

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 22
Submitted by: Sharon Vaughan
Publication:
Attachments:
Submitter Comments:

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee](#)
Subject: Free to Homeschool Submission to the committee regarding changes to Homeschooling
Date: Monday, 11 March 2024 2:51:17 PM

To whom it may concern;

My name is Sharon Vaughan. I am the mother of two, registered, homeschooled children in Qld. My Children are 9.5yrs old and 7yo. They are currently studying year 4 and 2 respectively.

We, like many other families, never intended to homeschool our children. We always intended and expected them to attend mainstream schooling. However, due to the poor education, horrendous emotional and physical safety concerns at school and the impacts this was having on our children, we have found ourselves as happy home schoolers and now we can't see ourselves ever going back.

I have become aware of some changes being proposed to the homeschooling system and I am concerned about them. I would like to express my concern and hope that you listen to me and the many other parents who have similar worries.

Concern 1: Making homeschooling families follow the ACARA curriculum

There are so many different ways for a child to receive a high-quality education. There are many different curriculums from all around the world. I know many homeschooling families who follow various curriculums with great success. ACARA is just one.

However, from my experience, when a child has fallen behind and developed fears around learning (usually as a result of mainstream schooling), the best way to provide them with a high-quality education is to discover where they are at and tailor their learning to what they need personally. This may mean that for some children, they need to focus on just reading and writing for a time or just numeracy so that the knowledge gaps are filled, and they can move on.

Often times, this mean back tracking to find where the learning gaps happened and starting from there. You may have a child that is doing prep level spelling, grade 1 level reading and year 2 level writing. If they have a lot of fear and frustration around English, spending a few hours each day on those subjects is going to be as much as they can handle. Forcing them to also learn history, geography, HPE, music and art on top of that is simply spreading them too thin and putting a lot of strain on the relationship and undue stress on the educating parent.

There are also times where you discover that there is one subject area that just isn't working for your child. Let's face it, none of us are good at everything! At school they cover all the subjects because they are teaching a whole class, but when you homeschool, you are just teaching your child. If there is something that is of no interest at all, forcing them

to learn the subject is a useless waste of time. If that same child was in mainstream education, they would likely zone out, not listen, possibly disrupt the class for that session. Yes, they would sit through the lesson, but they aren't really learning. For a class as a whole, it may be a meaningful lesson, but for the individual child it's a waste of time. We see this all the time in our classrooms at mainstream school. A child who has too many learning gaps in the basics who is completely disengaged from learning and as a result is unable to retain information from the broad smearing of subjects covered in the ACARA curriculum. Those children do exactly as I have described and disrupt the class or zone out. Covering a broader range of subject is not what these children need. They need to understand what is going on and feel a sense of mastery. But sadly, teachers are spread so thin trying to differentiate all the different ability levels within one class and cover such a broad range of subject areas that they can never give those children the targeted tuition they need.

Why would you force educating parents to make their children push through lessons just for the sake of it, that mean nothing to the child and won't be retained just so that they can tick off the many different points in the curriculum? Surely there is a better, more meaningful way to use their time and energy. There is! it is to let parent's tailor their teaching to fill the knowledge gaps, build confidence and tackle subjects that are meaningful to them at the time. This is the system we already have. We already must cover English, Math and one other subject. This is achievable and manageable. Most families find they end up covering a broad range of subjects during their adventures together anyway. But if you have rock-solid English and math skills, you can learn any of the other subject areas at any time when you need them.

Many of the children who end up homeschooling are doing so because they either don't "fit the box" of mainstream schooling or they were not coping with the volume of content in mainstream schooling. Homeschool offers a real alternative to those children and an environment where they can thrive both personally and academically. It is going to look different- it's meant to! We need many different ways to learn for our society to educate everyone.

Forcing educating parents to cover the whole ACARA curriculum is too onerous, distracting and stifling. It is also unnecessary. We already have a good system from ensuring children are learning what they need to learn. By all means put more resources into the HEU so that they can provide better support or closer monitoring of this existing system, but don't force children who already didn't fit into the box, back into it.

Concern 2: Making parent prove that homeschooling is in the child's best interests.

Of course, everything we do should always be in the child's best interest. However, this is a very subjective decision. We live in a society that has many core beliefs that have been passed on from generation to generation about education. For the average person who has never done homeschooling, their understanding what it looks like and what it involves

usually is based on very outdated stereotypes. Sadly, most people, including GP's, paediatricians, psychologists, teachers and the general public imagine that homeschooling is something that it is not.

Most people imagine socially isolated children who learn very little and have poor social skills. However this couldn't be further from the truth! My children have a more active social life than I do. There is a plethora of activities and social groups to join. They play with their neighbours and cousins and join in afterschool activities and team sports. As for the learning. I can say with complete certainty that they are learning better and deeper now than they ever have before. They are also developing other skills that they wouldn't have at school. Self-awareness, mindfulness, coping strategies, self-discovery, setting their own learning goals and monitoring their own progress. My son is now unburdened by the need to be "tough" and is discovering a love of art, music and math. All things that were "uncool" for a boy at school. My daughter who has been scared to read since grade 1 is finally realising she can read quite well and is nearly ready to read independently for pleasure- something she really wasn't going to achieve at school.

Who gets to decide? I know that if you asked our family GP if they thought the children were better off at school they would say yes. Why? because they don't know any better. School is seen as a panacea for all the child's problems by those outside of the system and for those who are uneducated about the alternatives. But they didn't see the daily struggle, the separation anxiety, the loss of confidence, the coming home sick every day. They didn't hear the phrases like "I'm bad at everything" and "I'm the most stupid boy ever" coming out of my 6yo's mouth after 6months in grade 1. They didn't hear about the desks being upturned mid lesson and having to take shelter in a corner of the classroom because someone was having a meltdown and throwing chairs and books. They didn't find out about the most recent assault against my 6yo from a classroom friend because he had gotten so used to it that he didn't bother telling me anymore. So, who gets to decide if homeschooling is in my children's best interest?

For both of my children, they experienced and witnessed violence on a daily basis at school. Their classrooms (like all the other classrooms at school) were filled with kids who were struggling. Some were kids that had learning difficulties and were now forced to be "included" in classrooms that weren't set up for their learning needs. They were suffering terribly and as a result were acting out in very violent and unpredictable ways. Others were suffering trauma at home and were then taking their pain out on their classmates. Again, there were others that just knew the teachers weren't allowed to discipline them and so they behaved badly by choice.

I asked several teachers before deciding to homeschool if we had just gotten unlucky with the classes this year and last year. Their reply was always "No, there is always 3-5 children in each class with severe behaviours". My kids didn't feel safe. They were terrified of going to school and spent all day feeling frightened and overwhelmed. They couldn't focus or concentrate partly due to their fear and partly due to the complete lack of discipline and

they weren't learning well.

Both children would come home sick each day and their symptoms were pure anxiety.

A private school can move those difficult children on...to a public school. So, you might suggest that as an option, but we tried a private school and found that the teaching was of very low standard and there was no flexibility or support. We cannot afford the very exclusive private schools in the area and so the only other option is for my children to homeschool.

But how would I find a professional that doesn't carry a bias against homeschooling, who has availability to see us and who can know us well enough to make a fully informed and educated decision about that? The cost will be prohibitive, the time will be an unnecessary distraction and you will make families like mine vulnerable to stigma and stereotyping about homeschool that is completely erroneous.

What are my suggestions to improve the homeschooling system in QLD?

Provide more support to the HEU so that educating parents can use them as a resource. Provide opportunities for educating parents to ask questions, get ideas and feedback about their plans and reports. When we submit our plans, maybe someone could call us and talk it through with us helping us to extend it or deepen it or just to get a greater appreciation of our plan. That would be lovely!

Maybe even a home visits each year to see how we are going and to see that the children are learning well.

All of this would have to be provided by educators who are passionate about home education and who were looking to improve and support homeschooling not trying to "catch us out"

When you start thinking of the HEU as a resource rather than a way of trying to catch parents doing the wrong thing, the opportunities for growth are endless.

Did you know that currently you cannot call the HEU and ask a question? You can leave a message, but it usually doesn't get answered. Did you know that an email asking one simple question can take 4 weeks to answer? Did you know that the HEU doesn't currently provide any support to educating parents? We are doing it all on our own and with the support of each other.

This is not a level of resourcing that is going to lead to good outcomes. People who **do** wish to do the wrong thing can very easily fly under the radar currently, because of the lack of resources. However those people aren't registered home schoolers. Changing the system won't fix that because they're not in the system anyway. In that case, you need better funding and resourcing for dept child safety to follow up and investigate- but those families are rare.

As homeschooling rates continue to rise, the HEU may become an example of best

practice in **flexible, individualised** education. Rather than seeing us as weirdos or renegades, maybe the government could start seeing us as creative thinkers and future leaders? Perhaps you could come to us as a group to ask for ideas and solutions to your sticky education questions? I'm sure you'd find some wonderful ideas in our uniquely poised group.

In short, the solution is more resources for the HEU and a move from them being purely a compliance monitoring agency to support and resource hub.

Please listen and consult with the people you are making laws about. It is a very simple request and a basic pillar of democracy.

Regards,
Sharon Vaughan

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