

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Dear EETSC Committee members

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the proposed Queensland education legislation changes that have been proposed. As a homeschooling parent I do not support many of these changes and am deeply concerned about the impact it will have on my family and the homeschooling community.

I will start by saying I am a product of the mainstream system, having been educated in both public and catholic schools and I hold a Masters degree in Applied Economics from a Queensland University. Most of the content I learned at school I can't remember, but I do remember the skills I learned, such as how to communicate, how to research and critical thinking. These are things that can be applied in all walks of life and have served me well.

As parents, we are best placed to know what is best for our children as we are with them every day. They read and write for us and we have many discussions, much like I remember my own school days, when the one teacher of 30 students (no support staff) knew their students. They did not need standardised tests to tell them how they were progressing.

I applaud the aspiration of every child deserving a high quality education, but making the Australian curriculum the basis of every child's education will not achieve this. It is very much a curriculum that is a mile wide and an inch deep and is producing very poor outcomes in literacy and numeracy. Schools are experiencing so many issues, that it is disappointing to see this opportunity missed to improve the outcomes for Queensland school students.

As with a huge majority of homeschoolers it was not our first choice. We started our son at a local school and in spite of the system he did ok. He is a bright, curious child with no learning difficulties, but he was bored and his love for learning started to wane. Despite this, two years later we started our twin girls at the same school. It was a complete disaster. Not only did they not thrive they were labelled as "bad" because they did not fit the box of quiet, compliant girls and talked too much. They also did not learn to read and despite me asking the teachers for ideas I was met with, "they are doing fine". They very quickly changed from the enthusiastic learners they had been in kindy to being very disengaged.

We started with a flexible distance education (DE) school that encouraged an individualised curriculum. As a consequence we taught our girls to read with an evidence based phonics program. We eventually moved to homeschooling when the DE changed management and the flexible, individual nature of the programs changed completely. We have now been homeschooling through HEU since the start of 2022 and all my children are thriving and are well adjusted, well spoken, confident, capable humans. This would not have been the case if we remained at school.

While my girls (who just turned 10) have learning challenges with written expression, we are working with speech therapists at the University of Queensland and utilising evidence based spelling and other literacy programs. A big focus this year is on progressing their writing and we are using their interest in Harry Potter to achieve this. They are now powering through the Harry Potter novels, with enthusiasm and attention to detail. In fact they are able to critique the differences between the books and the movies. This is amazing progress in a few short years.

There is no doubt in my mind if my girls had remained at school, they would be “behind”, and with poor self esteem and anxiety which I see in such high numbers in school children these days. A lot of this can be attributed to unrealistic demands placed on these children. There is no time to play (which has so many benefits including learning how to get on with others, resilience and physical development) and the stream rolling though a curriculum that can't stop and wait for so many children to catch up. Downloading copious quantities of content into a child's head is not education particularly when it's not retained or even understood.

My son who is in “grade 7” this year has always had a strong interest in history, particularly the World Wars and has been able to explore this passion. We utilise this interest to build his literacy skills and he retains the knowledge because he is interested. He will even spend his free time learning about these interest areas and is comfortable to discuss his views with adults. We don't have to stop learning about his interests so we can move on to a topic he is not interested in and won't remember down the track. He is a highly engaged, confident learner and is very much a leader in his peer circle. This has been achieved because of the autonomy he has been given over his learning and will not be enhanced by working to ACARA.

My children are involved in many activities in the community, including drama, art and highland dancing. They also attend a local after school pump youth class and attend a variety of council-sponsored activities during the school holidays. My children are already getting a high quality education. One that is equipping them with the skills they will need throughout their lives, but also sparks their curiosity and joy of learning so they will be lifelong learners. Surely this should be the real aspiration of your education laws. Don't pull us down to the very low bar of ACARA.

Another areas of concern, is forcing onerous reporting requirements on homeschooling parents. They do not have the training or the time to spend pouring over the ACARA curriculum in some box ticking exercise that achieves nothing. It will not improve the educational outcomes, much as it hasn't improved outcomes in mainstream schools. All it does is take time away from learning and will not achieve a high quality education outcome.

I ask you to provide evidence of how these changes will see the quality of education improve for my children.

Kind regards,
Sharyn Gibson