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EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Members present:

Hon. MC Bailey MP—Chair
Mr JP Lister MP
Mr N Dametto MP
Mr JP Kelly MP
Mr BA Mickelberg MP
Mr BL O'Rourke MP

Staff present:

Ms M Telford—Committee Secretary
Dr K Kowol—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2024

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 28 March 2024

Brisbane

THURSDAY, 28 MARCH 2024

The committee met at 9.00 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I am Mark Bailey, the member for Miller and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Turrbal people, and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lands, winds and waters we all now share. Welcome to everybody and thank you for supporting the committee's work. With me here today are James Lister, member for Southern Downs and deputy chair; Joe Kelly, member for Greenslopes; Brent Mickelberg, member for Buderim; Barry O'Rourke, member for Rockhampton; and Nick Dametto, who has just made it off a plane, member for Hinchinbrook.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. The committee received a large number of submissions regarding this bill. As a result, the committee decided to hold this additional hearing outside of the school holidays to provide an opportunity for submitters to attend and speak about the bill. However, it was not possible to provide an opportunity to all submitters given the numbers who wished to appear as witnesses at the hearing. As a result, the committee has chosen witnesses whose submissions reflect a broad range of perspectives on the bill.

Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I do remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages.

COONEY, Mrs Michelle, Private capacity (via videoconference)

CHAIR: I now welcome Mrs Michelle Cooney. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Mrs Cooney: Good morning. We started home educating just over five years ago after we tried my eldest daughter in kindergarten and it did not go well. We started off using a homeschool provider that followed the Australian Curriculum. This was a good place for us to start but, as we progressed, it was no longer a good fit for our family. Even from the beginning we supplemented it with overseas programs also written specifically for home educators, and this increased every year. At the end of last year it got to the point where we just could not do both anymore. These other materials were a better fit for my children. They better addressed their weaknesses and taught our children in a deeper, more consistent and logical way and overall were able to meet their needs and interests in a way the other program could not. We are no longer simply covering a diverse range of subjects for the purposes of ticking that box and we are now doing many subjects together. Every day this term my children have thanked me for changing. We do not want to go back to being limited to what we teach, the order we teach, the topics or the depth we teach and I do not want to have to spend extensive time trying to map what we do to the Australian Curriculum. It will waste my time and take me away from my children.

Even when I was a teacher it was the heads of department who interacted directly with the curriculum and I never had to demonstrate how my students had progressed over the year, something on which I now have to report to HEU. There is not only one way to achieve a high-quality education. Every child is unique, and this is probably why 80 per cent are currently not using the Australian Curriculum. Why is standardised better than tailor-made? We are already regulated by HEU to ensure our programs deliver high-quality education. As long as we are preparing our children to be responsible citizens, it does not matter how we get there.

I disagree with the arguments that we should all be forced to align because there has been an influx in the number of home educators and for the slight possibility that some children go back to school because it will supposedly ease their transfer. I have three big questions: first, why should any parent have to justify to the government that their educational choice is the best for their child's wellbeing; second, how does aligning with the Australian Curriculum actually ensure wellbeing; and, third, if my children are well cared for and well taught, what happens if we choose to not follow the Australian Curriculum? We are not government funded, and I do not wish to be; we just want the freedom to teach and raise our children in the ways we think best. Thanks for this opportunity to speak.

Mr LISTER: Mrs Cooney, thank you very much for coming in and for your submission. Your submission echoes what a large number of people have said in their submissions. Does this boil down to flexibility in that a national curriculum is a one size fits all for a classroom environment and not appropriate for the way that education can be delivered in the home?

Mrs Cooney: Yes, I do think flexibility is a big issue. In reality we probably will cover many of the things that are covered by the Australian Curriculum. If we follow the Australian Curriculum we have to do things in a set order and my son has already covered everything for the first three grades in science—he has probably done up to grade 5—so I just want the flexibility to be able to teach him what he is interested in. In terms of these other programs that we started using, even my sister who does not like science loves it, so it has been a real blessing to our family.

Mr KELLY: Thank you, Mrs Cooney, for your submission. It was quite an interesting read. If your son has jumped, as you said, and covered all of those additional units, are you able to document that and prove that, because if you have done that I would have thought that there should be nothing preventing you from offering additional education if they have completed the baseline already?

Mrs Cooney: I guess it was hard because his elder sister is two years older, so straight from the word go when she started lessons he was right there beside her and he was contributing orally, so, yes, I could document orally what he said and every term I have written reports. It just would be very tedious to go back and to report that because it would be years that I would be looking at, and in maths as well. He is way ahead in maths as well.

Mr DAMETTO: Mrs Cooney, well done for submitting today to the committee. We appreciate your time. My question is with regard to the extra layers of reporting that will be necessary if this legislation passes. Can you please give us a bit of an idea of how that is going to affect your ability to do the reporting and also your ability to put the time in to teaching your children?

Mrs Cooney: I probably already spend too much time on my reports. I probably spend about two weeks doing it, plus at the end of every term I reflect and record—mostly for my sake—to see where the kids are. I am already doing it for two weeks and most of the time that is through the night, so we have two weeks where I am staying up all through the night so that I can be with my children during the day. If I was to do this—I did not even have to look at the curriculum when I was a teacher—I am going to have to go back and learn what the Australian Curriculum is to be able to do that. I would rather look at resources to see how I can better teach them rather than concentrating on learning the curriculum. I do not know how long it would take, but I feel like I give a lot of time already to do the reporting. Does that answer your question?

Mr DAMETTO: Yes, it does. Thank you very much.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for your submission. With regard to that, you talk about add-on units to the Australian Curriculum. Can you just expand a little bit about what that is?

Mrs Cooney: I can. Pretty much from the word go we did an American language arts course as well as the Australian language arts course because that did spelling and it did grammar. We also did different types of writing, so they actually complemented each other well. The science is different. We also do different history, so we do world history as well as Australian history. We were doing the science because the science that we were doing was a little bit ad hoc and this other science that we were using was more systemic and more thorough. We were building on concepts from pretty much a year and a half ago, so we are working on that and keeping on going. Obviously there is maths. I have never actually followed the Australian Curriculum for maths. I have always done Singapore because, as a maths teacher, I just loved it; it was excellent. We do maths problem-solving, so we do Maths-Whizz and we do Mental Maths. We also do character training. Probably English and maths are the strongest things and then history, so they are the ones we do the most. We have split English now into four parts, so we do writing, we do spelling, we do grammar and handwriting. That has just really helped my children this year to progress.

Mr MICKELBERG: Mrs Cooney, in your submission you talk about—and you mentioned it in your opening comments—the fact that you educate both of your children together and they are able to learn off each other, but presumably if you are required to deliver a set curriculum in set time frames that will inhibit your ability to spend time teaching both of them because the content will be different for different age groups. Can you expand on how you think that will impact your ability to deliver the education you do now?

Mrs Cooney: You would know that during COVID many parents brought their kids home and had to teach. The ones who had more than one or two children at home were just not coping. At the moment we do a fair bit of English together. Because they are at different levels, they just have different levels of writing that they have to write. We can do history together. We can do science together. We do character training. We do a lot of stories together based around our curriculum. All of that goes together. If I was to do them separately, it would just nearly be impossible to do that. I do not know how parents did it, and that is probably why many parents did not cope during the lockdown times.

Mr MICKELBERG: Presumably that difficulty managing two children or more than two children is elevated with younger children. I have four kids under nine—it is like herding cats—so I imagine if you have older children they are more independent and able to learn potentially more independently of the teacher themselves, but for young kids that requires a lot more one-on-one attention; is that a fair comment?

Mrs Cooney: Yes, that is a very fair comment. Even now my eldest daughter goes off and does her music by herself. She does a lot of reading herself. There are parts of English that she can go and do herself but my 3½-year-old is already interested in learning, so I am teaching her and my son and in those early years my son only just started really taking off in reading. He is grade 3. We have done four different programs to help him to get to learn to read and it just takes huge amounts of time in those early years to get them to be reading well, so, yes, I could not do that on top of other young children as well. It is just very hard.

CHAIR: You were critical of the Australian Curriculum and you have outlined a range of the other resources you use. Would you regard what you teach outside of the Australian Curriculum as being consistent in terms of topic and choice but simply a different kind of resource? As a home educator, do you think that you should have the choice to go for things that are well outside the Australian Curriculum that are quite different in terms of the choice of topic? Do you understand what I am saying? You are using a broad array of resources, which I get, but do you choose them in a way that is relatively consistent with the curriculum in a broad sense, or are they quite different in nature in terms of the topic?

Mrs Cooney: I do not think that I have actually said that I am critical of the Australian Curriculum; I just said I like the flexibility that I do not have to follow it. Does that make sense?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mrs Cooney: I have not actually looked at the Australian Curriculum; I just used the provider that followed it. What I really like about the way we are doing it is that within the other resources they might actually overlap; I do not know. I just want to be able to teach them in a way that is consistent, particularly the Singapore maths. I was a maths teacher and the ordering that they teach is just amazing. My daughter who is not a natural at maths is achieving really well, so, yes, there might be overlap. I have not chosen them to be contradictory to the Australian Curriculum but rather because the flow of the topics really fitted my children. Does that answer your question?

CHAIR: It does, yes. Thank you very much, Michelle. That was a terrific, concise and tight introduction and you answered all of our questions really well. We really appreciate you taking the time to present to us and to answer the committee's questions. Thank you.

Mrs Cooney: Thanks.

UHR, Ms Hilary, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Ms Uhr: My name is Hilary Uhr. I am a lawyer and I have three degrees in different areas. I have worked in government, politics, music, and public and private legal practice, most recently for crown law. Education made this possible. My father is former Labor member for Ferny Grove Geoff Wilson. He was minister for education under Premier Bligh. Access to education made this possible for him. I am passionate about education, and education is broader than learning in a school or according to a curriculum. I am home educating my two young children. My son is nearly seven. In the safety and individuality of his home-educating environment, he has learnt to read at an astonishing level for his age, he uses the computer to design amazing things in Minecraft, he jumps around and rests when he needs to, and he engages with the world as his needs and interests allow. I am in tune with his needs and learning, and I adapt quickly and integrate learning into everything we are doing.

The new guiding principle has been explained on the basis of a child's safety objective, and this is fundamentally misguided. The bill draws a connection between home education and the findings of the Child Death Review Board that simply does not exist. That report relates to deaths of children who are connected to the child safety department, not the broad homeschooling population. Homeschooling kids are not the broad homeschooling population. Homeschooling kids are not by default in need of protection from harm. The government has taken the board recommendation and applied it outside of the circumstances to which it relates. The information available raises more questions about failures of child safety than about an issue with home education. Without evidence of a systemic child safety issue with home education, the creation of this principle is unsound.

Children have rights. My six-year-old has a right to education and a right not to be discriminated against on the basis of disability. A defined curriculum will limit his right to education and discriminate against him, too. It will not give him a higher quality education and it will impact the amount of time I have available for him and his sister while I meet new reporting obligations. Twenty years ago it was recommended that Queensland establish a consultative body about home education. If we had one of those, the committee might not be listening to these issues today. This bill in its current form ought not be passed.

CHAIR: Thank you, Hilary. We will go to questions. James?

Mr LISTER: I do not have any questions but thank you for your appearance.

Mr KELLY: Thank you for your submission and for your presentation today. In regard to your son who has a disability, I am not a teacher but I imagine that the curriculum is capable of being adjusted for students with disabilities because we have many in the state and non-state schooling system. Is that something that you anticipate would be possible under this bill?

Ms Uhr: I do not, because my child's disabilities do not relate to his cognitive abilities. His medical information is private and I will not share it here, but his needs do not fit in a busy school environment and they do not fit to a prescribed order of doing things. He is an autodidactic learner. He investigates and learns very naturally when he feels free to do it. As I say, he has learned to read. I have only had to answer his questions.

He becomes very stressed and very unwell—and he has been very unwell in the past, seriously unwell—as a result of the stress of just being part of those regular systems and structures. Even using that kind of format at home—first of all, it is not necessary for him to learn; it is just not necessary because he gets a high-quality education without that—in doing so would create stress that he does not need. I am not a teacher and I have not delved into the national curriculum because it has not been necessary while I have been educating him. He is only still young.

It is not a question of adjustment within curriculum; it is about environment and how we learn. Having to report like that will take a lot of time for me. I already prepare very detailed reports. I have had to obviously submit a plan to be approved to be a home educator, and that is very detailed. It covers the different areas that he is learning, and I have to show his progress and he is progressing. Someone else who will give evidence will be able to tell you more about the details of the curriculum because they have been through it. For me, I do not believe an adjusted national curriculum will serve his best interests.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you for coming in and giving your evidence today on your personal experience. My question is in regard to the legislative changes in the bill which will essentially put more of a burden of reporting back on the parents and home educators. Can you see any benefit from that extra reporting to make it safer for children who are being homeschooled, citing an earlier comment in regard to a potential failure in child safety connected to deaths?

Ms Uhr: It is not clear to me from the bill or the supporting materials that have been presented so far whether or not there is intended to be a link between the use of the national curriculum and an assessment of child safety and best interests of the child. That is not clear to me. If there is a link, if use of the curriculum is part of an assessment that the child is home educating in their best interests with regard to their safety and wellbeing, then, no, I do not see how in any way the extra reporting would identify a child at risk or a child who is needing protection. If there is a suggestion that there is harm done by not following the national curriculum, I just do not think that is going to stand up. I just do not think it can be that limited.

If the curriculum and the child safety issue is separate, if the issue of assessing their best interests is about their broad safety, again, there is no evidence that has been presented of an actual systemic issue between child safety and home education because the report is about what has happened tragically to children who were known to the child safety department. It is not children who were not known; they knew that this child was home educating. That child was registered. This is just from the report, and that is all the information I have.

What that report tells us is that that child's concern and notification to the child safety department had not yet progressed to intervention and assessment stage. That is where something actually happens. Under the Child Safety Practice Manual, that is the order that it happens so intervention had not happened. I do not know that child's circumstances and it is tragic that that happened. However, with what happened there, extra reporting for that child—either about what curriculum they were following or even an assessment that comes out of education legislation about their safety—would not have identified that. It would not have identified anything in addition to what was already known. All of those departments were already aware of this child's situation.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you, Hilary.

CHAIR: Barry, do you have a question?

Mr O'ROURKE: No. Thank you for your submission. It is very detailed and good to read.

Mr MICKELBERG: You have spoken in detail in your submission with respect to the Human Rights Act and your view that in particular section 13 is infringed as a consequence of the discrimination that a child may experience by not being able to be home educated. Can you elaborate on that? Also, I am keen to understand the consequence as you see it for young children. In your submission you talk about the fact that one of your children is unable to get education to meet his needs at a state school or a special school. I guess the question is: if this legislation were to pass, what would that mean for your son or those in a similar circumstance?

Ms Uhr: Your question is about how would I educate him then, or what impact would it have on his human rights?

Mr MICKELBERG: I am keen to understand both. On the one hand, you have said he is not going to be able to have his educational needs met at a state school or a special school so you are currently meeting them through home education. If this legislation passed, you are going to be constrained in the manner in which you go about that, so what will that mean for you, your family and him? Then what is the consequence? The legislative change and how it infringes the Human Rights Act in your view is one part of it, but what does that mean from an individual perspective and from a family perspective?

Ms Uhr: What it means is that I still do everything in my power to educate him in a way that allows him to thrive as a person. It means that I will comply with my obligations, whether that is extra reporting or whatever, and do whatever else is needed in addition to help him emotionally and psychologically with whatever stresses that may create. I hope that would not be very negative, but my fear is that it would be because we have been down a very bad road with him before.

It would mean that I would still be educating him the way I think is right while meeting my obligations and doing so in a circumstance where I believe that his human rights had been interfered with. If that is the law then that is what I will do, but it would absolutely increase my stress and impact his mental health, my mental health and the whole family's situation, whereas when we are able to do things following what their needs are we are getting where we need to go. We have got the same objective of having beautiful, well-rounded, happy, well-educated people. If we walk a different path to get there, I think that is okay. That will still be where I am walking, even if I think that it does not line up with the Human Rights Act.

CHAIR: Thanks for your very comprehensive submission and presentation and for answering our questions today.

Ms Uhr: Thanks so much for having me.

POWELL, Mr Mark, Director of Education Services, Montessori Australia

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Mr Powell: I spent 30 years as a classroom teacher, head of school, teacher trainer and curriculum designer. I am also an international consultant and speaker. On behalf of Montessori Australia, we would like to say that we support the rights of children to high-quality education both at home and at schools. However, by restricting the choice of curriculum available to home educators and by removing the 60-day provisional, we believe this legislation goes in the wrong direction. We believe that the learning and behavioural issues that are leading to increasing numbers of Australian families choosing home education or alternative schools reflects the fact that our education institutions have not kept pace with changes in society over the last many decades. Forcing these families to use the very curriculum that they are deciding to move away from will surely drive them underground, which is not in the interests of children. Best practice, as in the ACT and Victoria, would be to provide a panel of experts to advise homeschooling parents. Montessori Australia would be very happy to be involved in an opportunity for such a panel.

Homeschoolers in Australia and in other countries have used the Montessori method for many decades because it provides many benefits, including the fact that this constructivist method is based around authentic and real-world experiences that are taught individually and in small groups in a way that integrates subject matter. It shows increased engagement in learning due to its emphasis on student agency and interest. It has got a multi-age structure which is more relevant for homeschoolers. Research over many decades shows that it is best practice for neurodiverse students because it is designed around how children actually learn. Montessori phonetic-based literacy instruction aligns well with both the science of reading research and whole language best practice. It emphasises formative over summative assessment, which makes it more relevant for homeschoolers who use assessment to guide learning rather than to report. Parents report high levels of satisfaction with Montessori, not only because of its higher cognitive outcomes but also because of its positive social and emotional outcomes.

Finally, the Australian Montessori national curriculum is freely available to everyone on the Montessori Australia website and it has been mapped to V9 outcomes and cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities. It is currently stalled for approval with ACARA and it would be in the interests of this committee to see that this approval moves forward quickly.

Mr KELLY: I think you might have answered my question but I might get further explanation. My question is not about the people who choose to homeschool who use Montessori. My question is about the actual Montessori schools. You obviously use some sort of a curriculum. How does that line up with the Australian national curriculum?

Mr Powell: We have been involved in mapping the Montessori national curriculum to the Australian Curriculum. It maps very closely to the Australian Curriculum, sometimes not in the same order. Montessori tend to start from the whole picture rather than small details, for example, but it aligns very consistently. In fact, ACARA asked us to cut back on the number of ways that it overlaps with the national curriculum because there were so many connections there.

Mr KELLY: If you can do this in a school environment, why is that not possible in a home environment? If you can make Montessori curriculum compliant with the Australian national curriculum in a formal school environment why can you not achieve that in a home environment?

Mr Powell: It can be. Our concern is with choice and inclusion. The Montessori curriculum is very wide and very deep. It is important for student engagement and agency to align what is being taught with student interest to keep their engagement high.

Mr KELLY: In my mind—and, as I say, I am not an educator; I have a health background—it seems to me that the standardised national curriculum is about measuring student progress. I do not know a huge amount about Montessori, but I know you are not necessarily into testing and those sorts of more formal approaches that might be used in other school settings. How do you measure the progress of students in a Montessori environment?

Mr Powell: It is measured in the same way that it is done in the national curriculum. The emphasis in Montessori is on formative assessment rather than summative but there are summative assessments in Montessori schools. We tend to rely more on authentic assessments because there is more of a relationship between Montessori teachers who have their students for three years and the students in those classrooms.

Mr LISTER: Thank you for your appearance and for your submission. Is it the case that homeschooled students who progress rapidly with the Montessori method at home would be retarded if a strict adherence to the national curriculum, as proposed here, were to be imposed on parents delivering the homeschooling?

Mr Powell: I believe so. The research that has been done internationally tends to show that Montessori graduates in general tend to be a year or two ahead of their peers in mainstream education because of the importance of agency and interest in the Montessori curriculum. It tends to unleash this greater motivation in students as opposed to students who are being told what they are going to do.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for coming and presenting to the committee today. My quick question is in regard to the sharp rise in the number of people choosing to homeschool in Queensland. Obviously you would have an opportunity to speak to a lot of homeschool educators. There has been a 197 per cent increase over the last few years—since COVID I would imagine. Is there any indication why parents are moving away from the traditional public and private school system?

Mr Powell: My research into that shows a dissatisfaction with the national curriculum in terms of its inclusiveness, also behavioural problems in mainstream schools and a general lack of choice.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for your submission. In your submission you include concerns that parents are not trained to deliver the Australian Curriculum. Can you explain to the committee why this particularly worries you, given that most parents, or home educators, have not been trained in any other curricula?

Mr Powell: I think the Montessori curriculum is more amenable to being used at home. It has a long history of being used in very small-scale environments as well as large institutions. I think it is more amenable to homeschooling and it has had a long history of being used by homeschoolers over many decades.

CHAIR: Thanks very much for your presentation, submission and answering our questions today.

Mr Powell: You are welcome. Thanks for having me.

CHRISTOFF, Mrs Angie, Private capacity

CHAIR: I now welcome to the table our next witness. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which the committee members will have some questions for you.

Mrs Christoff: Thank you for inviting me. I am a homeschooling mum of five children and I was home educated myself from grade 6. I am concerned that changes have been proposed to limit our flexible learning and increase the subjects that we report on. To raise healthy individuals who can achieve post-school education it is not a necessity to have one nationally approved curriculum. My children and I are living proof of that. A flexible curriculum was, and is, an asset to us. We are thriving. We are not limited in pursuing the careers that we want. Our own family's past experience with one set curriculum is evidence that for some children this can actually be the cause for a decline emotionally, mentally and academically.

If these changes go through, what will happen with children like my son who went from a high achiever with an individualised curriculum to a disillusioned bundle of anxiety and self-loathing with the national curriculum? Do we parents keep educating these children in the way that they thrive and reach their full potential and just not register them in order to achieve that? Do my son and others like him drop out at grade 10 because they are not coping with the curriculum? Do we push them through and have them graduate year 12 a burnt out shadow of their former selves?

When children who thrive with diverse learning no longer have that opportunity, this is not actually progress. We need children like my son to prosper. We need the gifts they have. We need the outside-of-the-box thinking. We need them in our leadership roles. We need them fulfilling their full potential in our community.

I am grateful that you are looking into our education system to improve it. My concern with some of the things proposed in this bill is that in reality they will decrease the richness, diversity and depth of learning that our home education children currently have access to. Please consider the consequences these changes will have on our children before making any adjustments to our current freedoms.

Mr LISTER: Thanks, Mrs Christoff, for coming in and for your very comprehensive submission. I have one quick question for you. Are bureaucrats and politicians better positioned than you to decide what is best for your children?

Mrs Christoff: I think parents are usually more invested and better at deciding that. The bureaucrats' job is just to make sure that the kids are safe and that they have access to a really good education. For myself personally, yes, I think I am better.

Mr LISTER: I thought you might say that.

Mr KELLY: You mentioned that you were homeschooled yourself from about grade 5 or 6?

Mrs Christoff: It was from grade 6 fully. I actually had a couple of different years in the younger grades as well but I was mostly in the school system in the younger grades.

Mr KELLY: I am going to ask you about your personal experience and you do not have to share if you choose not to. I am interested in when you finished your schooling, did you move into further studies or the workforce or take some other path? Did you feel that you were advantaged or disadvantaged as opposed to other people who might have gone down a more formal education path?

Mrs Christoff: I think the advantage for me personally was that we actually had choice. We knew ourselves. I was the only child in my family who chose the TAFE pathway. My siblings all went straight to university.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for coming along today as well as for giving us some valuable insights. I want to learn a little bit more about your children's experience. Could you please give us a bit more of an insight into what would happen if you were forced to put them back into mainstream schooling?

Mrs Christoff: We have used distance education and even that was tricky. A lot of my children have autism. The sensory side alone in mainstream school would make it impossible for them to actually learn. It is just too noisy.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for your submission. Your work educating five children is very impressive. Can you tell us a little bit about how that flexibility in homeschooling has supported your family unit, more of the personal side?

Mrs Christoff: I think that we can pivot with real-life situations very quickly. If we have a child that is struggling with a particular concept, we can just carve out three days to work on it or we can do a more hands-on, real-life scenario to help them to understand that. That is the biggest thing. For me with five children in high school and lower grades, you are pivoting constantly. We can do that without even having to write on a piece of paper to say what we have done. Then we can come back to our planned goals as quickly as possible or we can change the plan.

Mr MICKELBERG: I suspect your answer is going to overlap with the one you just gave. You mentioned your experience with distance education. Can you outline some of the constraints or challenges that you experienced using distance education as opposed to homeschooling?

Mrs Christoff: I mentioned in my submission with regard to my son that that learning style just did not work for him at all. He just is more hands-on. He needs to be able to focus really hard and go really deep on something. He might jump a couple of grades while he is doing that in different subjects. He might be higher in one subject and lower in another subject. We could not do that with distance education. The other thing that I found really hard was that most of my day was filling out reports and working out assessments. When I chose to go down that path I thought it would give me more flexibility, but it actually had the opposite effect. We were not able to help them with the concepts they struggled with because we were just looking at assessments and what was next. My kids simply do not learn that way, so they were actually falling behind instead of being ahead.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your presentation. You are obviously very experienced in the area, so we appreciate you sharing the experience with us today.

GRAY, Mrs Judy, Private capacity

CHAIR: I welcome to the table our next witness. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Mrs Gray: I am a mum to a 14-year-old boy who has ASD with speech and language impairment and ADHD. Along with my other three children, he has attended a local primary school, and under an IEP he did prep to year 6. The school is amazing. The staff and the leadership team there—I cannot rate them highly enough; they really worked with him. He had a teacher in grade 4 who was also amazing—his obsession is Batman—sourcing maths Batman books from America just to help him learn. After primary school he moved to an alternative high school. This unfortunately did not work out.

I have been homeschooling him under a goal-based plan since April last year. I have two daughters who graduated from a nearby state high school, one in 2020 and one last year, and I have another son in grade 10 at our local Catholic school. I have always been a parent that fits the school to the child rather than the child to the school.

My homeschooled son is currently enrolled in grade 9 because of his age but has just started grade 3 work. This is the reason that I have no option but to homeschool. All the private schools have said to me that that is too much of a gap for them to teach. All the special schools have said no because his IQ is above the magic 70. There are very long waiting lists at Montessori high school up near Aussie World and a very long waitlist for the ASD school. There is no option for me.

Since homeschooling my son, he has gone from self-harming, being completely withdrawn, not looking or talking to anybody to now he is happy, chatty and very confident in his abilities. Because of this dramatic change I know this is the right way of learning for him. I have read all the changes and I would like there to be a distinction between special education and regular homeschooling because I feel it is far more important for him to learn transferable life skills than it is for him to learn gravity or rock formations or anything like that. Don't get me wrong: I do completely agree with having a structure in place to monitor and ensure homeschooling leads to productive members of society and to make sure that all kids have the same opportunities in job, trade and uni as school-based children do, but I would like there to be a distinction for special education so they do not need to follow the national curriculum.

Mr KELLY: Thank you, Mrs Gray. Your thoughts around fitting the child to the school are interesting. That is often the advice I give to parents who ring me inquiring about various schools in our community, which is to go and have a look and do not be afraid to change if it is not working for your child. In relation to your son, you clearly have some measure that he is not learning at the level you would expect for his age. Is there nothing in the Australian Curriculum to allow for students who are in their situation because that must not be an uncommon situation?

Mrs Gray: Obviously I could teach him grade 3 work and I could grade him against the grade 3 things, but as he is 14 I feel that it will take him a lot longer to be job ready. For him to be able to get a job when he turns 18, it is going to take him a lot longer. Next year the plan is for him to do a Certificate II in Animal Care. That is not going to take the 12 months that TAFE recommends; it is going to take him potentially the three or four years left that he has of high school. So moving the age to the year after they turn 18 would be amazing because it would give me an extra year to get him job ready, but if I am concentrating on science, arts, geography and history then it is taking away the time that he is going to need to do the study to make him job ready.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for presenting to the committee today. How much time are you currently taking per week to do record keeping of what your son is learning and where he is at right now with his learning ability?

Mrs Gray: I tend to be a bit OCD with organisation, so I take photos of everything we do. I have a Word document that I write up and save to my OneDrive on my phone. I also print it out because I like to have a folder to go through to see what he has done over the year. It probably takes me about an hour or so to report on what we have done that day, on top of the workbooks that he has worked through. I have only done the end-of-year report once and that took me probably two or three weeks because I was going over it to see what else I needed to add. It was the first time. I did not know what I needed to do. There is help out there for you and there is people who can help and read through them, but just to get the initial information down was still nerve-racking to begin with.

Mr DAMETTO: If this extra layer of reporting is brought in with this legislative change, do you see it having any positive or negative effect on your son's learning as a homeschool student?

Mrs Gray: It takes time away from learning, because I am spending five hours with him teaching him one concept. As we are driving down the road I am asking him, 'Can you tell me the time? What did that sign say?'—that sort of thing. So we are teaching all the time, as most homeschool parents do. If I am reporting on that and spending additional time each day, it means that, instead of me doing five hours a day of teaching, I might be doing four hours because I am spending an extra hour trying to report on whatever he happens to be learning. Then at the end of year, instead of me giving him a break once his other brother finishes school, he would continue on because I need to. I would not have that clear distinction for him to be able to understand it is now school holidays, he can finish his homeschooling as well as his brother—that is where we draw the line in our family because we find that works for us.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for your submission and for being here today. You touched on goal-based plans for your son's education. Can you tell us a little bit about how that works?

Mrs Gray: Obviously maths and English is covered because that is standard. Then with a goal-based plan for special needs children you can pick three goals. So for him I have picked social and communication skills, I have picked life skills and I have picked the world around us. The social communication skills are: make sure when you are having a conversation you wait for the other person to finish and then you can have your say; make sure what you say is relatable to what they have said—that sort of thing—but also making sure he actually goes and talks to other people. Understanding language encompasses that.

The world around us: I have taught him the states and territories of Australia. I have taught him that there is federal government, there is state government, there is council and basic things for each thing, but I will not go any further into that. It also encompasses animals, climate change, basically anything that is in the world around us that can relate to him.

Life skills: obviously walking up to somebody, deciding what you want to eat and then going and ordering it. It would be making yourself a sandwich—it is really the basic life skills that you need to be a functioning member of society.

Mr KELLY: In relation to the reporting, is there some sort of a structured format or a process for reporting and, if that system does exist, could be streamlined, improved upon and digitised?

Mrs Gray: There is a form that comes out and it does give you instructions on how to do that. It comes out around a month to two months before your report is due. You can submit it up to a month before it is due as well. I had five or six questions that I had to answer on basically how the year had gone. Did something work; did something not work; why—that sort of thing. Then you report on maths, English and one other subject. You say what they were like; what they have done three months later; how they have progressed; and if they are working with their peer levels. It is basically me writing a few paragraphs and adding pictures of before and after work so it is easily seen. It would be easier if we could maybe have options to have a more streamlined report but without having standardised testing there is only a perception of how the child has improved, rather than how you would potentially see the actual results.

CHAIR: Thank you for your presentation and for answering our questions.

DAMANT, Mrs Amy, Private capacity (videoconference)

CHAIR: Our next presenter will be via videoconference. Welcome, Amy. I invite you to make an opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Mrs Damant: Good morning. I am Amy Damant. I am an experienced school teacher and the founder of a home school support centre called Celebrate Learning. I was teaching in a school but had students who were not coping with the academic demands, were refusing to do the curriculum and struggling with the lack of flexibility in the education system in general. So I quit a great teaching job to help students in the transition between school and homeschooling. I am now working both with homeschooling families and back in a local public school.

At Celebrate Learning I demystified the home education registration and reporting process, helping families to create plans using the HEU goal-based template. Goals for these new home schoolers included mental health and wellbeing, social skill development and work readiness. There was also usually a specific interest area such as art, sports or technology. Literacy and numeracy fit into these goals, rather than the other way around. I aided families who were transitioning back into schools, if desired, after a rest period and youth quickly caught up academically once they were refreshed. I am concerned that the complexity of the Australian Curriculum—in my opinion requiring a university degree to understand—will hinder young people's success in their chosen areas of interest and their wellbeing.

While other states do require parents to meet curriculum or subject areas, Victoria allows an exemption from up to seven subject areas if a child wants to focus on a separate interest. In the end, this just increases the paperwork. With increased paperwork, parents may be more reluctant to register for home education. Perhaps this is intentional as the increase in homeschoolers since COVID seems to be a negative motivational factor behind the proposed change at this time.

I asked my homeschool community what they thought and one mother summed it up beautifully: 'I really feel like this is a step back for those of us whose kiddos do not fit in the usual school system or with the curriculum. Putting more rules in is not going to help our kiddoes to stay engaged. We need more options which cater fully to where the student is at the moment in time without having to jump through silly hoops and tick off boxes.' Quoting the explanatory notes, I urge the committee to 'reduce unnecessary regulatory burden' and uphold the freedom of homeschooling for personalised learning.

Mr KELLY: Thank you, Mrs Damant, for your submission and appearance here today. Could you give the committee some indication or an overview of why you think the Australian Curriculum is not suited for a student with ADHD or ASD?

Mrs Damant: I have a few examples of the curriculum here. For English: using subjective and objective language, topic-specific vocabulary and literary devices. Year 5 maths: adding and subtracting fractions. Year 3 science: observing the properties of soils, rocks and minerals—that potentially has the opportunity to be hands on, but most parents would be like, 'That is very academic language. I will have to find some kind of textbook that will teach that exact principle,' as opposed to being able to find museums or excursions or homeschool groups which really have hands-on learning that suits ADHD more.

Mr LISTER: Thanks, Mrs Damant, for coming. Clause 68 of the bill requires that homeschooling includes the study of English and mathematics, so I take that to mean right to year 12. Is it the case that that unnecessarily compartmentalises the approach to studying those subjects and ignores the possibility that they have been covered in depth as part of other explorations, or that students may have surpassed the year 12 level by the time they are in year 9 and therefore it is unnecessarily restrictive?

Mrs Damant: I am currently working with a grade 6 girl in a gifted and talented program who is doing grade 10 maths, so there are definitely students who are being accelerated. In the situations that I have seen, we have a lot of work readiness. I mostly work with teenagers in the homeschooling program, so they are looking to their future. They are looking at: will they do more study or will they go to get a job? They are writing resumes, they are doing budgets and that is their English and maths. So they are not sitting down doing grammar, learning how to use parentheses correctly, or how to use semicolons and those kinds of things. They are focusing on, 'This is the English and maths that I need right now in my life' and anything external to that would, I think, hold them back from the actual goal that they have.

Mr O'ROURKE: I only have a comment. Thank you for your submission.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for submitting to the committee and for presenting today. My question is in relation to a comment that was made by a departmental witness the other day that around 20 per cent of homeschoolers were happy to use the Australian Curriculum. In your experience, how many people who you are interacting with right now are using the Australian Curriculum when home educating?

Mrs Damant: None of them. I did watch that presentation. I imagine that those 20 per cent are using a bought curriculum, so that is parents who do not feel they can personally cater for that, so they purchase a curriculum which says, 'These are the textbooks that you are doing.'

Mr MICKELBERG: You have spoken in your submission and opening statement of the regulatory burden that is placed on homeschooling parents. Obviously, as I understand it, part of your role is to try to reduce that burden so they are able to teach. Can you explain how much time in a given day or week a parent currently needs to deal with meeting the regulatory requirements for homeschooling? I am keen to get your thoughts on how that will increase or decrease as a consequence of the provisions in the bill.

Mrs Damant: Some families I know are very—I want to say 'well organised'. They are very structured. They have folders: 'This is what we are doing each week, day by day,' and there will probably always be those kinds of people, but a lot of the people I work with are very stressed: 'I do not know if I can keep doing this. I am not sure if I am doing it right.' There is a lot of uncertainty around meeting the standards that they do not understand.

Mr MICKELBERG: In terms of time that they would have to spend, how much time do you save them now in your role?

Mrs Damant: With the planning, I have created an automated system where they can just go and do check boxes and say, 'Okay, for English my child is going to be writing resumes. They are going to be reading books from the library.' I take a large amount of the planning time away. Then through the year I offer some coaching. I encourage them not to spend very much time on that: 'At the beginning, plan it, take photos, write notes as you go and remember to collect those specific pieces of evidence for the final report.'

In terms of how that would increase if they were doing the Australian Curriculum, there is a lot in the Australian Curriculum. It is not just that they touch on eight subjects. Saying they are doing the Australian Curriculum means they are doing rocks and life cycles and all the things in history and all the things in science. Then the plan would be very long and they would have to follow it very strictly to cover it all within one year. I think the amount of time that they have to put into that would jump exponentially.

CHAIR: Thank you for sharing your experience, submission and answering our questions today. We very much appreciate it.

FRANCIS, Ms Catherine, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Ms Francis: Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. In 2022 I started a free community meet-up group in my local park where home-educating families could gather each week with the purpose of supporting one another and flourishing. Over the past two years we have engaged in all kinds of enriching activities together in our multi-age park setting. Each of these families comes with a story as to why they home educate. It is this diverse, amazing, ever-growing community of people fondly known as Little Village who I have come to represent today.

Within our community I have met several families who were thrown suddenly into the world of homeschooling. I was one of those families too. Some of the reasons have been due to anxiety, sensory overload, school bullying and sheer overwhelm from not being ready for school. If provisional registration were removed, these families would be scrambling to write and submit a plan in time, placing more stress upon the individuals. I would like to share, with her permission, an excerpt from Lindsay's story. She writes—

A lot of us are not homeschoolers from the start. A lot of us have turned to homeschooling as a last resort because our children were suffering at mainstream school and we felt there was no other option. For those homeschool parents, when we begin to homeschool we are overwhelmed and anxious. We aren't sleeping. Our children are not sleeping.

Lindsay shares how her year 3 child had been to three different schools and how exhausted they were feeling. She says—

We pulled her out of school and registered provisionally with HEU. There is no way I would have been having the mental space to be able to prepare an ACARA plan at the same time as wrapping my head around homeschooling and supporting my child.

That child is now in grade 6 and she is thriving. Having to tick the boxes of a national curriculum is also not going to work for this child. Other families choose to homeschool from the outset. Some of the phrases mentioned by our community were 'protecting childhood', 'building family relationships', 'following and pursuing a life of love of learning', 'admitting the individual needs and interests of each child'. The current homeschool model where families are free to source resources, activities and curriculum that is appropriate for their children's needs without the constraints of the one-size-supposedly-fits-all national curriculum allows time for communities such as Little Village with its chess players, writers, bushwalkers, book lovers, international gymnasts, entrepreneurs, animal lovers, musicians, budding scientists, museum enthusiasts and more, to nurture the individual and contribute to their social and emotional wellbeing.

My vast experience as a teacher in the public and private sector for more than 20 years confirms my belief that every Queensland family should have the freedom to educate in the way that is right for their child's individual needs and their emotional wellbeing. I implore you to seek further consultation with home educators before making any amendments to the education act.

Mr MICKELBERG: You mentioned that many parents turn to homeschooling as a last resort after they have tried everything else. Flipping the conversation around a little bit, I am keen to understand how the state government can better enable and support homeschooling parents as opposed to some of the restrictions that this bill contains. How can the state government better facilitate homeschooling and support parents who get to that point where it is a last resort?

Ms Francis: I think that is a really good question. I think for a lot of these children the environment in the schools themselves just does not suit them. It is a case of the bells overwhelm them and the lights can overwhelm them. I have had situations where I have spoken to parents in my community and with bullying they went to the teachers and they went to the principal and nothing was done. They let that go on and on and nothing was done, so in the end they withdraw them. It is within the school and then I guess within the home situation too, providing that flexibility for parents to be able to educate the way that they want to.

Mr KELLY: We spoke via video link yesterday.

Ms Francis: Yes, we did.

Mr KELLY: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. The issue that we talked about yesterday seemed to be that one of the main concerns of this bill was around the national curriculum restricting and limiting the capacity of homeschooling families to deliver various parts of education that they feel is necessary. It seems to me that when you look at kids in a mainstream school, whether they are in primary school or high school, there does seem to be quite a bit of variability around the way schools approach teaching and learning and the subjects that they offer. Why is it difficult to make the way that you teach fit into the Australian national curriculum?

Ms Francis: I think it comes down to the individual child. I think some children possibly could do it, but when given the opportunity to outsource other curriculum, be it Singapore maths, be it other programs that are out there, it is offering the children a broader opportunity to learn rather than just the Australian Curriculum. For myself, I started homeschooling my son and due to my personal family situation I have to do distance education. I can see it from both sides. With my community I hear all that the children are doing and the fact that they can pursue their interests. We have some international gymnasts in our group. There is just this wide variety of children who are able to stay curious and loving learning because they are not restricted to the national curriculum.

Mr KELLY: You mentioned that you worked as a teacher in the past, and you have a group that you coordinate. We talked about that yesterday. You were with another woman who has a different group that she coordinates. Do you find that you have to provide assistance and guidance to other families around teaching, given your professional background?

Ms Francis: No, not really. I actually find it is such a beautiful space because we all come from different walks of life, different backgrounds, different ages. We have some people in our community—particularly this year I have had so many people joining I have had to put a stop to it until term 2—who have been homeschooling for a long time so they might speak to that parent. Then we have someone else who is maybe more of an eclectic homeschooler so they get talking. People find their people to talk to. I would say parents know what their children need. They do not need a teacher to tell them what to do.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for submitting to the committee and also for presenting today. My question is almost a bit like Mr Mickelberg's question but in reverse. You said earlier that not all home educators start off that way. What could the mainstream schooling system do better to ensure more parents are not stuck with the one and only last choice of homeschooling?

Ms Francis: I think it is the size of the classrooms. I think it is too many children. When I worked in the UK, for example, we still had the same number of children but we had a teaching assistant full time in every class right up to year 6. That makes a huge difference alone: just having that extra teacher in the room. I think a lot of it is the class size. It is the dynamics. So many children are coming from stressed environments already, so there are lots of things that need to change. I think at the core a lot of children want to be free to discover their learning. They do not want to be told do this, this and this. Perhaps as we are moving forward in society we need to think how we can really do education differently.

Mr DAMETTO: How we can do it better, yes.

Mr O'ROURKE: I have more of a comment. Thank you for your submission where you discuss the benefits of community homeschooling and that interaction. I have spoken to people who have been homeschooled. One of the concerns raised by one of them was the fact that her and her six siblings were homeschooled up to year 8 and found that going into the high school was so important for her for that interaction. I think what you are doing alleviates some of those concerns for some of those younger people as they are entering back into the public school system. Thank you for that work you have been doing in that space.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Francis, for your presentation and your submission and answering our questions so well.

BARTLE, Ms Amanda, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes after which committee members will then have some questions for you. Thank you very much for appearing today.

Ms Bartle: Thank you for having me. I am Amanda Bartle. I am a registered teacher in Queensland and I do have a fairly good working understanding of the curriculum that we are talking about today. I am also a homeschool mum of three—a couple of graduates and one still at home. I am well known in the homeschool community in Queensland and I understand the needs of my community.

My submission was pretty lengthy and in multiples—my apologies—but I highlighted how this bill does not align us to the other states and how the national curriculum is not a suitable definition of high-quality learning. I highlighted how this proposal is not actually backed by research and the inadequate consultation with the community. I highlighted safety concerns that are not actually solved by this bill and the increased administration that this causes to the Home Education Unit and to parents. I also highlighted how removing the provisional registration is both a safety and a financial concern.

I am going to focus my talk on the curriculum paperwork side of that. Firstly, I want you to know that this bill does not align Queensland with the other states in Australia. At a legislation level, only the Northern Territory actually mentions ACARA or the national curriculum. We are aligning with the Northern Territory. Victoria and New South Wales both actually mention subjects. That is a more workable plan for us as homeschoolers.

At a policy level—so we have gone down; we are at policy level—the Northern Territory and South Australia actually mention the national curriculum or ACARA. Are we aligning to the Northern Territory's legislation here or South Australia's policies? Again, all the states usually mention subjects. Queensland is actually the only state that legislates for academic progress. We are the only state in Australia that actually does require us to report on children's academic progress. Reporting on children's academic progress actually has no value to their education—none. It is box ticking. So why is Queensland looking to increase the amount of reporting that we do on our children's academic progress?

The Home Education Unit is struggling. Forty-six per cent of us are actually still waiting for the email to let us know that submissions are open. We are waiting two to four months to get our reports approved and they cannot manage a certificate when we first enrol now apparently. If reporting has no educational value then I just cannot understand why we are looking to increase these things when the Home Education Unit is clearly struggling to keep up. We need legislation that puts the kids' needs before the government's needs for easy box ticking. This legislation is discriminatory. It lacks consultation with those that it affects most and it failed to put the wellbeing of our children and their education first.

Mr LISTER: Thank you very much for coming in and for your submission. In your submission you express concerns about the consultation process and talked about it being skewed towards those with a financial vested interest. Can you talk a bit about that, please?

Ms Bartle: I can. That was specifically in the round 2 consultation process. Patricia and I, who is also here, had been part of all of the meetings and things like that up to that point. When we hit round 2, they decided they were only going to include associations. You heard at the briefing there were six associations. There are not six associations in Queensland that represent homeschoolers, so what they did include was a couple of businesses that are already aligned to ACARA, and those businesses were part of the consultation process. They have a financially vested interest. In terms of that consultation and seeing that first round of drafts, only one registered homeschooling parent actually got to comment on that draft who did not have a vested interest.

Mr O'ROURKE: In your submission you note that when it comes to reporting on subject progress to the HEU many parents outsource this and pay others to assist them.

Ms Bartle: Yes.

Mr O'ROURKE: Can you tell the committee a little bit more about that?

Ms Bartle: Yes. Obviously we are a fairly diverse community in homeschooling. There is a lot of neurodiversity. There are also people who are busy. They are homeschooling and working, trying to run farms and things like that. People like that can outsource some of the paperwork aspect. It is kind of like a resume writing service. They might call and talk to some of the volunteers or paid services and they will explain what they have been doing for the year. Those people will put together a report or resume on what they have done for the year. They can outsource some of that, but

generally speaking there is a financial cost to that. There are volunteers in Queensland who spend an amazingly large amount of time prereading people's reports and plans before they are submitted to the Home Education Unit to alleviate anxiety, to make sure they have everything they need and that it gets passed, because we have no support for that. There is no body between us and the Home Education Unit to help provide that level of support.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for presenting to us as well as putting your very detailed submission through to the committee. I just wanted to make comment. Home educators across Queensland seem to be very well connected. To those in the gallery today and also online I would say that we appreciate your interest in this bill and the way you have moved and got together on this. Ms Bartle, obviously you have read the proposed legislation in depth. My question for you is: are there any amendments that should be made to this bill? If so, from your perspective what would they be?

Ms Bartle: Starting from the guiding principles down, I would recommend we get rid of them completely. I think child safety legislation belongs in Child Safety. Homeschoolers do not deserve to put another umbrella on us with Child Safety when we are already covered by other legislation. I also believe that by qualifying what a high-quality education is and limiting it to the Australian national curriculum we are actually short-changing our children. I would have been struggling to educate my children through to the end of their high school years with this legislation. My children started university when they were 13. According to the way this legislation is worded, they would not have been able to access that. That would not have been considered part of their education, and I would have had to find a way to back map what they are learning at university through the national curriculum. I do not have time for that.

Mr DAMETTO: Could you find any correlation between qualifying what is a high-quality education—which is what the proposed legislation does—and making sure child safety is adhered to across Queensland?

Ms Bartle: I cannot see how it is even relevant. They are two completely separate things. If we are identifying what a high-quality education is, that is something for the education department. Child safety is not part of the education department. Every child has the right to an education. It is the job of the Home Education Unit to look at our plans and reports and say, 'This child is getting a really good education.' If they cannot do that and they need the national curriculum in order to tick their boxes, then perhaps they need to hire some homeschooling people, because we can see it really clearly.

Mr KELLY: I did read in your submission that your children started university at a young age. How did the university assess the suitability of your children to attend if you had not followed a formal curriculum, which they would normally use as an assessment tool?

Ms Bartle: That is a great question. In Australia you can enrol in a single unit with Open Universities Australia. I knew that my children were ready and that they were not going to struggle with that process, so I actually enrolled them in a single unit through Open Universities Australia in their speciality area. For one of my children that was English and for the other one it was science. They completed that unit and got excellent grades. Then at that point they had proven they were capable of studying at a university level, and after that they were able to enrol in the course they wanted.

Mr KELLY: There was still a process where they had been assessed as having reached a certain point for them to continue though, was there not?

Ms Bartle: Anyone can go to university in Australia tomorrow. You do not need an assessment for that. In order to enrol in a full degree you need to have something behind you, whether it is a TAFE course or you have done a couple of single units, but you can do a single unit automatically. Any schoolchild can enrol in a single unit at university.

Mr KELLY: By doing that single unit they fulfilled the requirements of that particular course and they have demonstrated that they are at that level.

Ms Bartle: Absolutely.

Mr KELLY: They have gone through some sort of standardised process that has measured their capacity to participate.

Ms Bartle: By completing that course they have proven they are at a university level of study.

Mr MICKELBERG: You have spoken in your presentation and in your submission about the burden of reporting and the fact that many parents outsource that. Is there any financial support—I think I know the answer—provided to homeschooling families to assist with that process and/or any other part of the homeschooling process, be that curriculum or activities? Is there anything like that at all?

Ms Bartle: There is zero support, financial or otherwise. We have absolutely no support from anyone. We are on our own and it is run by volunteers. If this goes through, our volunteers are all going to collapse.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your presentation and your submission and for answering our questions here today.

PROOF

MILLER, Dr Kylie, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have some questions for you. Thank you for coming in this morning.

Dr Miller: Thank you for the opportunity to speak and express my concerns that the proposed legislation will greatly limit much needed flexibility to home educated children. Upon reading the bill I was disappointed to find the proposed changes for home education varied significantly from the initial and limited consultation with the home education community. This initial consultation indicated that the quality of education and reports being provided by home educating families was high—so much so that the Home Education Unit was considering reviewing only 15 per cent of reports received.

I have been home educating my children for over seven years now. We are part of the 80 per cent referred to in the last committee meeting that does not follow the Australian Curriculum. While large amounts of my children's learning could be linked back to the Australian Curriculum, being forced to follow it and report progress on all areas of the curriculum would purely be an administrative burden on me, and in no way would it add to the quality of their education. It would also likely push otherwise compliant families underground.

We currently have best practice in place for home educated children in Queensland, with each child having an approved and individualised learning plan in place. The flexibility of home education is its strength. By contrast, the Australian Curriculum was not written for the home environment or to be implemented by parents. As home educators, we have a whole world of high-quality curriculums available to us. Many are designed specifically for the home environment or particular learning difficulties. Why limit us?

My recommendations to the committee are: firstly, that no changes are made to home education legislation until proper consultation with the home education community is conducted. This would be best achieved with a consultative body, as was advised in the 2003 review into home education. Secondly, any proposed legislation must ensure that flexible options remain for all home education students.

Mr LISTER: Thank you, Dr Miller. Can I ask you for your view on the motivation behind the elements of this bill concerning home education? Obviously you have some strong insights about what is valuable to you and how you think it would not work. Can you share with us what you think the system is trying to achieve here?

Dr Miller: The first consultation paper that we received just indicated they were looking at streamlining things; however, it seems more now there is a lack trust in home education families. I am not sure where that lack of trust has come from, considering that the Home Education Unit has constantly said that our reporting is of high quality. Adding in the idea of it needing to be in the best interests of a child—I do not understand why that just applies to home education. Should all forms of education not be in the best interests of a child? It seems like there is a lack of trust there in what we are doing.

Mr KELLY: Dr Miller, what type of doctor are you?

Dr Miller: I have a PhD in Chemistry.

Mr KELLY: I ask that because I wanted to understand what your qualifications were. Are you aware of any research that may have been done on students who homeschool and the outcomes they might achieve as compared to children who are in other educational settings?

Dr Miller: I have read a great deal of research. I enjoy reading research. What I have read is all quite positive. I am probably not the best person to ask about that. I believe that Rebecca English is speaking next week. She is a researcher at QUT. She would definitely be the best person to ask for specific examples of research in that area.

Mr DAMETTO: Dr Miller, thank you very much for coming along today and presenting and putting your submission forward. There has been a sharp increase in people choosing to homeschool over the last three years. My opinion is that the bill is in response to that, not so much the child safety side of things. I am asking for your opinion: why do you believe the bill is being pushed at this point in time, and do you think it has anything to do with the increased number of people who are choosing to homeschool?

Dr Miller: Yes, definitely the numbers have shot up. I am sure the government has concerns about that. I would say that is a very serious thing the government does need to consider. Why are people moving to homeschooling? Why is the school system not working for so many people? Current numbers are showing that about two-thirds of home educated families have disability. We have just

had the royal commission into disability, which showed that school is not necessarily an inclusive place for children with disabilities. That is a real failing of the education system. There was also the Senate review into school refusal, which also showed there really needs to be flexible options in education. Given there are many flexible options available within mainstream education, I think that is forcing many families to turn to home education.

Mr DAMETTO: Do you believe that adding more rigidity around the homeschooling framework would have a negative effect, especially since that framework may be part of the reason why so many parents are choosing to homeschool?

Dr Miller: Absolutely. There are already a large number of families that go underground. If you are placing a greater burden on us, it is just going to make more families not comply who would normally otherwise comply. Registration is of no benefit to us. It takes our time. It does not add to our children's education. If you make it more of a burden, people are not going to want to follow it.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for being here, Dr Miller, and for your submission. I just wonder if you could expand a little more on your experience with working with the Home Education Unit?

Dr Miller: Where I have been reporting for quite a number of years now. In the past they have taken up to three months to get back to me on my reports, which is a significant amount of time. They have not had any issues with my reports. Were they to find something, it is a long period of time to go before contacting that family and raising issues with the quality of education that is being provided. They are clearly struggling with the numbers. My question to you is: if this legislation goes through, is there going to be more paperwork for the Home Education Unit? Are you going to be funding more staff for the Home Education Unit?

Mr MICKELBERG: Dr Miller, you spoke in your submission about the benefits of home education, particularly for neurodivergent children. I think you gave an example in your submission of your son and holding back reading for a little while until he was more interested in it and now he loves reading. Can you expand a little on how the national curriculum, in your experience, would constrain—if it would; I guess that is a judgement call—or affect the ability to deliver homeschooling to neurodivergent children?

Dr Miller: Neurodivergent children tend to have a spiky profile so that in some areas they may be quite advanced and in other areas they might need more help. Being able to have flexible curriculum really allows us to use the areas that are their strengths to build the areas where they need more help. The example you gave with my son with reading, if I was following the Australian Curriculum I would have had to give him reading instruction from when he start first started schooling. He had no interest, yet he had so many other things he was interested in, and I had no concerns that he was learning. He was not interested in reading, but his knowledge of all other areas was more than satisfactory. Giving him that space and time meant that when he was ready he picked it up quickly and he has caught up with no problems. He has never felt behind or that he had any difficulties. I think if I had forced him from a younger age, he would have felt that perhaps there was a problem with him when there was no problem with him.

Mr MICKELBERG: Dr Miller, you and your husband both have doctorates, so I presume you are the beneficiaries of mainstream schooling at some point and/or mainstream education at the very least. Obviously feel free not to answer this if it is too personal, but can you talk to your motivation to homeschool your children in the first place? What was the reason you made that choice?

Dr Miller: My son, who is my oldest child, went to a community kindergarten and that was a great year for him. It was very child-led and had a very flexible approach to what they were doing there. If school had been more like that, I probably would have sent him to school. Because he was on the younger end of the age spectrum, we questioned whether to send him to school or hold him back another year. When we started looking into all the different schools, we were shocked at how rigid the learning was, and we did not want that for him. I distinctly remember walking into one classroom and each kid had done this thing, 'X is for X-ray', and they had done the same artwork of a handprint and they had used cotton buds to make the bones to look like an X-ray. Every kid in the classroom had done the exact same artwork. I distinctly remember looking at that and thinking, 'My kid does not want to do what everyone else is doing. What would they make every kid do exactly the same thing?' Why can't they let them have that expression?

We decided, given that he was young, that we would take that year to try home education. We did look into some alternative schools first, but there was none that suited us or were close enough to where we lived. We took that year to try home education and we loved the flexibility that we had. We loved that our kids could learn through their interests. They had so much more time to play as well, because learning can be done much faster than in a school setting. We also met with a lot of

people within the home education community and realised that it is a great life, and the kids learn well and they love learning. My kids at the moment have had so many well-meaning adults come up to them and say, 'Are you looking forward to the school holidays?' Honestly, they look at them like they are a bit crazy because they do not look forward to the school holidays; they love what they are doing. They do not see a difference. That is why we chose it.

CHAIR: How long have you homeschooled for, Dr Miller?

Dr Miller: This is our seventh year.

CHAIR: I am interested in your feedback. Certainly there has been a huge surge in people homeschooling around the same time as the pandemic. What would be your view on why that would be the case? There could be a lot of reasons, there could be a small number of reasons—I do not know—they may be correlated, they may not be correlated. I am curious to know, from your perspective, as you started homeschooling before all that, if you have any feedback on that for the committee?

Dr Miller: I have a number of friends who started homeschooling following the pandemic. Some of the things I have heard is that for some families, they saw that their kids were behind and they were not happy about that, so they wanted to homeschool to catch their kids up. For other families, I think it was something that they had considered, but often parents can feel a bit hesitant at first, wondering whether they can do it, and that gave them the time to see what it was like. They also saw how happy their kids were out of the school environment. I think that just gave them the confidence to give it a go.

CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Miller, for your presentation, submission and answering our questions today.

MATHESON, Mrs Jami-Lyn, Private capacity

CHAIR: Mrs Matheson, I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes after which the committee members will have some questions for you. I am sure you have seen the format. Welcome.

Mrs Matheson: Thank you. Choosing to educate my children was not an easy decision, however, it was one made with their best interests in mind. This is why when I read social media posts and then part of the proposal, I became concerned around the wording used and the absence of their meaning, as well as a lack of consultation with those who will be affected the most.

As you know, I have two children. My daughter, at 19, is the youngest educator in charge at the day care centre she works at, a privilege not given to many, especially people her age. Rightly so, this role is bestowed upon only the most responsible of people and, as I speak, she is educating 14 children, aged three to four. She has achieved this success in under a year in the industry and was the only student to finish her TAFE course in six months. She credits this to the lessons and life skills she learned while she was homeschooled. Furthermore, when I asked her how homeschooling affected her, she said, 'I wouldn't be as successful as I am if I wasn't homeschooled.'

My son is 10 years old. He has multiple medical issues and his education is the opposite of my daughter's. It is slow, repetitive and, to the comparative eye, he is behind his peers. His success in his education depends on his ability to stay in his lane, a lane that has been designed for him based on his unique needs.

Neither of my children have been educated using the Australian Curriculum as a focal point. They have, however, been provided with a wide variety of educational resources, plenty of opportunities to grow their minds and learn in a variety of places. I have strived to provide both my children with a well-rounded education that includes subjects not included in the Australian Curriculum. I am not sure if you are aware of my current responsibilities as a registered home educator, but every year I am required to provide proof of the quality education my son receives. I must provide evidence. I must also provide a plan for what I will teach. These documents form part of the approval process, and failure to provide evidence of a high-quality education could mean registration is denied. In my 13 years, this has never happened to me. Both my children are shining examples of why it is important to say no to the proposed changes as they stand. Amendments must be made in collaboration with us. We can work together to ensure all Queensland children are receiving a high-quality education. Thank you.

Mr KELLY: Mrs Matheson, thank you for your submission and presentation. You mentioned the roles and responsibilities you already have as a home educator, and clearly there are some requirements on you around some sort of reporting and justification of what you do. How is what is being proposed any different to what you are already being asked to do?

Mrs Matheson: Because I do not follow the national curriculum strictly, it will just add to me having to relate what we are doing to the curriculum as well as then having to find lessons and resources that will relate to the curriculum and then having to report on them. Right now we follow the goal-based plan that you have heard about before. The proposed amendments will then increase my time spent to report in a way that I am not currently reporting, and nor have I been reporting in that way.

Mr LISTER: Mrs Matheson, in your submission you talk about there being issues in the mainstream school system which drive parents to homeschooling. Obviously there are some who choose it with complete freedom and others who feel that homeschooling is the only way that they can get the best education for their child. Would it be fair to say that the government would be better investing the effort put into this bill into addressing the reasons some parents feel that the mainstream schools are not suitable for them, rather than regulating you guys?

Mrs Matheson: Yes, that is a fair thing to say.

Mr O'ROURKE: Touching on the goal-based plan. Could you expand what that means for your son?

Mrs Matheson: In regards to my son, we obviously cover English and maths and I collaborate with him and know where he is at and create three goals that we report on. Those goals are often life-based, important things that he is going to need to succeed in his future rather than focusing on just the national curriculum. That is how he has learned the best.

Mr DAMETTO: Mrs Matheson my question is in relation to a concern I have that extra reporting may result in an unintended consequence of some children falling off the registration. Do you see that as an adverse effect perhaps in contradiction of the intention of the bill to improve child safety in Queensland?

Mrs Matheson: I cannot speak to how other parents are going to react to those negative consequences. It would be something that could be a consequence, and I would urge the committee to find that out and understand that more deeply in collaboration with us.

CHAIR: Mrs Matheson, you mentioned that you teach some things outside of the Australian Curriculum. In your case, what kind of areas would that include?

Mrs Matheson: For my son, we do a lot of focusing on life skills and how to ensure, as he gets older, he is a functioning member of society. Things like character building are huge in our household. It is a mandatory subject, if you will. We focus a lot of time—almost most of our time—on building that character to ensure, as he ages, he is able to be a functioning, successful member of society like my daughter.

CHAIR: Like essentially practical ethics?

Mrs Matheson: Ethics, absolutely.

CHAIR: That is valuable.

Mr MICKELBERG: Mrs Matheson, in your submission you talk about a research report prepared by the HEU in 2022 and you talk about the number of homeschooled children who have an underlying health condition. I am keen to understand, outside of that regular reporting around your delivery of education, what other instances have the HEU sought information from the homeschooling community, in your experience, from you directly, around the efficacy or the make-up or the issues concerning homeschooling?

Mrs Matheson: The HEU have not come to me about any of those things that you have mentioned, and I unaware that they have to the general community as well.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Matheson, for your submission, your presentation today and for answering our questions. Thank you very much for making the time.

FURNER, Ms Samantha, Private capacity (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Good morning, Ms Furner. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes after which committee members will have questions for you. Thank you for your time.

Ms Furner: Good morning. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate from Far North Queensland in this hearing. As I am sure you would have read my submission, I am not going to go over the same things again. Instead, I want to give you a more personal insight as to why I strongly believe that some of these proposed changes to home education outlined in this bill will have a negative impact on our children's educational outcomes and future.

As a parent of two neurodiverse, academically gifted children, I have seen firsthand that a learning style or environment that works for one child certainly does not work for the other. I have a 14-year-old who, after many years of struggling, has now become one of the success stories of a mainstream-schooled student with a disability. After being moved up a grade in prep to grade 1 simply because the teacher 'couldn't do anything with him' over that year, he now attends a mainstream high school in grade 9 with minimal serious issues. I would like to quickly add that I do support the proposed changes in the bill that surround students with disabilities and suspension as they will greatly benefit students like him.

However, I also have a 12-year-old who has ADHD and suffered severe anxiety and 'school can't'. Before moving to the Home Education Unit, he had attended many different schools of different sizes, including distance education. Unfortunately, it took me almost eight years to discover and come to the realisation that this mainstream environment and style of learning did not suit him. Over this time, it resulted in him being labelled as naughty, disruptive and noncompliant within the schools, and therefore this further affected his mental health and wellbeing.

Our move to HEU was not driven simply by choice but by necessity. Although he is technically in grade 7, due to the flexibility of the home education plan I provide he is able to work well above his grade in most subjects, including year 9 to 12 maths and technology. This not only keeps him engaged and wanting to learn but allows him to further his knowledge and skills, in particular his interest in STEM. Without this flexibility that supports his way of learning, I feel that his anxiety, mental health and wellbeing will deteriorate to unhealthy levels again.

This brings me to some of my biggest concerns with this bill—the lack of clarification surrounding the terms used in section 7. Therefore, I would like to seek further clarification on who would define and ultimately decide what is or is not in the best interests of the child, a suitable environment, a high-quality education and consistent with the national curriculum. As I am almost at the end of my two minutes, I will leave you with this. I always have been and will continue to be a strong voice and advocator for my children and their rights, especially when it comes to their education and best interests. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr LISTER: Who in your opinion is the best person to judge what is in the best interests of a child?

Ms Furner: The parents ultimately. We know our kids the best.

Mr LISTER: Thanks for that.

Mr KELLY: You mentioned that your son has gone to a mainstream high school. Are there any challenges or issues around that if the child had not been educated using the national curriculum?

Ms Furner: My first son has gone to the high school. He was educated using the national curriculum but experienced many difficulties and issues before he eventually found his way in the system. My youngest son is now doing Home Education Unit with me at home.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you for submitting and also presenting today to the committee. I am a fellow North Queenslander so, hi; how are you going? My question is probably moving away a bit but I wanted to get a better overview of the homeschooling network and the people out there. What opportunities does your son get to interact with other homeschooled students or other students? We have heard different models talk about park catch-ups and I have even heard of homeschool swimming carnivals and things like that. Does your son participate in any of those activities?

Ms Furner: We have just joined all of our local groups. I also run a local community catch-up group for Cassowary Coast homeschoolers and distance education. We have also recently joined some other groups up in the Cairns wider region due to the minimal amount of people in this area. The ones I have been to in the Cairns region hold twice-a-week meetings at various locations. We

organise meet-ups and educational opportunities for things like Science Week and Questacon. We have catch-ups at the local water park. There are lots of social opportunities available, including educational opportunities as well.

Mr DAMETTO: It is great to see that there are plenty of opportunities for those children to be working on their social skills.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for your submission and for appearing. In your submission you mention blended lessons. Could you expand on what that is? Do you actually create those yourself or do you buy them?

Ms Furner: I create the blended lessons. My idea of blended lessons is where we use lessons surrounding, say, a cooking lesson and that also will then incorporate and draw attention to the maths components, the English components and the scientific components of chemical reactions when baking. I basically teach life skills to draw attention to the learning outcomes as well from those situations.

Mr MICKELBERG: My question is in relation to the support you get from the HEU in delivering home education. Some of the other submissions talk about other states where there is a visit from the department to be able to visualise and see how home education is being delivered in the home setting. I am keen to understand what your current interaction is with the HEU in terms of facilitating the delivery of learning, as opposed to monitoring the regulation around learning.

Ms Furner: I have only just recently become a home-educating parent after my son started trial distance education this year and the workload just became too much. I saw his anxiety and mental health declining rapidly. As far as the interaction with HEU, so far it has been that I submitted my plan and got approval for my plan about a month later. I will be following my plan and then I am due to report in December this year on how I have followed through and provided the learning intentions that I set out in my plan.

Mr MICKELBERG: In developing that plan, if you have questions or issues with respect to how it is implemented, have you had the experience or are you able to go to the HEU and ask for feedback and assistance in developing the plan?

Ms Furner: I am sure you would be able to. I did not have the need to as I know what my son is lacking in and what he excels in and the best way he learns. Therefore, I have solely based it around what is in his best interests and is going to give him the best educational outcome.

CHAIR: Thank you for your submission and presentation today and for answering our questions.

HAFEMEISTER, Mrs Aneeta, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes, after which committee members will have a few questions for you.

Mrs Hafemeister: Good morning. My family are beef cattle producers from Central Queensland. I have driven seven hours to be here today because nothing is more important to me than the future of my children. I would like it clarified exactly what is meant by the statement 'in the best interests of the child' that is written in the proposed legislation. I find this very concerning. I am also very disappointed with the lack of consultation with the homeschooling community throughout this process.

My family has followed a child-led learning and educational philosophy and this has been an exceptional pathway for my children. My three oldest children have now finished homeschooling and are leading productive, joyful lives with purpose and enthusiasm. My oldest children wanted me to say how glad they are that they were homeschooled. It allowed them to follow their interests and foster their independence.

My youngest child is 12 and she has followed the same philosophy with her education. The proposed legislation changes would inhibit the current education pathway that she follows. A personalised, self-driven education should be the gold standard that is aimed for, but this is not catered to by the national curriculum. If this legislation is truly about students, then homeschoolers must be allowed to continue with their current path of tailored education instead of being compelled to use a one-size-fits-all curriculum that is only intended to be administered in a classroom. The current requirements, registration and reporting system with the HEU are working well. There is no need to change it. This proposed legislation shows a complete lack of understanding and consultation with the community they affect.

CHAIR: Thank you for your presentation. James, do you have a question?

Mr LISTER: I do not have any questions. You were very clear.

Mr KELLY: In your submission you reference a swathe of educational resources available to parents today. I guess from my perspective as a health professional whenever people google something they get a swathe of information. How do parents determine what the right path to take is and the right materials to use and the validity of those materials?

Mrs Hafemeister: You use discernment. How do you choose what school is right for your children? How do you choose what to feed your children? It comes back to parents are responsible and you have to trust them to do that research. There are a lot of homeschool websites now that have lists of great curriculums—like Khan Academy for maths which is all free. You can look up the whole MIT college curriculum for free. You could do those courses for free. You will not get a certificate but you will get them for free. There are so many educational resources from longstanding educational institutions that offer so many free courses. It is truly mind-boggling; it really is. Yes, some things may be better than others but you have to trust parents at the end of the day to know what the right thing is for their child.

Mr KELLY: How would you determine the validity of the materials that you are looking at?

Mrs Hafemeister: Could you define 'validity'? What would you consider a valid information source?

Mr KELLY: Evidence-based materials that I guess have some evidence of being able to achieve the educational outcomes that they are purporting to be able to achieve.

Mrs Hafemeister: So where is the evidence that the national curriculum is better than what homeschoolers are currently doing? Is it evidence based?

Mr KELLY: Yes.

Mrs Hafemeister: Really?

Mr KELLY: Again, I will come back to my question to you. How do you determine the validity of those curriculums that you are putting in front of your child and choosing to use?

Mrs Hafemeister: Well, if it works for your child, if they are engaging with the content, if they are learning the concept. It depends what they are trying to look into. If you are looking into something like chemistry, for example, chemistry is chemistry, maths is maths. Two plus two equals four for those sorts of things. I think it is also wise that children look at a lot of different research and are exposed to different ideas and are taught discernment and how to question things. That is probably the most important thing you are going to do with children—not how to think but how to find things

and how to critically express yourself and engage in ideas and debate. It is not just, 'Here is the answer. Tick a box.' We really need some intellectual scrutiny of what we are teaching our children. I think it needs to be rigorous. I really do.

Mr KELLY: Thank you.

Mr DAMETTO: How important is it for parents and home educators to have the choice around what they teach their children, rather than having the Australian Curriculum thrust upon them as the rigour of how they should be educating their children?

Mrs Hafemeister: We know our children. I have four children. At the start of this process, I was hesitant about homeschooling. We made the choice with the right intentions, but I have learnt so much over the past 14 years of doing this. My four children were raised in the same house with the same circumstances. They all learn totally differently. Their educational pathways truly have been so personalised. You can recommend all sorts of different resources to them—there is this course going on; are you interested in this; what do you want to do—and they follow their path.

I can tell you that children who have never been to school are just magnificent. If you see little children who are curious and take life by the hand and want to know everything, they are children who have never been to school. You get to school and you think you have to poke them with a stick and force them over this hoop and this hoop and this hoop. If you leave children to themselves, they are amazing and they learn things. You just cannot imagine what they learn and the speed they learn it at when they are engaged and active and are in ownership of their learning. I think people think you cannot trust kids. If you trust kids, they do challenging things and they do hard things, because that is what gives life purpose, that is what gives life meaning and that is what gives life joy.

When I started this journey, I always wondered whether I would ever regret giving my children these thousands of hours to themselves to really know themselves, to have self-respect, to have confidence, to truly follow their dreams. I can tell you, looking back at 14 years of this, this is the best decision my family has ever made. I am just very disappointed that this option honestly is not open to all children. Here today I know we are asking, 'But what if these homeschool kids went to school? What would be their outcomes?' What would be the outcomes if every child at school right now who is struggling was given this incredible option? I think it has to remain an option and I am very passionate about this.

Mr DAMETTO: I appreciate your passion. I can feel it. I am sure my fellow committee members do as well.

CHAIR: I am sure everyone in the room does. Thank you for your submission and your commitment. We very much appreciate it. I now welcome the next witness.

RAGARUMA, Mrs Jennifer, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes after which committee members will have some questions for you. Thanks for making the time to join us this morning.

Mrs Ragaruma: Thank you for having me. Might I just say that you are all looking very well today and very smart in your suits. I have been thinking a lot lately about suits. You know when you get a suit that fits you just right it makes you feel so good; it brings out the best in you. You just perform better. The learning programs that we as home educators must currently prepare for our children and submit to the Home Education Unit for approval each year are like suits that are being measured up and custom-made for each one of our children. These learning programs fit our children just right and they bring out the best in our children, just like a tailor-made suit.

Imagine, if you will, trying on a suit that is five sizes too large or maybe it is five sizes too small. You are assured, 'It's okay. You can tailor it. You can alter it to fit,' but we all know that this altered suit will just feel a bit uncomfortable. It will look a bit long in the legs and tight around the neck. It is actually going to take so much more work to make those significant alterations to a wrongly sized suit than it would to make a custom-made one from scratch. Such a mediocre suit is not going to bring out the best in anyone.

The Australian Curriculum is a suit that fits some—for sure—but it does not fit everyone. Public and private schools, as valuable and necessary as they are in the overall provision of education, are fundamentally different from homeschools. Methods and curricula that work in the school sector are not necessarily going to work in the homeschool setting. Why force Queensland students into a single-size suit when our home educated kids have custom fitted suits ready for the wearing.

In conclusion, I would ask you: is there evidence that the changes in this bill are being made in response to actual issues in the home education sector? Are homeschooled kids who end up transitioning to school actually finding it any harder than another child transferring from one school to another? I do not believe that there is any evidence of this. Is there data to show that the current definition of a high-quality education is not adequate? Are homeschool educated students failing on various measures when compared to their age counterparts in school? Are they not transitioning into tertiary education or employment when they finish school? I do not believe there is any evidence of this—quite the contrary, in fact. So I ask: why is it necessary to alter that which already appears to be fit for purpose? This bill seems to be a solution in want of a problem. My response would be: if it ain't broke, why fix it?

CHAIR: We do not allow clapping. Thank you for your analogy. I can certainly say—and the member for Southern Downs might agree with me—that at six foot four I have never had a suit that fitted me the first time, but we persist until we get what we need. Thank you for your submission. We will go to questions.

Mr KELLY: You mentioned that there is evidence to the contrary around the success of students transitioning to universities or the like or into the workforce. Do you have documentary evidence or are there studies or research papers that you can point to?

Mrs Ragaruma: I think that is one of the issues: there is not a lot of documentary evidence. As we have seen, the documentary evidence could be things such as the conversations we are having today with the parents of the children. They are not saying, 'We are finishing high school and they are just sitting around for the next 20 years twiddling their thumbs.' Look around you. The parents here and their kids are productive members of society. That is about all we have at the moment, but it certainly says a lot. There is no evidence to say that they are not succeeding.

Mr LISTER: I really liked your analogy about the suit. That really got my attention. If we continue with that banter, in your view, who is the better tailor for your child: the bureaucrats and politicians or—

Mrs Ragaruma: Me. It is funny because it is not a question we are asking of parents who are deciding which school they send their kids to. They get to make these choices for their children. It is funny, we keep talking about public and private schools as 'mainstream schools'. There are actually three options on the table and it is not like there are two mainstream and one fringe. There are three legal, legitimate options. We are asking these questions. Parents of homeschoolers have to prove that this is in their child's best interests. We do not ask a parent whose child is failing in school, 'Would it actually be in the child's best interest if you were to take them out and homeschool?' We do not ask that. The right that we give to parents who send their kids to public and private schools is that they are able to determine what is in the best interest of their child. I say that it is fair that parents of homeschoolers be afforded that same legitimacy as well.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you for your submission and your analogy. It was very good. You talk about concerns about how home educators will report on children who surpass the expectation of the Australian Curriculum. Can you provide the committee with a little bit more detail about your concerns in that space?

Mrs Ragaruma: Do you mean in terms of reporting on progress?

Mr O'ROURKE: Yes.

Mrs Ragaruma: It is hard to mandate that a student progresses. Again, we do not necessarily do that for a child in school, either. We mandate that and legislate, which is what this is, that a good program must be provided. You can mandate that, but you cannot say to a child, 'You must learn,' and you cannot say to a child how fast or slow they must learn. Everyone is individual.

In terms of the reporting, that is a concern for me as well. I can report to you and say to you, 'This is the program I am developing.' For me, that is not a personal issue. I have not had to homeschool my kids because schools failed them or anything like that. I think they would probably do just fine in school, but they are doing great at home, too. In terms of that idea of reporting on progress, I can report on their progress. However, we do not report on kids' progress in school in the sense that if a child is failing in school no-one is going to say, 'School is no good. I think you need to take your child out and home educate them.' We are just not going to do that and yet home educators have that fear that if someone was to say, 'Okay, my child has not made all that much progress. Things have been going on in their life,' we are fearful that someone will come knocking on our door and say, 'You have to put your kids in school or else.' That is a genuine fear.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for your analogy and also for commenting on how smart we look in our suits. To be fair, you look like quite smart in your cardigan and have demonstrated to all of us that you are quite smart as well.

Mrs Ragaruma: Thank you.

Mr DAMETTO: If there was an opportunity to change things in this bill through amendments, what do you think would be the best changes to make to ensure that home educators can continue providing the high level of education they do currently?

Mrs Ragaruma: Removing the guiding principle that it has to be in the best interest will bring it into line with what is already happening in schools. The fact that we have to provide a program, we already have to talk about providing a suitable education setting and suitable program—I think that is fine. The biggest one is removing the fact that best practice is the Australian Curriculum. Honestly, if you were here presenting evidence to us that the Australian Curriculum was gold class, we would not even be here; we would all be volunteering to use it. Like I said, it is suitable for some; it is not suitable for all. I think having that alignment that high-quality education equals the Australian Curriculum—we see through that and that needs to be removed.

Mr DAMETTO: In your experience from talking to other home educators, what loose percentage of people you speak to would indicate they have taken their children from mainstream schooling and put them into homeschooling because of their non-agreement with the current Australian Curriculum?

Mrs Ragaruma: I think lots. It is really interesting. I was talking to a friend the other day who is actually a teacher. I was also a teacher but that was before ACARA was introduced. She was a teacher, she had some time away and then she came back. If you do not mind, I will read part of what she said. This is within the school system, not even coming out of it. She states—

Even teachers are struggling to manage the Australian Curriculum in schools. They are micromanaging teachers out of the system by drowning them in paperwork and redundant, time-consuming processes, forcing them to teach a curriculum that is oftentimes developmentally inappropriate while carrying a screen from class to class and then they wonder why results are down and behaviour is up. I have been horrified returning to the classroom this year at how unbelievable the work intensification has been since I left 12 years ago. No scope for personal pedagogy or following the students' interests unless you are willing to ignore the systems. It is so rigid and systematic and it is dull in the worst possible ways. I'm looking for other work.

It is not just the kids who are leaving; it is the teachers who are just throwing up their hands and saying, 'This isn't the teaching I came to do. This isn't what I love. This is just paperwork.' I could not put a percentage on it and stand by it and say, 'Yes, that's honestly true,' but there are lots.

You asked earlier about the reason for the rise in the number of people registering with HEU. Yes, lots are coming from schools, but lots are coming from distance education, too. Very recently distance education was forced to come into the Australian Curriculum. People had chosen distance education because it gave them flexibility. Now they are having to follow the curriculum and they are saying, 'No, thank you,' and so they are registering for HEU. That might also explain why there is a rise.

CHAIR: I am interested in the submissions from not just yourself but a range of people about the breadth of resources that are used by homeschoolers and comparing it to, say, 20 years ago. These days it is pretty common for many people to have access to technology. We have the web and, of course, the resources that are now available online from anywhere in the world. Do you think that has played a pretty big role in homeschooling becoming more viable for a lot more people?

Mrs Ragaruma: I think so. I think that would make sense. I think there are people who would do it regardless. When I first started I was living overseas in a developing country. I would come back to Australia and have a list of things to Google because I had no internet. Even in that constrained time I was saying, 'No, I'm homeschooling.' Some people will homeschool regardless, but certainly there is a plethora of resources available and a lot of them have been designed for homeschools rather than a curriculum that is designed for a school. It is so much easier to implement something that is purpose built. I think it just shows that we live in a diverse society. We live in a global society. We do not have to rely on things that are right in front of our nose. We can go beyond. We can use things available from other countries as well.

Mr MICKELBERG: It is interesting that many of the submitters to the bill were or are primary school or high school teachers as well homeschooling educators. I am keen to understand how the manner in which you assess progress in a primary school setting differs or compares to a homeschool setting.

Mrs Ragaruma: It is actually really different. Especially as my children have gotten older I have struggled a little bit more—not struggled, but just found it difficult in terms of reporting. A method that I use a lot with my children, especially as they get older, is known as the Socratic method. It has been around for a long time. It is based on dialogue and discussion, questions and answers. I have full confidence that my kids really understand because the answers they are giving are really deep. That is really hard to document because if you say, 'Let's just record it' and you press record, well, dialogue kind of ceases. It is very different. When you have a big class of kids you need them to write things down because you cannot be there with them to talk about everything. I taught primary school. These kids were only just learning to read and write, so it was really hard sometimes to get that evidence. But when you are with your child you do not have to have them do that.

As a teacher, that held me back a little bit when I first started homeschooling because I kind of taught her how I taught in school. I wanted her to write everything down and she was a reluctant writer at first. She is great now. That actually caused a barrier for her and I had to kind of put it away. It would be, 'Why does she have to write that down? She's just explained it to me. I know she knows it.' So this idea of the way we have to report on every subject in every way and have something tangible is a method that does not fit with the homeschool sector necessarily.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your presentation, your submission, answering our questions and giving us your time.

Mr KEENAN, Mr Danny, Principal and QTU Representative, Oakey State High School Leadership Team, (via videoconference)

CHAIR: Danny, before we start we have a declaration of a conflict of interest from the member for Greenslopes.

Mr KELLY: I just have to declare a conflict of interest. Danny and I have been very close personal friends for over 40 years.

CHAIR: Thank you. Do not hold that against us, Danny; it is all good. Joe will not participate as a committee member. You will not ask questions or anything?

Mr KELLY: Yes, it is probably best if I do not participate.

CHAIR: That is fine. Danny, you have two minutes to make a short opening statement after which committee members will have some questions for you. Thank you for making the time to present today.

Mr Keenan: Thank you very much. It is an honour to be involved today. I have worked in North Queensland, Central Queensland, Far North Queensland, now the Darling Downs and the south-west as a teacher, head of department, deputy and principal for 27 years, the last eight of which I have been principal at Oakey State High School with 500 kids and 100 staff. We are about 150 kilometres west of Brisbane. I represent the leadership team.

We stridently oppose appeals for cumulative suspensions of 11 days and more and we strongly oppose mandated support plans for a range of students. Why? At Oakey State High School and every other school across the state I have ever been in—I have spoken to at least 20 other principals and they agree with me—we had our own support plans and they fit the context of the school and the student. If they are mandated in a statewide capacity, say into the one school data system, we will end up bogged down with the dreary work of paperwork support rather than the pragmatic, real aspect of support. Please do not do this. We justify in writing and verbally all of the factors around every suspension we do. One hundred per cent of the time we meet with the parents who want to meet with us. We have return from suspension interviews. The absolute goal of the return from suspension interview is to make sure that we put support plans in place so it does not happen again. Legislating people's ability to appeal will not make life better for students.

As you know, there is a lack of teachers statewide. We cannot attract people to the profession, and these statewide mandates will not make life any easier for us. Poor behaviour is a giant factor in why people are leaving teaching in droves. We need your support. We have the best interests of all of our students, no matter how complicated they are, at heart. This is not the way to move forward for them and their families and guardians.

CHAIR: We have seen a very big increase in suspensions from schools in the last five to 10 years. Would you like to comment on that in terms of what impacts that might be having, and do you have any ideas or feedback about how that could be better managed? When kids are excluded from a school, obviously there are difficulties that go with that in terms of their engagement or disengagement with education.

Mr Keenan: Absolutely. Sadly, as a small school with 500 students, we excluded eight kids last year. It is a heartbreaking experience. It is the last thing we ever want to do. Every single one of those exclusions was not because someone smoked a bong at school or hit me in the head. It was not a one-off situation; it was an accumulation of a lot of things. There are countless meetings. We link these students with a whole range of external providers. If they have a problem with conflict management, we focus on that. If they have a problem with violence, we focus on that. If it is a trauma related issue, we focus on that. We have a great team that does that.

Ultimately, we are under the Equity and Excellence policy. For me, the interpretation of equity and excellence is that every kid deserves to be able to learn and teachers need to be able to teach. Sadly, we had to remove eight students last year so that kids could indeed learn here. Our suspensions this term, long-term and short-term, compared to last year are 50 per cent down at the moment. We have suspended half the kids we did last year. We asked the staff why they thought that was the case. One of the resounding answers was, 'Because eight of those students who didn't take the chances offered to them had to go elsewhere.' When they go elsewhere it is an embarrassment.

The Catholic system has a flexi school here and 99 per cent of their customers come from state schools. We do not offer a flexi school in the tradition of this Good Samaritan school. They are in Townsville, they are all over the state. It is a disgrace that the state education system does not have one of those. That would be a huge leap forward.

Mr LISTER: You mentioned that behavioural matters are one of the causes for teachers leaving the profession. This committee has taken hundreds of submissions, and many of them refer to poor discipline and poor behaviour at schools as being one of the reasons that parents decide to homeschool their kids. Are these changes potentially going to further undermine the confidence of parents in schools and cause more of an efflux to home education?

Mr Keenan: I have not put a lot of thought necessarily into impacts on homeschooling. The kids we want to keep in the state system are our best and brightest. The hallmark of a free society is having a competent education system, and we are slipping into a situation where that might not be the case. In particular, the notion of appealing the 11 days cumulative and having mandated support plans will make our job harder, without a doubt. There will not be equity and excellence for the 500 kids who make great decisions at our school and who are going to be plumbers, electricians, teachers and all the rest of it. We have had a pretty sharp increase in homeschooling, there is no doubt about it. Many of those homeschoolers are because they feel that things are not safe enough at school.

Mr O'ROURKE: You have touched on attracting teachers into the system and teachers leaving and things like that. Is there any link between teacher morale and school management plans, behaviour management plans? Is there some correlation there?

Mr Keenan: Absolutely, 100 per cent. Every state school in Queensland does a School Opinion Survey. Our School Opinion Survey is off the Richter scale positively on questions about staff morale, on questions about is this a good school, is behaviour well managed et cetera. We excluded those eight students last year and there were 200 kids that we had to sadly suspend for between one and 20 days. There was pressure at times—and there is pressure everywhere—to not suspend people. We do not need the pressure because we do not want to suspend them. It creates work for us. It is bad for them, but it is good for the kids who are at school. We cannot lose the faith of our parent community so they say, 'We have to go into Toowoomba.' 'We have to go to a private school.' 'We have to leave the state education system.' There is a great school here in Oakey. Sadly, excluding eight students and suspending 200 students last year played a big part in the morale of the staff. We have a stable staff. We are understaffed. I had to teach history last year. That was very hard, being the principal and teaching history, but it was a good learning experience. You are spot-on in your question.

Mr O'ROURKE: With regard to student management plans, do we know how that will impact the workload for teachers, principals et cetera?

Mr Keenan: Deputies here work 16-hour days. They work at home, they work on the weekend. Everybody thinks they are the busiest person in the world, 'boohoo for us', but it is true. We have a tier 3 plan for every single kid who has been suspended. If we mandate them, will our deputies have to work 18-hour days? When we try to replace them, there is no-one to replace them. We have several people off on stress leave. I will have to teach woodwork next term because there is no-one else out there. It is diabolical and we are going to lose more and more people. We are in real strife.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for presenting today. Forgive me, I did not catch the number of years you have been teaching for, but I imagine it has been some time. Over the past 10 or 15 years I would imagine the tools for teachers to try and correct behaviour have changed significantly. Could you speak to how the changes to tools to correct behaviour have impacted you to the point it is at today, where you are seeing a lot more suspensions?

Mr Keenan: I have been in the game for 27 years, which is not particularly long compared to other people. I was a journo before I got into teaching. I was in Moranbah for a range of years. I taught in Townsville and a whole bunch of places. Everybody is going to jingoistically say that things are getting worse. They are getting worse. The data reflects that, although in our school and in the south-west, first term compared to last term it is good.

The simple reality for me is that most parents and guardians are wonderful people and they love their children, they do their best, they support them. Sadly, there is a portion of students at our school whose parents think that telling me or the art teacher to [REDACTED] is fine. I do not know where in society that is fine. We do not allow that to happen at our school. There are some state schools that have different rules around that, and I reckon they would be the people who are tearing teachers down. I think things have changed in society. So much is lumped on us. Someone who gets excluded from our school will have been through nine or 10 support programs with the PCYC, with anger management, with everything. It is just incredible the suite of things we are trying to propagate to help kids make better choices. I hope that answers your question.

Mr DAMETTO: It certainly does, thank you.

CHAIR: Just a reminder, Mr Keenan, that we have parliamentary standing orders, so just be careful with the language, even if you are paraphrasing.

Mr Keenan: I am sorry, I was quoting. Excuse my language.

CHAIR: No worries. As chair, I have to say that.

Mr Keenan: Imagine how a 58-year-old teacher feels when that is levelled at them.

CHAIR: Yes. I have a quick question for you. Where you have the situation of a potential suspension, if there was better resourcing in place would support plans assist in a situation like that?

Mr Keenan: Possibly, yes. We have to find our own solutions at Oakey because there are not a stack of providers to help us out. I think if we had more flexi schools, because kids are exceedingly complicated and while we do not have a one-size-fits-all here at a flexi school—and thank goodness for the Catholics who run one. As I said, 99 per cent of their customers are state school excludees or suspendees. If we had those in every regional place—how the hell we would staff them I do not know because we cannot staff our other schools and it would be a tough gig—but I think that would be a step in the right direction

Mr MICKELBERG: You spoke about the impact broadly on students of the behaviour of some of the kids who have been suspended or excluded. I am keen to understand, with those eight kids, how many were instances where they physically harmed someone, be that a student or a teacher? If you do not have that detail, perhaps you could talk about your broad experience as to the threshold at which an individual might be suspended or excluded for that amount of time.

Mr Keenan: Generally for that to happen they have probably had a five-day suspension, a 10-day, a 15-day—20 is the most pending exclusion. They have probably gone through that. Never do we move through that without helping them to make better choices, whatever the problem is. Fifty per cent of our suspensions, not exclusions, last year were around direct verbal abuse at teachers. We have had years where there has been a lot of physical activity. Last year was not one of those. None of our teachers were physically—I do not like using the word ‘assaulted’, but there was no physical interaction that led to that. It is usually an accumulation of a whole bunch of situations: they are swearing, they are refusing to do anything. It is a whole bunch of things. It is not often one thing.

Mr MICKELBERG: When I was at school 20 years ago—I went to a state school—if you had a fight three days was the going rate for a suspension for both participants unless there were mitigating factors. Is that still the case?

Mr Keenan: Yes. If it was your first go around and you are a good fella or good female then you would generally possibly get a three or maybe a five and then if you did it again after we had given you help to make better choices. But, yes, that is roughly the way things still work.

Mr MICKELBERG: Do you have access to the pathways program in your district?

Mr Keenan: It is starting now. It will be good but by far, for the largest number of kids who get excluded, the pathways do not really want to take year 10s; they want 11s and 12s. It is our grade 9s, 8s and 7s who get excluded. We need intervention with the junior secondary—7s, 8s, 9s—and pathways does not cover that. It would be wonderful, but it does not cover the people who are making poor choices.

Mr MICKELBERG: That is great. Thank you for your frank feedback.

CHAIR: Mr Keenan, thank you very much for your submission and presentation and for answering our questions. We will let you get back to the cross-country.

DICK, Mrs Suzanne, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement of no more than two minutes after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Mrs Dick: The largest part of our family's 16-year home education journey has been with a DE school which allowed us to tailor individual learning programs for our children. My submission highlights how an individualised approach has provided excellent education outcomes for my children and shaped them to succeed into adulthood.

In 2022, our DE school did away with individual learning programs and implemented the Australian Curriculum across all KLAs. I attempted to embrace the change and help my kids to continue to thrive, but very soon I was completely burnt out. Education had become a box-ticking exercise and, for our family, the joy of learning was lost. I had been pressed into a position where I was no longer able to educate in the best interests of my children. I was drowning. In survival mode I made the terrifying decision to unenrol our two youngest children from the DE school with no idea what I would do next. Every time I looked at HEU registration I was overwhelmed. The requirements for both programming and reporting just looked too hard for me as a homeschooling mum to tackle so for a time I flew under the radar. I went back to educating my kids as I saw fit.

My breakthrough came with the incredible support I received once I discovered the Home Education Qld group on Facebook. This enabled me to successfully apply for registration with HEU and to develop goal-based programs for each of my children, which were approved. My kids are thriving again.

Can you see how wrong it would be for this homeschooling mum to be forced once again to implement a curriculum designed only for qualified teachers in an institutional setting? Just the thought for me is soul-destroying. I predict this change alone would push more families under the radar than ever before. Surely that is not the plan. If you are truly concerned about educational outcomes, it is imperative that you reconsider forcing homeschoolers to use the Australian Curriculum. Let us continue in the freedom we have to educate our kids as the unique individuals they are. Thank you.

Mr LISTER: Thank you very much. Am I right in saying that you have actually experienced, in that year of DE under the national curriculum, what home education would look like if this bill passes?

Mrs Dick: I believe so.

Mr LISTER: And you are opposed to the bill?

Mrs Dick: I am. It is not that we do not cover all these subject areas. It is just that we would then be put under pressure to report like teachers, understanding something that is written in 'eduspeak' and mapping what we are doing back to the Australian Curriculum and that is a lot of work. Quite frankly, I would rather spend time teaching my kids. We do not choose to do this because we want what is worse for our kids; I think every homeschooler in this room and every homeschooler I know is choosing to do this because we want what is best for our kids. Does that answer your question?

Mr LISTER: Very well. Thank you.

Mr Kelly: I read in your submission that you are from a rural or a farming background.

Mrs Dick: I am a farmer.

Mr Kelly: Do you think there are advantages around the homeschooling option for your kids in that rural environment and are you able to use your physical environment in the schooling process?

Mrs Dick: For sure and for certain for me. I think for us, my girls would have probably done okay at school, but my boys have really benefited. My eldest has had a lot of time in the toolshed and he would have needed a lot of time in the manual arts building, I suppose, if he was in a school. He is now a qualified tradie. He was actually headhunted, so to speak. He did a TAFE course in year 10, I believe it was. The local business that he works for was actually very keen to have him but when we spoke originally they said, 'No, we would like you to finish your education', which he did. He went right to year 12 with the DE school we were with. His was the last OP year so it was a different ball game then in distance education.

My youngest son would desperately love to be a beekeeper. He would not be a standalone beekeeper. He would be a farmer and a beekeeper. He is capable of doing both, I believe, and they complement each other well. He is beginning a cert III in beekeeping very soon. To be honest, it is not a great thing for him to be doing if he was in the school system because there is no flexibility for him to do that in the school system. He would need to wait until he finished school before he could begin that.

Mr Kelly: Schools and bees do not tend to mix too well.

Mrs Dick: No, not really. He might be on suspension if he brought his pets to school, I think.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you, Mrs Dick, for coming along day and presenting to the committee. My question is in regard to the extra reporting that would be required if this bill went through. It seems from the submitters today, as well as the people who have put forward their argument to the committee, that this is more about satisfying the department's want and need for data rather than the educational outcomes of homeschooled children. Would you make any comment to that?

Mrs Dick: Yes, for sure. I have already been there because this is what I had to do with the DE school. I had to report on every KLA and align with the national curriculum. It became a box-ticking exercise, as I said. It was very frustrating for me because I was spending so much time doing that, which took me away from actually helping my kids. You get those scenarios where your child is saying, 'Mum, can you help me with this? I don't understand', and I'm saying, 'Hang on a minute, I've just got to make sure I do this over here.' It is actually really distracting. It is the equivalent of the doctor spending time at the computer when they really need to be looking at the patient.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much for that. It gives a very clear picture.

Mr MICKELBERG: My question is in relation to your son whom you mentioned was doing a beekeeping cert III. If you are okay to say, how old is he?

Mrs Dick: He is currently 15, nearly 16.

Mr MICKELBERG: Presumably an alternative could be for him to step out of schooling and do that outside of school, but you and he want to remain engaged in schooling from a broader educational perspective rather than just focus on that one aspect. Is that something that you had considered? What are the benefits to him staying engaged in home schooling so that he can do those other academic pursuits, not just the cert III?

Mrs Dick: The way I would answer that is I have had multiple jobs and I have had several careers. Beekeeping may be what he wants to do now and I think he can make a success of that. However, he may not wear that beekeeping hat for the rest of his life. Beekeepers can develop allergies as well. Anyone doing any job, any tradie, could have an injury so I feel that it is important for him to continue his academic studies as well as that. Certainly it has stood my other kids in good stead. I have two who have graduated.

Mr MICKELBERG: Does his interest in beekeeping and the cert III flow through to his level of motivation and engagement with respect to the other educational activities?

Mrs Dick: Absolutely. To engage him in science for a time it had to all centre around beekeeping. It had to centre around bees; it had to centre around insects. I was actually quite surprised when I would take them to the local library—we would go on a weekly basis to the local library—and my girls would come out with big piles of novels and fiction and he would come out with hardcore stuff about beekeeping. I do not think he will mind me saying that he is dyslexic so he has really struggled. It has been a real challenge to teach him to read and yet we succeeded because I could teach him individually, one-on-one, I love him, we pushed through, we found strategies. Really, the only place that could happen is in the home, in my opinion. I would love to see it happen in a school. I would love to. I would love to see the teacher-to-kid ratio so high that that could happen, but in the current situation it just cannot. I think he would have driven a lot of teachers into early retirement, personally.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Dick, for answering our questions, for your presentation and also for being so honest about your full history and your experience of homeschooling. It is much appreciated. That concludes this hearing. Thank you to everybody who has been here this morning to submit and answer questions. On Thursday, 4 April the committee will be hearing from some organisations that have made submissions on the bill. We sincerely thank everyone who has participated here today. Thank you for taking the time. We know in many cases it is a long trip, but the experience you have all had in many different ways has been very valuable. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public hearing closed and, again, thank you.

The committee adjourned at 11.44 am.