame and pressure I was receiving didn't feel like a healthy environment to me.

It was hard to work with them when they were insisting my anxiety was the problem, and at the same time I felt ignored when talking about adjusting the level of challenge/expectations to a child's level of overwhelm. While I agree that reinforcement of anxiety is an issue, they didn't believe that nervous system regulation and interpersonal trust is a higher priority.

It became traumatic for my child to keep trying to go in at the gate each morning, and we couldn't easily go further because of the pressure not to leave once we stepped in. After a few weeks I had to make the decision for her that we would stop trying. It didn't have to be so traumatic, though, because it was the urgent and frustrated pressure from school admin that caused a small hesitance as the start of term to become a huge fear.

The behaviour management system of the school wasn't entirely 'positive'. One child in my daughter's kindy class had behaviour outbursts and had his face on the 'reminder board' every day, which my daughter said made her scared to do anything wrong. This may have contributed to her after school meltdowns and homework refusal in the term she attended, even though she was adapting to the expectations while there. Even the praise/prize-based motivation added to this, and she felt powerless when she couldn't negotiate for so many hours due to class size. She was sitting still, but felt like she needed to be moving, playing with things, and imagining. The balance was too tilted towards the adult-led, even in terms of what the children were led to think they should be feeling.

Many kids learn best without being forced. My daughter has just gone through a developmental leap and raced through outcomes in her swimming class, after months of her teacher accomodating that she wouldn't yet put her face in the water. She has attended classes without me after not being pressured to, and completed assessments without shutting down when the professional focused on sensory regulation (gross motor and relational connection) in between more difficult tasks. She is finally following a formal literacy program with interest, after refusing for so long, but only when she chooses what time and what order we do the activities in. Knowing all this about her, it seems unfair that the principal told us 'doing it her way' wasn't working after just a few days of pressured attempts.

For those who do better with flexible homeschooling, many families would really benefit from flexible, unpressured literacy/numeracy centres and/or tutoring. Our councils also need to focus more on providing programs with a mix of structure/support and free play, similar to early education settings, focusing on STEAM and social opportunities.

I found the kindergarten educators had no understanding of what we were dealing with and treated it as 'normal' separation anxiety

One of my other children (aged 8) also experienced significant school refusal and distress, and I have noticed the same benefits and improvements to them as my child who was the subject of the responses in this form.

I wish I did homeschool my other child. School crushed his spirit. - There is not enough help at school for all children that need it. The public heath system is a joke. My son has SM (undiagnosed) & people think he needs to be in school for the social aspect but.. when he's in school he doesn't speak. He says it's like jail.

I have three other children who've never had an issue with school attendance, often the parents are blamed, instead of working out what supports the child actually needs. It was not my dream to be educating my child at home. I am his full time carer, I cannot chase after my own interests or dreams.

Homeschooling is outrageously expensive and not something undertaken lightly. Our child had chronic school refusal because the school he attended was not an environment in which he felt safe. In fact, attending school was a form of trauma for him. Forcing some children to attend school is child abuse and I wish I understood that earlier. I wish that there was financial support for homeschooling families because the lost income is a barrier to a happy childhood when it precludes one taking your child out of school.

Despite the financial strain due to lost income while homeschooling (single working parent), it was absolutely worth it for my child's well-being.

Teachers do not understand trauma and schools need to be made covid safe to be inclusive. I would move tomorrow if I could find a covid safe trauma informed school with a gentle teacher.

I'm tired and angry. School is mandatory. It is supposed to empower, not harm.

All 3 children are home educated as a classroom environment was not suited to their health issues. School refused to gauge level of quirks for middle child which led to almost complete mental breakdown, we have worked on this and he has a list of 5-6 quirks school refused to address. Much happier Child, more relaxed family.

That the level of anxiety started early and I tried for an entire year to support him through preschool. It was too much for him to cope with. Teachers do not get it and the level of support and care required. He really tried and wanted to go but it was too overwhelming for him

I have schooled my child twice, grades Both times I was given an ultimatum to remove him or the school would apply for exclusion. I will pull him out again if I absolutely have to but the financial strain makes it impossible to both look after the mental health of my child and put a roof over his head. All of my child's complex behaviours are caused by trauma experienced at school. When he returns to school he goes backwards in all of his learning. He has only ever made academic progress at home, he would not be able to read (severe dyslexia) if he had not been home schooled. Our education system can't keep him safe. They can't teach him. At this point all I want is for them to babysit him a few days a week so I can work and they are struggling just to do that.

Home schooling has been wonderful for our child. Though it is a real struggle financially as it limits my work options. Schools on the whole haven't provided a Covid safe environment and none of us want to pass on an infection to other family members. My son doesn't want to go back when he has a younger vulnerable family member. The NSW government and schools are not providing any protection or support for those that don't want to be infected. They are also not sharing the science that shows repeated infections can have devastating long term health impacts.

Homeschooling has helped us choose a curriculum that helps engage the children, yet not feel overwhelmed with the courses. It also has given the children a chance to do schooling without having their self esteem gutted, but able to constantly come alongside them and help them understand social situations, what is expected, and understand their own strengths, and what they contribute.

Considering home schooling due to on going school refusal and anxiety related to school

We wish we knew about the homeschooling option before she started school.

Did distance Education till distance Ed school could no longer deny that they could not meet child's needs

My son wants to go to school but finds the environment incredibly dysregulating. Home education is giving him an education suited to his needs.

The lack of support and appropriate early intervention for the school can't child is disgraceful. It does

not feel like anyone else values children's mental health, and children need to completely break before anyone will listen.

Younger sibling with special needs will also be home educated as home education better accommodates personalised approaches to education to suit childrens' needs.

Home education can't be relied upon as the only solution to school refusal. It's not practical for all families, and access to education is a right. Schools need to be genuinely inclusive and accessible. An option to split attendance between onsite and remote would work really well for us for instance. My child still misses a lot of school due to burnout and overwhelm, but she doesn't want to actually stop attending altogether. Home schooling was a last resort for us. Also, NESA needs to let go of the idea that home education has to strictly replicate school. This is missing the point entirely of why some people choose or need to home educate. Also, adopt the national curriculum NSW! Sheesh.

Needs to be more financial or government support. Yes we make the decision to homeschool but it is because sometimes there is no other choice. Some of us with additional needs kids are not eligible for any payments of any kind including ndis as there diagnoses don't have the right buzzwords.

My son has ASD level 3 with pda profile and ADHD. School settings as they a currently configured cannot / will not make necessary accommodations to support his learning needs. He is academically gifted but not able to manage with more than one person at a time and cannot manage in the busy environment of a typical school setting.

We would like to see either funding for homeschooling to access specialist teaching hours or the Ed Dept collaborating with homeschooling to provide some specialist teaching hours. It should not be an either/or situation (homeschool or mainstream school) when the school environment is disabling for children. We homeschool because there is no other choice.

Much happier

Our school systems have a lot to answer for when kids refuse to go to school the impact on my child and family life if the stress and lack of support from the education system is zero. A ver stressful situation could of been handled so much better.. disgusted parent..

I believe the schooling system is flawed. Children need to learn real life skills, how to care for their mental health and to embrace their own creativity and individuality. The bullying happening within the system needs to be looked at...REALLY looked at. Having policies and NOT following the policy is a travesty to all of the children involved.

We decided to formally home educate based on partial school refusal. We had however written our home education plan when our child was about 4 years old in preparation for. We did 'try' the school system after completing a second year of kinder to build resilience as per kinder recommendation and left school in November, completing almost a full year. There were lots of lovely parts to school, however it was never a good fit for our child. We remain open minded and will support our child if they wish to re-enter the school system at a point in the future. We left school with open and positive dialogue.

I think the compulsory age of starting school in WA is far too young- my son started when he was 4 years 9 months old.

I think the pre primary year should be about helping kids be comfortable in school setting and completely no pressure! My son was having to do dictation when he was barely 5 years old! I feel the school system needs to Look at themselves and what they can do differently rather than making children and parents feel bad for being different /difficult.

There needs to be a bigger emphasis on what research says actually works for kids and less on pandering to business and political pressure.

More flexibility in schools to try new models, public schools that do what the independent schools have found to work!

More financial support for homeschoolers and recognition that it works for many families!

The school system isn't exclusive or educational to staff about how to exclude children with needs. They have little support and majority just don't have the time or care factor to try.

I don't have any faith or trust in Queensland Education. When my autistic son was assaulted by another child at kindy and we also raised concerns about my child's needs not being met by the teachers, which was admitted to my boys dad and myself by the teacher, I lodged a complaint with Queensland Education. No help was given to my son or us as a family to help my son as his mental health declined more and the psychiatrist even stated he has PTSD from the assault.

Home-schooling was the best choice we ever made for our 4 children-15,12,10&8 years

If the schools/teachers actually performed their jobs competently my child would have been ok, but the system is not set up in favour of children, and this is a fundamental flaw that needs to be rectified. There is too much unnecessary suffering as a result of child un-friendly schools.

I no longer believe schools are the right environment for most children. We are breaking so many of them.

Home education for us was a necessity to ensure our young child's mental health was restored and that he was given the attention he deserved both academically and psychologically.

Home education was not successful for my younger child, so we returned him to school. Earlier withdrawal of older child might have produced more/better results.

We need to start listening to the children, all children, from a young age

The current school system lacks in flexibility to meet the emotional and physical needs of individual children. My son had a sleep disorder, allergies and trauma in his background that combined to create significant anxiety and depression symptoms. At home I was able to give the attention and care necessary to support him and he is currently working two jobs, completing his schooling, has a rich social life and plans for continued education. He is able to do that while managing physical and emotional challenges because of the flexibility and support I am able to offer at home.

The system doesn't work for some kids. Stop calling it school refusal - it's not a choice

I pulled my son out of * school name removed * due to his yr 10 English bullying him for having dyslexia and dysgraphia. Which the school well and truly were aware however they weren't in the slightest interested in supporting him. Yet it is meant to be a school that's great for ASD, adha, anxiety students (my son is all of these.) Bullying at a teacher level and the principal didn't care One bit. Goes to show what the school is actually like.

School Can't has impacted our child in so many areas and the small, independent school we chose was unable to effectively assist. We persevered with paying high fees while trying to attend school every day but each day we would arrive at school and our child's distress would be too great for them. We tried everything: including the teacher in the transitions, including friends, switching parents, early arrival, late arrival, psychological intervention, liaising with the school, developing a gradual exposure plan, planned days off, early pick ups, leaving our child at school crying. We tried everything. There is just no one answer for children experiencing this and I really think that schools should have packets of school work readily available to assist kids who have to miss a lot of school. It would help greatly with everyone's stress. I also think it would be great if - give the world we live in now - there was a way for kids who can't get to school to still remain connected to their class via an online link for at least part of the day.

This would retain connections, count towards attendance, and help kids feel like they can go back after a prolonged absence.

School refusal

Since kindergarten and took until year 7 for us to decide to home educate. I wish we would have started earlier. If more support for HE was available we may have.

My son was bullied so badly at school and the school failed him by blaming his Autism and not the bully. He wasn't sleeping, and he would cry that he didn't want to go to school to be bullied again. I wish I had made the decision to Homeschool him much sooner. He is happier and thriving now. We will never go back to school.

School kept trying to get her to school, when we actually unenrolled her the school said that was the best choice considering the high level of anxiety. Wish they could have said it's best to homeschool her. More awareness is needed around home schooling as an option for kids who school can't

The bullying our child suffered at school still results in their avoidance of other children in public even after 3.5 years of homeschooling.

Home education saved my child's mental health and is slowly rebuilding his natural love of learning after school diminished it. It is certainly the right choice for our child and we support him 100%. However, home educating requires enormous changes in the adults lives. Most of this burden falls disproportionately on women - I closed a thriving business and put my career goals on hold to home educate. I still work 20 hours a week while homeschooling and carry most of the mental load of the household. I supported my children's mental health at the cost of my own. There needs to be financial and practical support for parents who are doing the job that schools cannot.

Our problem wasn't as severe as others I have read about but the school never tried to assist, they didn't communicate to me there was a problem until I approached them, they gave me a hard time when picking up worksheets the child's teacher has prepared and when professional help (ndis ecei coordinator and Occupational therapist) tried to contact the child's class teacher to discuss his return to school and help them understand his needs and how they can help in the classroom the school actively blocked the requests and refused to talk to the professionals. The following year we decided to try homeschool and it was such a big difference in our child's behaviour, and no stress at school. We have been able to adapt learning to our child's needs and if there is a day that's not working we can try the following day so the child is not stressed.

I would love it if there were more schooling options for children with different learning needs and styles. My child's needs are huge and teachers were under resourced and too busy to help us. The system failed him and he was made to feel like the failure. He was suicidal by age 10 because of all the constant assessments and comparison between himself and non-disabled children. His learning needs and disabilities are too complex for mainstream and yet there are no options in . He now has PTSD from trying to attend school and refuses to do anything that even resembles learning. I was given the wrong advice from well-meaning professionals.

The teacher's at my child's school were wonderful. We all really tried to make it work for my autistic child. Unfortunately there needs to be much, much more support for the teacher's and special needs children in the current school system. There is hardly any support for Asperges/high functioning ASD children in the school system. They fall under the radar which is devastating. We started home schooling as we had no other choice. Autistic/special needs schools would not have worked for my child either.

We are in our second year of homeschooling, In our journey we are still dealing with trauma of the school experience and we de schooled for a year and still do at times but we have seen major improvements and although we are now a one income household the improvements out way the financial burdens. School refusal increased my child's anger, tics, as a family we are pleased not dealing with the aggression anymore.

The school system needs to change the style of learning to cater for individuals who are struggling but in a way that will not embarrass them as teenagers and help engage. Looking at the possibility of lowering the working age so they can engage in real world learning if they desire.

I decided to homeschool my youngest after realising that he may face the same struggles as the one who had school refusal.

I think the elements of schooling that led us to home educate had never been addressed in the school my child was attending. to the point 1.5 years after we left her year group had a mass exodus from that school. Mostly these parents have sent them to another school but many have also started homeschooling.

It's been 9 years, and she is a different child, but the changes happened soon after removing her from the kinder and the autism service. She is engaged, regulates her emotions well, makes and keeps friends, has an intense passion for learning new things, and loves life. She's looking forward to her future, and is excited about all the possibilities. My one regret is ever sending her to kinder, and to the autism service. Home education is the best decision we ever made.

Greater understanding from professionals that they aren't "naughty" children who need discipline, they're struggling humans who need support

We would still be homeschooling if I didn't require permission from their dad. School refusal is at an all time high but I don't have any other options.

Home education should be financially supported as the State no longer provides staff or resources.

The school system needs to improve tremendously on how they support autistic children. They say they are inclusive but they are not. My son is non speaking and goes to a Special Development School however they do not have a clue how to support autistic children. Although the teachers are kind, they still see the neurotypical as superior and base my sons achievements off how neurotypical he can accomplish things. There is not enough support or training for teachers and I see over and over again the school basing their support from a medical model rather than social. I am still blown away that majority of teachers do not no how to use AAC dedicated devices and as my son is non speaking he goes through most days with his needs not being met or understood. Why is there not schools dedicated to supporting autism? Autistic adults and educators should be utilised in schools. Autistic people should be valued and seen as a neurotype, not something that requires fixing which is what I feel the school system do. I had to send my son back to school due to being a single mum of 2 however there are still times he refuses to go which makes it extremely difficult to work and get a steady income. The government needs to do better.

I unfortunately have come to believe the current school system is not inclusive. We tried so hard to keep our daughter in main stream school, but the Government School Principal & our daughter's teacher, although they met with us & we gave them information from reputable & recent research, didn't believe the opinion of our child psychologist or their suggestions for accommodations & strategies. Instead they chose to blame us as parents. Very disappointing and isolating and confusing and frustrating for us as parents. With the outcome negatively affecting our daughter's right to an education in mainstream school & family.

Child's school refusal was caused by living in the most locked down city in the world for 2 years. The constant stop and start of school resulted in anxiety, stress and therefore school refusal in a child who spent their first 2 years of formal education in and out of lockdowns. The impact of this on this generation should not be underestimated and the government should work on addressing the problem they have caused. Home schooling was a wonderful solution for our child and family but also has significant financial impacts.

Children thrive when they're happy. A positive and nurturing environment is key

Life is incredibly hard when your child has school refusal.

Intend to enrol in formal school again in 2024 (year 7). 2023 will be a repeat year (year 6 again), covering off on our child's gaps in Maths & English due to a less than acceptable learning environment at previous school. This is in addition to covid disruptions, multiple teachers and a recent learning difficulty diagnosis.

I homeschool three kids all autistic and started different times for different reasons. School isn't able to give them the support they need

Without me being at school with my child everyday he wasn't able to attend as there wasn't the support equities for disabilities and incontinence.

Went from not being able to cope to having confidence and knowing she can do things again

The current school system is broken.

Homeschooling changed our life. I think Department of Education should we nature that the assessors for homeschooling should not make the registration and renewals of homeschooling harder as some Authorised Persons in NSW are beginning to expect homeschoolers to achieve school type learning which is very restraining as learning happens in so many ways for a lot of homeschoolers. I think homeschoolers shouldn't made to feel like they are doing something wrong and they need to prove themselves worthy of registration (child safety check I get but questioning everything they do is not fair).

My child has been diagnosed with multiple neurodiverse differences. Mainstream school never picked up anything. Once we had him assessed the school refused to offer and support and actually made the situation worse.

I did not recognise, home education as a viable alternative to school, I had internalised society bias which I had not been consciously aware of until the prospect of not being able to continue at school was forced upon us. We only tried it on the premise it could not be any worse. I really wish I had known more about it and not been so scared of it, because I delayed leaving school too long and increased the trauma my child suffered because of that fear. the fear of it failing or being too hard. It still bothers me to this day

As a NeuroDiverse family I genuinely believe that Home Education needs to be a better supported option for children struggling in the normal or regular school environment. It is unrealistic to expect any teacher or aid to manage the massive variations in ability, skill and communication style that happen in a classroom and especially high functioning, not very disruptive kids, are not properly supported because of that. Sadly that leaves them open to increases in mental health struggles and many other issues as they age. Ask yourselves what is the intended outcome of this. Do you want thriving children who are educated and caring, contributing members of society, or do you want everyone to go to school?

We were able to access a primary school program which supported reduced attendance...so part time attendance with home learning projects as well as supporting work from school. This was then supported at HS until year 10 when my child decided to attend school full time.

As a parent, I am now less involved in the learning process and do not see how my child progresses or where my child struggles. School is no longer bilingual. The child is too tired to practice the subjects they struggle with. The child does have less time to pursue their own interests, such as reading widely and difficult books, playing the piano, learning a third language (my child has been asking repeatedly to learn another language for over a year now), or learning other skills such cleaning and cooking. [Child back at school]

My child is back at school because her father did not approve of home-schooling and she has been refusing to go again.

She wanted to go back as we struggled to connect with other teens in our area and she missed having friends. Having started a new school with no friends has been incredibly overwhelming for her.

This child would refuse to go to school because they saw their older sibling refusing to go, it also caused issues with another younger sibling.

The 3 of the areback at school this year, as the oldest is refusing to go often the younger 2 don't want to go as it doesn't seem fair to them and they'd rather be home too.

I've learnt over the years that she really just can't attend school. Her sensory needs and dyslexia are not supported adequately there. Even though they try, the structure is too restrictive and they don't have any funding for an aid because she's too well behaved and bright. She try's so hard, but the build up of anxiety gets debilitating. It's heartbreaking. I feel burnt out from homeschooling and would like to just be her mother and have support for her education. But this has been very difficult to get. She has depression now which adds to the complication.

She is happier at Steiner than she was at either kinder or public school

In my experience nothing is perfect. We've been to many schools with many great and some not so great teachers. The general structure of our current school system doesn't suit every child. Pushing to learn academics so young negatively affects many kids self esteem at a very young and vulnerable age. Kids who need more support later often miss out or are left feeling less then or stupid because of the rush to read & write.

Homeschooling is hard too. If you have a strong network of like minded families, you can pool together and create an excellent education that teaches the kids so much about the world, social skills etc. But it takes a huge amount of effort, creativity and discipline from the parents. Especially if they have multiple children.

I don't have the answers, but it is true. Some kids school can't.

School staff need urgent strategies for students with ASD/ADHD. My son is still often told he is rude (rather than direct) and I still have to step in on a regular basis. He is not able to attend camps or most excursions as they won't assign staff to "not funded" kids, but he is unable to attend on his own.

After seeing huge school can't with my middle child i was much more attuned to recognise the early signs in my youngest child so when i homeschooled my 12 year old I also offered it to my 10 year old. After homeschooling most of 2022 they both chose to return to mainstream. It was like they had a chance to reset their nervous system and be able to recognise and articulate exactly what the stressors were at school then I was able to advocate for accomodations to support them with these specific barriers.

From yr 7-11 our care team (psychiatrist, psychologist, OT) developed many different strategies to try to re engage my daughter. We attempted working from home well before the pandemic, we tried attending for as little as 10 minutes a day, 10 minutes a week, moving from mainstream to a LSC and a LSU, removing timeline expectations etc. Our care team would 'negotiate' a new strategy to trial with my daughter and then I would liaise and meet with the schools to convey the new plan. Very early on in this journey it became very clear that I had to be the driver behind this. Exemptions were put in place from yr 7 to date. I would have to follow up with the school to have work provided. Feedback from teachers rarely came on any work that was submitted. This very quickly led to my daughter leading a self learning journey.

We did not enrol for home schooling, we remained enrolled in the public system. I continued to keep the school updated with her health and well being and ensured that the exemptions etc were kept current. As a parent I definitely feel as though we were in the 'too hard basket' and throughout these years you live with the fear that you are going to show up on the 'radar' as doing something wrong, when you only have the best interest of your child.

You hear so many horror stories of schools threatening parents with involvement from departments because of non attendance, the involvement of police and DOCS. The entire process regarding a 'school can't' child is exhausting for the child and parent. You are advocating constantly and in our case

if I hadn't been advocating she simply would have fallen between the cracks. In my state I can now legally withdraw her from education because she has reached age and her health has deteriorated to a point where it is detrimental. I will still have to prepare reports from our care team and jump through more hoops but I can see that soon removing the formal expectation of school will drastically improve the health of my daughter.

I am not completing another survey, but I will share that I also experienced similar with my son. He is now His journey was almost identical to my daughters however. He did however attend a specialised school run by CAMHS for 3 terms, The goal was to transition back into the enrolled high school in the LSU. This was never achieved and at most he would attend the LSU for 1 hour a week, with an LSA and generally the executive of the LSU to play a board game. I would have to walk him in and for the first 6 months had to stay, eventually I was able to walk him up and then sit in the carpark and walk back in to collect him after the hour. When yr 10 ended he was sent to our college and the same plan of 1 hour a week continued until he was old enough to legally exit.

Both of my children are highly intelligent and are extremely knowledgeable across so many subjects, they have achieved this on their own self learning journeys. It is an exhausting and mentally fatiguing process when you have school can't children. During their primary years we had the morning battles of trying to get to school, days of when they did get there but something would trigger them throughout the day so they would leave, calls from school saying that my child had left and they didn't know where they were.

I am a solo Mum of my two youngest were the school can't children, I worked full time, with all of our appointments and school issues it was an absolutely horrible way of life. I didn't think so at the time but luckily for me I was made redundant Initially I looked for a new role and then I stopped. With trying to take the kids to school for their 10 minute days, or hour periods etc. on top of 4-6 appointments each week I decided enough was enough and my focus would solely be on caring for and supporting them. This was a game changer in our home. Over the next few years we found our own rhythm. As I was now on a carer pension, I continued to make sure I crossed the t's and dotted the i's with school so we were not flagged re attendance which would have an affect on our income via family tax benefit.

It has been a really hard journey, whilst concessions were made for both children from yr 7-11, school can't kicked in for both of them from about yr 4 (my son) and yr 5(my daughter). Apart from a school can't Facebook group I am in there is very little support. There are a whole range of reasons school can be difficult to attend and schooling can be difficult to complete. There is a mindset re the importance of physically attending and it has severely impacted my children's lives and very clearly is a source of so much trauma. If I knew then what I do know, for the health and we'll being of my two children I would have done so much more to try to remove the 'expectation of school' when they were much younger.

It's important to note I am by no means anti school, my two older children went through school without issue.

The distress my child experienced trying to be in school was horrendous, I felt guilty that he was suffering so much and I felt guilty that I couldn't get him to school. We took a whole term out with no school at all in order to reset and recover his mental health, whilst enrolling at VSV. I took most of my long service leave in order to help him. The change in his mental health has been wonderful to see.

It's appalling that schools are unwilling to adjust their teaching methods to assist neuro diverse students. Eg insisting that the student writes over and over when they have a diagnosis of dysgraphia. This still continues in Tafe settings - it's not rocket science, just let them use technology.

The psychologist, psychiatrist & OT, who were not supportive, were amazed at just how many severe problems were solved... simply by leaving the school system.

To their credit, all have told us they have changed their 'conservative stance' and now recommend it as an option to others.

We have found so much support and resources since we entered and embraced home education. Our family is happier, because all our kids are able to learn and not be distracted and disheartened by the impacts our eldest child had on the rest of the family 5 days a week when his behaviour was out of control. Home schooling meant all our children were educated not just those that socially felt safe in the school system. The difference has been life changing for us all. He was able to thrive not just survive.

It took years of forcing my kid to go to school before we started homeschooling, recommended due to other health issues... any school refusal, we were told to just keep sending him, even though he was miserable

has encopresis (medical condition causing soiling) school staff called me in to complain and say they can't help with clean up, opposed to home education but offered no solutions.

we home educated as a matter of emergency. Our son would not have survived school

Homeschooled other child due to school refusal. Not all children can fit into a specific school system.

The desperate need to provide flexible learning spaces for children to attend with support. So they don't miss out on opportunities

School refusal for is was directly related to peer bullying, including verbal and physical bullying, threats of violence him and members of his family. We worked with the school over two terms, including seeking counselling for our sons "school refusal" but the bullying continued and it was explained as being misunderstandings. His school refusal included crying every night, nightmares. On days he did attend school he came home exhausted. We tried half days and part-time attendance, counselling and all suggestions put to us by the school. The bullying continued, leaving is with no other option. The immediate change in our son in terms of academic performance, confidence, energy, self-belief and all physical stress symptoms has been astounding.

My child was beaten up at school by 3 other children and the school DID NOTHING!!!

My child is autistic (dx 2020); it looks like anxiety and sometimes defiance; school had no idea how to help. Over the last year the school distress got progressively worse, and now my child's mental health is really bad. I wish we'd left school earlier.

We had some great people throughout school, such as teachers and admin however this was because they loved their job and loved helping kids, not because of any system or plan. More training is needed for staff and much more flexibility and empathy for kids who struggle to be at school. I genuinely believe my child has life long trauma from her experiences with school, and will absolutely impact her ability to gain education for work and career. The system needs an overhaul.

Schools intentionally withhold support in this area, when it could have a direct positive impact on the child and their family. They need to stop the hurdles and direct families to where/how they can find the perfect solutions. It shouldn't be such a lengthy, stressful and drawn out process. Remove stigma of home-schooling or distance ed as it can hugely benefit some who, otherwise would have disengaged in education altogether if they were continuing to try and force full time attendance. Offer part time options for those struggling, or send work home instead of all or nothing.

Schools and power-hungry principals should not discriminate against or further ostracise and humiliate kids who are already struggling, due to their attendance issues. Welcome them and include them when they DO make it to school, as it can be a huge step. Uneducated teachers or staff with a lack of understanding in this area project their judgement and it is not helpful at all. If they truly want to help kids, then HELP THE KID and treat them as individuals with differing needs and abilities.

We decided to home education our younger child who was attending school but experiencing horrible mental health as a result. The mainstream school we were involved with where wonderful but very skeptical about home schooling however I think they were relieved that there was going to be an action

to the problem. Despite the best intentions there was no way the school could accommodate the needs on my son.

The process to start home educating is very difficult. There is definite, deliberate discouragement of home education by school, professionals both medical and other, and the benefits are not discussed or encouraged. I found it difficult to know where to start. I also found that when I advised Centrelink that I was home-schooling, they didn't share the ways that the government can help with some of the costs, like the support for isolated children scheme, which is difficult to apply for as well. I stumbled on it by accident when speaking to another parent. There needs to be more support for children who can't manage school and teachers and schools should be educated on the benefits there are for those who just can't attend a mainstream school. Instead of trying to fit them into the school mold, how about they support the parents in getting set up to manage schooling in a way that will work for their child?

Best thing we ever did

We were going to home school but took a chance on the local mainstream state school. After 5 years it was taking too much of a toll.

also home Ed 2nd child for same reason

It's the best decision I have ever made for my daughter and family and wish I had home educated from the beginning without ever going to a school.

I wish we had taken our son out of school years ago. He was extremely traumatised by his school experience, which included bullying related to his learning difficulties (which was more or less dismissed by leadership). The school was also not interested in working collaboratively with his therapists, it's now so much easier working alongside his therapists without contradictions from the classroom.

Our now 10 year old just stated she would never wear a school uniform so she refused even before she started 😊

I would love to home educate my other school aged daughter but she's chosen traditional schooling and we've chosen to respect her decision

School refusal to us is our child refusing to do her school work as a home educator's child. That said, she knows why she is home educated and knows what opportunities she has that others don't so she has recently stated she doesn't want to go to school.

I struggle at times when she doesn't want to do her traditional school work, for fear of the moderator refusing our reapplication. But this is my battle. Our child asks many, many questions and learns everyday. It doesn't always fit easily into the curriculum. Or I find it hard to fit it into the curriculum. But it is there and I accept that's my battle.

There is a huge unaddressed gap in the education system between mainstream and special development/ autism schools that children like mine do not fit into. Home education is the only option we have around my child's disabilities and diagnosis.

The school system shames and punishes children and thinks they just need to "try harder" (to do the work, to attend etc) when school is not actually designed for individualism - it is designed to force children to conform and if you don't fit into their box, you are the problem. My children will never set foot in a school again.

Remote learning and the ongoing interruptions with school due to covid, lack of well-being/ psychological support at our school. School were unable to support my daughter's needs due to the overwhelming number of children struggling with anxiety and other issues following remote learning. Being unable to attend the school myself, her psychologist could not attend the school and the fact siblings could not play together at school to reduce the covid risk meant support for my daughter was very limited and we could not put her back into school through that process. She is now so much happier, more confident, not suffering from any anxiety, happy to step outside her comfort zone. Homeschooling has been the best decision for her. School is not for everyone.

Mainstream schooling do not accomodate kids who are neurodivergent, our education systems need to change completely to ensure ALL students are LEARNING in a comfortable, adaptable environment, and stop trying to make our kids who are not coping feel guilty!

Schools are no able to meet the needs of my child as they currently are. He is still recovering from the damage school did to him. He is a social boy, who is caring and gentle. He loves his friends and is very interested. School did not support him to be there. If I could have got him to school I would have. But the damage it did was heartbreaking.

We would have preferred to keep him at school part time but this wasn't an option. It would be good to offer more flexibility in this space. Due to his high sensory issues, learning is very difficult for him in a school environment. However, there are things schools offer that are harder to replicate at home. Also, help with resources would be good - even on a loan basis. It feels a bit like we've been left to carry the entire load just because school can't cater for our child's needs (living in a rural location we only have 1 school option).

School system is struggling to cope and so many kids are falling way behind, covid has affected kids mental and emotional health and school refusal is becoming a real problem. People need to realise it's a condition and not just say make them go, it's not easy and is affecting so many families.

Bullying and the teacher and schools lack of action to resolve the matters, played a large factor in my childs declined mental health status and not wanting to attend school.

The education system is set up to divide and not unite. There is no inclusion and diversity of attempts to implement same level of education for all people of different nationalities and cultures.

We live in a rural town & it has been difficult to access supports. We also have to drive an hour each way to visit home schooling groups and a library that runs activities for home schoolers - this is not always possible. The lack of home school supports has made home schooling a lot more challenging than it would otherwise be.

My two children are homeschooled so that they can feel safe in their learning environment. Free to be themselves, free from bullying, free from a lack of understanding about their disabilities, and an adult available to them who they know will be there for them when needed, giving them space to learn and regulate themselves. This was never available for my children throughout their primary education and we weren't willing to put them through this into their high school education. Only 12 months into our journey, we see two happy, learning individuals who no longer need the emotional support that they needed to cope with attending school.

My middle child also refused. My youngest still attends school. It's impacted the whole family. I have to do both school parenting and home schooling. It's had a huge impact on my health.

Home education is not easy but my child did not fit in to the school setting and was traumatized, it has taken over a year for him to recover from that. There needs to be more personalised smaller educational settings for children of different needs and levels, so they don't have to be be pressured to fit a one size fits all approach.

I think school tries to make it a family issue where in our case it is the school who is unable to provide a safe environment.

Home Education has been the best fit for our child. His well-being is priority as without it no educational value was offered after day 3 each week at school and recovery took 3-4 days just to repeat the cycle over and over. It was a vicious and unhealthy cycle and struggle. It took a good 6mths to just recover from the school system and reinstate his love for lifelong learning. We will never return to mainstream schooling now our eyes have been opened.

Homeschooling was not a choice. It was our only option to ensure the mental well-being of our children and support successful progression in their learning and education

This is our first term of Home Educating, so not a lot of experience yet.

Wish I'd trusted my gut & di e it sooner!

My daughter hasn't been homeschooled 100% since age 8. she's been in and out of mainstream many times since age 8. Every attempt to send her back to mainstream school has failed. She's only started homeschool again a week ago after attempting mainstream school again from the beginning of this year.

As a full time working single mum, home education is very difficult to facilitate however it has given breathing space and taken a lot of stress off the family.

Gifted children do not get catered for at school. And they are miserable. We have met many gifted families who homeschool due to school refusal. Despite a grade skip school nearly broke my son. He was 6 and it was heartbreaking.

The school did not know how to support us effectively with the school refusal. At the height of the crisis for our family, the school told us that the problems we were experiencing were because of our parenting. They turned out to be because of autism, ADHD and giftedness and the unmet needs of our child. This had a huge impact on our family life for several years and was not resolved until we started home educating. We're very glad that we did this. But we genuinely believe that the education system should provide for all children and that we never would have had to home educate if the school had been supportive.

The answer above was in response to needing flexibility when family members were ill. My now had just started Prep in 2007 & we needed to travel quite often to care for them. As a result he was always 1 year older than his peers & resented this, until he got his licence first in yr 12 :-). I think the most difficult thing I have noticed is that if you believe "it takes a village to raise a child" & then not being able to connect with that village, life can be tough. It's been difficult to 'model' friendships when you are yourself unable to maintain them & so there can be a sense of blame & shame around all of the complex reasons that your child 'can't' attend school. I think the 'one size fits all model' is outdated & teachers can't be expected to be 'mental health workers'. Add to that large class sizes that are overstimulating for many, not just neurodivergent children & under resourced. Then there is the 'cognitive bias' of the individual teacher (or ignorance) as well as the 'school culture' not being a good fit. Just because it's the closest school, doesn't mean it's the right fit for your child, and if you have limited resources or finances, you don't have a choice. Also, Centrelink payments are not very sympathetic unless you are a single parent. That is unless your child has been subjected to the 15+ assessments necessary to establish a diagnosis that may or may not lead to extra funding depending on how you cope as an individual with the administrative burden of various applications whilst still trying to homeschool, run a house, pay your bills, and maintain your own sanity. It is not an easy option, but sometimes the only option - to save lives!

I am always inspired by the work of Kristy Forbes here in Australia & the work of Jodie Smitten in the UK. I think without discovering how these two amazing women are advocating for themselves & their/our children I would be in a completely different place.

I have since partially completed a Masters in Ed/Dev Psychology and was astonished that no-one on the course ever discussed (or asked me about) homeschooling as a viable option

Appendix F - Responses to Question 24

Do you have anything else you would like to share?
[Children with School Can't who have never been home educated]

On the days they can't attend school we try to do work books and they are very happy to learn. School is a huge trigger and they sometimes don't feel safe. They go to a specialist school 4/5 days and week.

My child has been at home for 2 years traumatized about school and can no longer attend. So traumatized cannot even do home schooling because anything academic triggers his trauma

The education system needs to be more flexible & understanding of kids who cant always attend school. Views that kids just dont want to attend need to be challenged. Teachers/school/community need to ne netter informed & educated re neurodiversity, trauma , anxiety. Especially for kids who are experts at MASKING. Parents who report school refusal need to be believed. So common for parents to be projected upon as cause of behaviours, school refusal etc. Parents often bare the blame ie lack of boundaries, resilience, issues at home parenting styles etc. The only model which will be successful is an educated education workforce. School cultures which support & promote positive partnerships with parents/carers. Committed to developing strong partnerships. Esp relationships connection with struggling student. Adequate supports services avail at school. Wrap around services with primary health fr students & family.

The education system is broken. There is not enough support and flexibility and kids like my son end up anxious and traumatised.

I have tried so hard to advocate for my child and educate my children's teachers in the public school system about neurodivergence, and provide suitable resources for them to better understand and support them - but I have not been listened to and it is a constant battle for basic inclusion and understanding. Worse, there is no willingness on their part to make reasonable adjustments in line with the DDA (Disability discrimination act). I've been told they can't because down the track in VCE the examiners won't allow adjustments. I've been told my child is being dishonest about being bullied (this is absolutely disgraceful of them and clearly false). I've been told we should go to a Steiner school instead by teachers who don't understand that this is not a solution for us. The schools have been punitive and judgemental and exclusionary over and over again with no regard for my child's mental health or self esteem and it is exhausting and heartbreaking.

If govts funded the required professional training, support and resources to support families amd schools to enable flexible learning, this would assist children and young people greatly.

Yes - in some case students are not refusing/avoiding school/ling due to the learning challenges but the social security when they have been severely bullied. They don't feel safe and supported beyond the re-entry (when bullies continue to cause harm)

My son has complex medical conditions, which the schools (changed schools at beginning of 2020) refuse to cater for. If there is excursions with the school I either have to go (at my own expense) or he misses out. Same with school camp I either have to go and stay near by at my own expense or he doesn't get to go. He's got to the point where he refuses to go due to the school not being able to help him and him not being included in alot of things due to his medical restrictions. I have also had to stop working so i can go help my son at school and tend to his medical conditions as the school

<p>doesn't want to learn about helping him. He's in mainstream schooling as he doesn't qualify to go to the local special school. (No other options in Along with his complex medical conditions he is also on the autism spectrum, adhd, severe anxiety, selective mutism and a few other diagnosis that go along with these. The schools have put him in the to hard basket, with one of his previous teachers telling me she can't have him in her class until he is 100% better his medical conditions, which is never going to happen.</p>
<p>I have considered home school not due to school refusal but to our concerns over the education system and what is (or isn't) being taught to our children</p>
<p>No support from school. I have reached out to them many times - to try and implement a flexible learning plan. They have shown no interest in working with us to try and re-engage with schooling</p>
<p>It breaks my heart that my child believes she's "stupid" and there's something wrong with her when the reality is that the systems and adults responsible for adapting the curriculum to deliver her education effectively are either not trying or can't due to lack of necessary skills and supports.</p>
<p>My child has already experienced more trauma from school teachers and office administration then the majority of people do in their lifetime. Every inclusion I've fought for and often not succeeded to get would benefit their entire student body, yet time after time my 6yr year old is shamed and bullied by staff and students and held responsible for the inadequate and inappropriate actions of individuals who actually have the developmental and cognitive ability to make better choices.</p>
<p>In retrospect it would have been a lot easier and better for my eldest child if I had of home schooled him. At that time I wasn't very confident in my own abilities to help him. I would cry myself to sleep at night worrying about what would become of him if I couldn't get him to go to school. He is now and while he is doing ok as an adult I know he would have done better if I had of thought homeschooling was something I could have done back then. Before covid there was a huge stigma involved with homeschooling but I'm glad I pushed thru that with my other three kids.</p>
<p>There is just so much info which is great but knowing which one to do is overwhelming.</p>
<p>Anyone paying attention knows the current education model doesn't fit anyone. Why are we still focusing all our time, money and effort into a broken system that doesn't even have the best interests of its students in mind? Part of a larger societal issue - of all Western systems - designed to prevent people from being holistically well?</p>
<p>The Victoria Education system needs urgent attention. Principal and Teachers have little to no understanding of my child's behaviours and just resort to suspension. He was excluded from school from 1pm last year "to avoid suspension" They just were not interested in working with his support team to give him the best shot. These kids are stuck as they cannot access specialist schools and mainstream loose interest as soon as you don't fit in to the square box they need you to. Its a joke.</p>
<p>Mostly it's discouraged which makes it really hard to learn about</p>
<p>He has always struggled with daycare, preschool, etc, but people always told me it would get better. Now he's in foundation and I feel like I'd be failing him if I took him out and homeschooled right away.</p>
<p>Our highly regarded and very mainstream paediatrician supports our decision to home educate and congratulated us for giving our children a "non traumatic education."</p>
<p>Our children are suffering in the current system</p>
<p>The education system failed us, they offered a support worker to help him and that was in Nov, application submitted, still nothing. DECD I am very disappointed, I am tired but will keep fighting.</p>
<p>Our story is so much more complex than a survey. I first considered HE in year 1. He should be in year 11 now. PDA, severe school based trauma over multiple states, schools and year levels.</p>
<p>We feel helpless. We don't want to fail her!</p>

My child suffers from anxiety which was caused by bullying at school. She started school a happy, confident, social and bright child. Now in grade 6 she has lost so much confidence, self harms and struggles with school socially. She is a high achiever and is bored at school. In grade 4 we had an excellent teacher who had her doing year 7/8 maths and she loved it. Apart from that though it has been a disaster. In grade 5 she did not learn one single new thing.

The bullying continues and the school does nothing. She was _____ last week and despite having a clear _____ mark on her arm nothing was done. She has come home with _____ and many other injuries. Outside of school she plays _____ and socialises fine with those kids. She also had a good group of friends at school.

The school is unable to stretch her academically so it's like she's there for babysitting so I send her to a babysitter that allows her to be physically assaulted every week. I would like to home school her but it's hard with work. Through covid and being stuck _____ for 9 months I homeschooled her and she progressed so much. When she returned to school she was 18 months plus ahead of her peers.

I would like her to finish school in a safe environment but that seems impossible. She has _____ for high school so I'm hoping a private school will manage behaviour better. If not we will homeschool although I don't think she'll reach her full potential that way.

We have had many days of school refusal, sometimes a week at a time. Despite knowing she has issues the school has not contacted us once. Even worse is her _____ to the parents of one of her bullies.

Sort your schools out, make them a happy, safe environment and most kids will go

The education system for children with a disability (autism) is severely broken. It is not inclusive or supportive for autistic children. The education system thinks it is acceptable to isolate a child in a room by himself away from his peers. Suspend him and exclude him for long periods of time. Suspensions and exclusions and with holding breaks as a punitive action to try and deal with a child's autistic behaviours is severely flawed and will never have a positive outcome. Leading to him becoming disengaged from school and refusal to even go on a part time basis due to the trauma that has been imposed on him by the education system due to his disability (autism). There needs to be an urgent enquiry into the systemic deficiencies into the education department and their inability to care for, nurture, support and educate autistic children.

Beautiful young lives are being ruined by the broken system. My child does not want to be home educated as he has an extremely strong desire to connect with his peers. I also am not qualified to educate my son. It is also not my desire to do so as I would like to concentrate on being a loving supportive mother and strong advocate for my autistic child. Please fix these issues now before more lives are damaged by the broken system. I am unfortunately not alone in this opinion this is happening to many young lives all over Australia.

Home schooling is not an option due to other siblings that require 1 on 1 supports

Son goes to school up until lunch time, he has said on many occasions he would rather be dead than go to school, he wants to die because I'm making him go to school. School currently is saying to the education dept that he not going to due to family reasons they said because the education dept doesn't like giving out exemptions for my son not to go to school. I feel like I am not capable of home-schooling because of my disability & I find all the information very overwhelming I wouldn't even know where to begin. My son & I both have disabilities and not much money left each fortnight to survive let alone be able to afford resources for schooling.

Current school only providing "accommodations" that teach compliance from our child, not

acceptance from the school.
Everyday getting my boy to school is a battle. He cries every day. I cry most days too. And it makes me feel physically l'll. There is not enough support for him at school because he doesn't meet the crazy criteria for an aid. He masks well so people think he is fine as soon as he stops crying. But he is not. He just holds it in. We are really struggling and nearing burnout.
My daughter is a young adult now and I really wish the level of advocacy around ADHD and girls existed even just 4 years ago.
My child was excluded from primary school and sent to a behaviour school. However, due to his disability, and "lack of engagement"; he was not able to continue. Pretty much said he cannot return. He was too traumatised by the primary school which would result in absconding. Therefore, he didn't attend for the last 6 week of term 4. He did not graduate with his peers. His suicidal ideation was at its peak whilst at this particular primary school. We are in our second year of high school, and in week 3. He has attended school 4 times this term due to suspension
The red tape and obstacles in place make it very hard for a child, who WANTS to learn, learn without pressure or judgment from the government departments. Instead of prolonging the inevitable, when faced with school can't/medical issues and disabilities, trust when the families ask for help and direction, for better options so they can access education, in a way that suits the child,rather than simply saying, bring them to school and we'll try other support options that will not work.
I would love to home-school but finance would be the main concern
After years of struggle with anxiety, separation anxiety and school refusal and trying to make it work with the school to support our child, we have finally decided for her emotional wellbeing homeschool will likely be the best option for her emotional wellbeing and academic learning and will begin homeschooling next term.
My child refuses to go to school on a regular basis due to anxiety, she is autistic and absolutely used to love school, until the bullying and alienation started, and then this year when they did a 3/4 mixed year, in a huge open plan class room with a massive 28 kid class. She's missed almost 2 and a 1/2 weeks so far this year. Composite classes don't work. Please stop doing them. Please.
We employed a very expensive psychologist who refused to acknowledge time away from school was an option. Instead, we were to physical drag our daughter into the school grounds and threaten police action if she left the grounds again. This went on for a term, with the principal class at one point physically needing to hold her and try and pull her off the fence as I got into the car because 'once she was here, she had to stay on school grounds for legal reasons'. Children need to be supported when they say school is not for them, not beaten down until they give up
We have persisted with mainstream school through 2years of on and off school can't and are ready to give up. I feel frustrated that we are letting the system off the hook by leaving, but there are mental health implications of continually trying to fit into a school system that doesn't welcome and nurture neurodiverse kids.
School refusal is by far, the hardest thing I have ever dealt with. My daughter is a square peg trying to fit in a round hole. Very hard to know how best to help her
We tried Distance Education but the need for self direction meant it was not a great fit. Now in an alternative mainstream school and that works for us
This year my daughter's school refusal and general anxiety has been worse than ever before. I have seriously contemplated home schooling for the sake of my daughter's mental health.
I struggle to afford the fuel to get my kids to and from school so often they miss out just because I can't send them

My child is unable to attend school due to chronic illness and neurodivergence. My child has tried and tried and tried, but the school system is not friendly to my child's individual support needs. Not because the schools or individual teachers didn't try, they did, our teachers were beautiful and amazing people who did their very best to support us in the system within which they function. Unfortunately the school system itself is based on neuro normative standards, it is so under the pump and the incredibly hard working teachers are extremely time poor. Even with significant disability resulting in the inability for my child to attend school regularly for several years now, we were never offered the opportunity to access classroom support staff (I imagine due to funding constraints) to allow my child access to the school system in a more equitable way. It is not individual teachers fault, because in the school system and in the broader community there is very little understanding (beyond outdated, clichéd tropes) about the diverse individual needs of neurodivergent individuals or what rare chronic illness looks like. The lack of education for education providers means that children like mine fall through all the cracks in the school system, and after so many years of trying to be at school, they can no longer access school (often due to autistic masking and subsequent burnout) in a way that provides helpful, systemic accommodations, equity or inclusion. The school system as a machine is just not set up to provide ongoing education to children like mine, who are incredibly intelligent, capable and exceptional human beings. Children like mine need the school system to change, to go slower, to focus on the child's individual experience of school and less so on academic advancement, particularly in the primary years, but also in secondary, or children like mine and their families eventually have no choice but to home educate. Thank you.