

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 71

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Publication:

Attachments:

Submitter Comments:

Monday 11th March 2024

Dear Member

Subject: Concerns Regarding Proposed Changes to Homeschooling Legislation

I am writing to you with great concern regarding the proposed changes in legislation for home educating families, being put forward by the Minister of Education and Youth Justice, Dianne Farmer. I believe it is crucial to voice my apprehensions about the potential impact of these changes on our education system.

We (as many homeschooling families) follow an interest-based or project-lead learning style. We have embarked on this pathway to allow our children to foster personal and practical interests, with real-world experience and examples. For example, at some point in the future our family plans to travel overseas. As my husband and I are originally from the UK, we plan on travelling to the UK and Europe and onto the Americas. Therefore, one of our first areas of interest as a homeschooling family is to learn Spanish together in order to immerse ourselves more thoroughly in our travel experience. Similarly, our daughter has shown interest in travel planning, exchange rates, budgeting, map-reading, all inspired by our future plans as a family. For us, homeschooling is not just a mode of providing an education, it is a way of life that allows us to bond, grow, learn and experience life as a family.

Closer to home and prior to our travels overseas, we are a FIFO family, with my husband working interstate. We have worked hard over the years in order to allow ourselves the fortunate position of flexibility – flexibility to travel with my husband, flexibility to prioritise family time at home during his rostered time off. We have no interest in enrolling in a form of Distance Education or providing a replica of school at home, both of which would restrict our flexibility as a family.

As an active participant in the homeschool community, we participate regularly in multi-age learning co-ops and group activities. We regularly capitalise on instruction and lessons from other parents, community members and experts in their fields. Sometimes, this sparks interests and passions within our children and we are able to go away and deeply explore an area of interest. Enforcing the Australian Curriculum will severely limit this opportunistic learning and stifle the ability for us to form multi-age groups as the topics they will be investigating would be dictated according to their year level.

My eldest daughter attended a year of Prep in Queensland prior to homeschooling. Although she cherished her time with friends at school, the content of the curriculum at her year level did not enrich her at all. She was socially happy, but felt undervalued by the end of the year. She is a very intelligent little girl, with literacy and numeracy skills well above her year level at this point in time. Even in a nurturing, well-respected private school, her needs as a student were not met. She was never offered any extended learning in any areas and this frustrated her and us.

Home educators have access to some of the best educational programs in the world, why restrict them to only being allowed to follow the national curriculum that they chose to leave behind in the first place? Adopting ACARA aligned resources, methods and expectations into a homeschool setting appears to be a peculiar proposition: firstly, because parents learning plans are already subjected to review and approval by HEU; secondly, it removes basic human freedoms for parents and children to choose the methods of learning; and thirdly, would seemingly assume that parents are equally equipped to facilitate learning content that qualified teachers spend years learning how to teach. I cannot help but think this is an unreasonable expectation for parents, a fairly narrow view of how young people learn. The Australian Curriculum is an incredibly complex document that has been tailored to educate children of multiple skill-levels in large, diverse groups, in schools. Many schools employ curriculum specialists to interpret and implement this document. In order to implement this, we

would need to base our learning off over-simplified textbooks, rush through topics and stop the practical, hands-on nature of our learning. In a 1:1 setting, this is not a high-quality education.

There is an amendment in the bill that says homeschooling registration will only be granted if it is in the best interests of the child. I would like it to be clear within this legislation, who decides what is in the best interests of the child? The answer in most cases should be the parents. Any other answer to this question is overreach and frankly, a frightening response. If in some cases the parents are not acting in the best interests of their children, this has nothing to do with homeschooling legislation or the homeschool community as a whole, this is a question for a child welfare body.

Further areas of concern for the community as a whole would be:

- New wording to now have to show “academic progress” in Reports instead of "progress".
- Reporting requirements are now to be against all areas as per new plan requirements for across all ACARA.
- New children being registered require an individual Learning Plan on application.
- No more provisional registration options.
- New requirement to provide a Report if/when reregistering.
- Reduction in time to provide requests for more information – 28 days to 14.

All of the above seem to only serve as barriers to families who may not have the safety, time or resource to register within these extremely restrictive regulations.

The changes proposed have raised many questions for us as I'm sure it has for many others in our position.

Some key questions we have are included below:

Can you please provide us useful links to the research studies that you have conducted to determine that,

- a) the legislation that you are proposing is in the best interest of the homeschooling community,
- b) that the current model of registration, reporting and legislation for home schoolers is inadequate,
- c) that adequate consultation has taken place with appropriately qualified experts in education and members of the homeschooling community to determine that this is needed and in our best interest?

In light of these concerns, I urge you to carefully reconsider the proposed education legislation and to prioritize the best interests of our students, teachers, and schools. I implore you to advocate for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to policymaking that values input from all stakeholders and ensures the integrity and quality of our education system.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and for considering my concerns. I look forward to your response and to further dialogue on this important issue.

Sincerely

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