

## Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

**Submission No:** 115  
**Submitted by:** [REDACTED]  
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**Attachments:** See attachment  
**Submitter Comments:**

Dear committee members,

I am a homeschooling parent of a nine-year-old girl and I am writing to raise my concerns about the proposed changes to the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2016* currently under review in parliament. I am dismayed by the lack of meaningful engagement with the homeschooling community prior to this submission, particularly the lack of consultation during and after the drafting phase.

My main concern stems from the requirement that educators adhere strictly to the ACARA curriculum, specifically the amendments to section 217 (Standard conditions) [for registration for homeschooling]. But first, it should be noted that the Explanatory Notes for the bill give the misleading impression that these amendments only apply to senior subjects. Page 25 of the Explanatory Notes states that “These amendments include: requiring the educational program for a child registered for home education to be consistent with the Australian Curriculum or Queensland syllabus for senior subjects”. Close examination of changes to section 217 in the bill however, shows that alignment with the Australian Curriculum is not limited to senior subjects but applies to all homeschooling students from prep to year 12. **This mistake in the Explanatory Notes should be clarified for those considering this bill.**

I acknowledge the state's interest in maintaining educational standards, particularly in light of the recent surge in homeschooling registrations. However, **I do not think it appropriate to mandate the ACARA curriculum as a standard to apply to students in the homeschool setting for the reason that it is not fit for, and nor was it designed for, the purposes of homeschooling.** The ACARA curriculum was intended to ensure quality and equity across the country in a system that is geared towards education *en masse*. In that situation the ACARA curriculum necessarily covers content across a wide range of learning areas to cater to all children at least a little. In a one-on-one situation like homeschooling, where education can be tailored to an individual (and if we truly believe that parents know their children best), this one-size-fits-all approach is no longer a necessary or appropriate use of teaching time and resources, and it makes sense to focus on the child's strengths and interests, not to try and cover everything.

For example, my daughter's passion lies in dancing, which involves hours a week of dance lessons and choreography classes. She is less interested in music (despite a year of drumming lessons) and visual art. Other than the occasional arts and craft activity that she does in her spare time, and exposing her to art and music as part of everyday life, we see no need for a rigid curriculum that incorporates visual arts and music at the expense of time spent on something she likes and is good at. If we have to follow the ACARA curriculum, our ability to give her a high-quality arts education that is customised to her interests and talents will be hindered. This is just one example of how this highly prescriptive legislation is not fit for purpose in a homeschooling context, and will undermine the flexibility and individualised approach that makes homeschooling successful.

Moreover, many homeschooling parents, myself included, lack the expertise or time to cover specialised subjects like visual arts, music and technology comprehensively. Home educators already need to plan and learn themselves so that they can deliver in fundamental subjects like Maths, English, HASS, and Science and Health. Many opt to supplement their children's education with external classes or specialised curricula tailored to their interests (eg. dancing, visual arts, musical instruments, STEM, coding clubs, or sporting lessons) in order to cover any shortfalls in their own knowledge and skillset with limited time available. They cannot reasonably be expected to cover every aspect of a highly varied curriculum – if they have to spread themselves too thin, the quality of

what they cover (particularly in fundamental areas like Maths and English) will likely suffer. Indeed, breadth of education is only one aspect of quality: depth of knowledge is important too.

Furthermore, the ACARA curriculum doesn't always align with high-quality pre-packaged curricula, which may offer better-suited alternatives for some students. Often these have the same content as the Queensland curriculum over the course but in different sequence. For example, my daughter's maths curriculum (Beast Academy) is an advanced curriculum, which is purchased from the US and aligned to the US curriculum but suits her learning style better than the Australian options we have tried. At grade 2 level, children in the US are doing slightly more advanced maths (including addition with carrying and subtraction with borrowing, which is taught in grade 3 in Australia). At grade 4 level however, Australian children learn maths that is not introduced until grade 5 in the US (contracted multiplication of three-digit numbers and decimals) because the US systems spends longer building the foundations of division, fractions and multiplication (including mental maths of multiplying large numbers by breaking them down, not just rote memorisation of simple multiplication facts) beforehand. Arguably, this approach is just as valid, if not better than the Australian approach, and having the option of purchasing overseas or interstate curricula provides greater choice for parents to cater to different learning styles. While it is simple enough for a parent to supplement overseas curricula with Australian content (eg. Australian currency, the metric system) it is often not feasible (because of the way the lessons build upon each other) to pick and choose the *order* in which these curricula are undertaken in order to align with the ACARA curriculum. Similar issues apply in other subjects, like English (we use IEW, which is excellent) and technology.

For a variety of other reasons parents often deliberately choose to teach content in a different order to the ACARA curriculum. For example, I chose to teach my daughter basic sewing skills in grade 3 while she was interested in tactile activities and 'making her own things', rather than waiting for high school when making her own clothes might be seen as less fashionable. Similarly, for HASS we started with ancient history, and are currently working through medieval history. Geography, movement of people, studies of religion and culture are brought in and integrated in a contextualised fashion as we progress throughout the stages of history, rather than taught as decontextualised, dry facts. My daughter has loved this, and is already spotting patterns of human behaviour and politics that tend to repeat themselves throughout our history, showing a depth of understanding above her age level. Australian history will be similarly taught in a context-dependent manner at an age where she can more thoughtfully comprehend its historical complexities and the implications for reconciliation.

Additionally, many parents who decide to home educate their children actually do so specifically because a one-sized-fits-all curriculum does not cater to their child's individual needs. This is especially the case for parents of children with learning disabilities and neurodivergent traits such as those with ADHD, or on the autism spectrum (including those who are gifted and twice exceptional). By using a homeschooling approach that caters to their individual strengths, challenges and interests, parents are free to develop their child's talents and unlock their potential while also fostering self-confidence and – something that seems to be forgotten in the modern schoolroom – a love of learning. Often these children fail, lose confidence or become disengaged with the mainstream schooling system. If the Department truly wants to apply uniform standards to home education and ensure a minimum standard across a range of essential learning areas, surely a less prescriptive, principles-based approach would achieve the same goals but with more flexibility to help struggling students.

On a related note, **the Department needs to consider the additional workload that they are imposing upon a vulnerable section of the homeschooling community: families with**

**neurodivergent children.** Many families with neurodivergent children have little choice but to homeschool, often after mainstream schooling has failed to meet the needs of their child. Children with oppositional defiance disorder, pathological demand avoidance or ADHD can require more intensive tuition than their neurotypical counterparts as well as different approaches (such as child-led). They also require extra time and attention for focussing on everyday life skills, such as social skills, hygiene, self-care and daily routines. In addition, these children often attend multiple therapy appointments throughout the week which limits the amount of time available for homeschooling. Parents of neurodivergent children will struggle to meet the demands of the proposed changes in addition to their already overloaded lives.

To go as far as embedding this highly prescriptive curriculum standard within the primary legislation (the Act) would be a grave mistake that will result in thousands of homeschooling children falling short of their potential. From an administrative stand point, it seems impractical to adhere to and enforce. **As you will be aware, because the changes are embedded with the Act and not subordinate legislation, any issues created by this bold and ambitious implementation will be difficult to undo.**

In conclusion, while I understand the need for educational standards, the proposed amendments to section 217 of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2016* to standardise home education along with mainstream education according to the ACARA curriculum (which was not written for the purposes that it is being adopted) overlooks the individualised nature of homeschooling and is an unnecessary burden on home educators. Having to strictly adhere to the ACARA curriculum undermines the flexibility and individualised approach that makes homeschooling successful. I urge you to reconsider these proposed changes and explore more inclusive and flexible alternatives that recognise the diverse needs of homeschooling families.

Thank you for considering my concerns.