

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submitted by: [REDACTED]
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Attachments:
Submitter Comments:

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee](#)
Subject: Fw: Concerns Regarding the Bill Outlining Proposed Changes to the Education Provisions under the Educational (General Provisions) Act 2006
Date: Monday, 11 March 2024 5:41:43 AM

Hello,

I have contacted my local member to discuss some of my concerns regarding Di Farmer's bill. My concerns are based on my experiences as both a psychologist and home educating parent. I am forwarding these directly to the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee. I trust that my concerns will be given due consideration and that a process of further consultation with the homeschooling community will take place. I would be only too happy to provide further information to assist with informing the committee.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 11 March 2024 6:19 AM
To: Mirani@parliament.qld.gov.au <Mirani@parliament.qld.gov.au>
Subject: Concerns Regarding the Bill Outlining Proposed Changes to the Education Provisions under the Educational (General Provisions) Act 2006

Dear Steve,

I am a resident of your electorate and am writing to express my concerns regarding the bill outlining proposed changes to the education provisions under the *Educational (General Provisions) Act 2006* and Di Farmer's statement that this will include "getting home education students to follow the Australian Curriculum".

1. My Concerns Regarding Standardised Curriculum in Homeschooling

As a psychologist and a home-educating parent, I can see that there has been a recent increase in homeschooling within our state and country. From my discussions with others, it appears that a decision to homeschool is frequently being made due to a lack of fit between children and the school system, resulting in emotional, behavioural, social and academic difficulties for kids, which ultimately impacts their wellbeing.

We are experiencing an insurgence of homeschooling, in my opinion, due to a growing recognition by families that our current schooling system requires reform in order to meet the needs of a wider variety of children. Consideration needs to be given to how best to support these children outside of the schooling system (or engage in a systematic review of the current system). Our youth are struggling with mental health concerns at alarming rates, and academic pressure is one of the key contributors to this. With the Australian curriculum, we see academic pressure for our children like never before and the shocking impact this is having on their wellbeing.

There is so little flexibility available within the mainstream schooling system to cater to the individual child that increasing numbers of families are joining our homeschooling community looking for a model of education that allows for a better (i.e. individualised) fit for their children. Having the freedom to learn in a manner that aligns with their individual interests, abilities and learning styles is the goal we should be reaching for in all areas of education, rather than enforcing a standardised curriculum on all children irrespective of their individual needs.

The Australian curriculum was designed for a system attempting to facilitate the education of a large number of children, grouped into same-aged peers and educated within organisations. An intention to apply this same curriculum to home-educating families is worrying, problematic and likely does a disservice to many children and families. An assumption that the Australian curriculum is a better option than individualised programs for homeschooling children appears to be an incredibly short-sighted and ill-informed way of avoiding meaningful educational reform.

There are many children within our community for whom interest-based learning is a necessary option. This style of learning increases motivation and engagement for children in the learning process and leads to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Removing home educating parents ability to look at education outside of the structure of the Australian curriculum compromises home-educating families ability to respond flexibly to their individual child's needs, interests and abilities.

One of the benefits of home education is that it allows each child to be considered and catered to individually. Requiring children to work systematically through a structured curriculum irrespective of their individual needs is not reasonable and removes families' abilities to choose educational pathways that have the flexibility required to meet the needs of individual children and families.

My strong opinion is that the Australian curriculum places too much pressure on children to develop literacy skills and engage in structured learning before they are developmentally ready for this or cognitively equipped for it. The cumulative impact of this all too often results negatively on the well-being of our youth (i.e. to varying degrees based on their individual differences).

2. My Professional Experience with Neurodivergent Children and Young People

I have been a registered psychologist since 2009. In my practice, my clients have always been children, young people and their families. Since 2019, I have been in private practice, and my client base has predominately been neurodivergent children (i.e. children who meet diagnostic criteria for neurodevelopmental conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Specific Learning Disabilities and Intellectual Disabilities).

In Australia, it's estimated that around 15% of the population is

neurodivergent. Observationally and through talking with other families, I have also noted that there are also large numbers of neurodivergent youth within my local homeschooling community.

For these children, the expectations of a mainstream school environment are often unattainable and put pressure on children that considerably impacts their wellbeing, self-concept and engagement in learning. They are frequently not able to access the curriculum with the scope of support offered to them in mainstream settings. Equally, they are increasingly unable to access special education environments due to the narrow range of presenting problems and severity of problems, that these environments are designed to cater for. Homeschooling has and can provide an unquestionably needed third option for these children. However, mandating home-educating families to follow the Australian curriculum would significantly compromise the potential benefits of home education for neurodivergent children.

Arguably, this group, more than any other, is able to learn and thrive in settings that allow them to engage in interest-based learning and learning through their engagement with life (i.e. rather than through a standardised curriculum). Intrinsic motivation to learn and flexibility to learn at a pace that suits the individual child's developmental trajectory is, in my opinion, essential in this population for successful outcomes. Furthermore, any bill that forces home-educating families to follow the Australian curriculum is disadvantaging neurodivergent youth through the application of ableist principles and practices.

There are many reasons that education within a school setting and within a highly structured curriculum is challenging for neurodivergent youth, and the impact this can and often does have on them is incredibly worrying for families and practitioners and should also be worrying to our government. Even with significant support, many children are unlikely to thrive in this system. Increasingly, the school system's solution to the significant limits on their flexibility to meet the needs of neurodivergent children is to push for medication for the child and to expect conformity from children in a system that they are simply not hardwired to function well in. This in and of itself is a truly worrying reflection on the school system that requires urgent review.

3. My Family Experiences

As stated previously, I home-educate my own children. They are currently twelve, ten and six. As our eldest child was approaching school age, my husband and I decided to homeschool her. At that time, my concerns included the lack of time for play at school and that not having freedom in her learning (i.e. having to learn what she was told when she was told how she was told) from such a young age would impact my daughter's love of learning.

My work as a psychologist has led me to have concerns regarding the mainstream education system and the inability of this system to respond flexibly to children as well as a push for children to engage in academics earlier and earlier. I had no faith that the system

would be as invested in the educational outcomes of my children as I was as their parent. I could see that what we were doing at home already was a very positive fit for my daughter that could be built upon as she grew.

Prior to this, we had completed an enrolment form for her at a local school. When I went to the meeting with the principal and said I had not brought my daughter as I intended to homeschool, she spoke about how it is so important that this option is available for children and how the system devalues how much learning occurs naturally for children when we are able to experience and capitalise on day-to-day moments with them.

Through our success with my eldest daughter and seeing the challenges her siblings would face (i.e. related to difficulties maintaining attention and regulating their body's need for movement), we knew that homeschooling was also the right choice for her siblings. At no point have I waived in my belief that home education is the best educational path for our family, and this is largely due to the flexibility this has afforded us in being able to tailor educational experiences to our children in a way that best motivates, engages, supports and encourages their learning.

My children all have challenges that would make learning in a mainstream classroom difficult. Two of my children struggle significantly with difficulties related to inattention and hyperactivity, and the other with written expression. I take my responsibility to provide a high-quality education to my children seriously. I know that for me to provide my individual children with the highest quality education, this is, without a doubt, best facilitated predominantly through interest-based learning.

When children are motivated to learn and learn about a topic that they themselves have expressed interest in, it is a truly magical process. As a mother who is deeply invested in her children being happy, confident and capable both now and in adulthood, I have been thankful for the flexibility allowed by the current Act for us to tailor our own learning path as a family. Through this, I have seen my children flourish in ways that simply would not have been possible should we have been forced to adhere to a structured curriculum in all subject areas.

As an example, recently, we have been reading *Words That Changed the World: Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species* by Anna Brett during our reading time together. Each of my children has listened to me read this as they worked on various craft projects. Each of them has engaged with the material at their own level and different parts of the information in the book have been particularly meaningful to each of them (i.e. given their own interests and current stage). For my six-year-old, through reading this book, he began asking questions about the seasons and platypus, and we sorted out additional information about these. My ten-year-old daughter, through reading this book, became interested in the evolution of horse hooves and then the evolution of a particular breed of horses (i.e. Shetland Ponies). She then engaged independently in finding further information on these topics. My twelve-year-old daughter was interested in the conflict between Darwin's theory and creationism that was the accepted explanation for people at the time (i.e. she reflected on how what he know today was radical when Darwin first expressed his theory) as well as the classification of living things. Through this one shared family activity, my children were all able to learn together and engage in the richness of learning that comes with being truly interested in something and motivated to learn about it. It is in these

moments that the learning is exceptional.

If we had to follow a highly structured curriculum, what would happen to these beautiful, shared learning opportunities when we learn together through topics we are motivated to learn about? Where would they fit into our day, week, year or life? All of that richness would be gone to give way to a structured curriculum, enforcing learning for the sake of learning instead of learning for the love of learning. How quickly this would erode what my children are learning how to be a learner, not just as a child but throughout life and in life.

The high-quality learning opportunities that can be provided through home education far surpass the learning opportunities afforded by mandated adherence to a standardised curriculum. It would be beneficial to consider further how homeschooling families can continue to be supported in developing individualised education programs for their children and also how this might be applied to school-based education settings to improve the outcomes and well-being of all students.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss my concerns about this bill further, and I will contact your office regarding this.

Should you have any questions regarding the information provided or my concerns regarding this bill, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards,

