

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submitter Comments:

I am writing to express my immense concern regarding the recent education legislation changes that have been proposed in our state. As a constituent and a member of the community, I believe it is crucial to voice my apprehensions about the potential impact of these changes on our education system, children, and families. I am the mother of two wonderful boys, both of whom were very much wanted by myself and my partner. We are an IVF family, and went through the gruelling process of IVF to conceive our children, who are now 5 and 3. We also have 5 babies who we never had the chance to meet. Before deciding to embark on our parenthood journey, I was managing multiple early childhood education centres, having worked in the education sector for 10 years. I had experience across a range of early childhood education centres, including those rated as exceeding, meeting, and working towards the National Quality Standards, and including centres within primary school grounds. Having had this exposure to the education system in Queensland, and in other states, I knew that once I had children of my own, we would be a home educating family. While the Australian Curriculum itself was part of my reasoning, it also has a lot to do with the way in which I have personally heard teachers of all levels discuss children and their families, the way in which they segregate and talk down to children with differing abilities, and the complete lack of understanding across the board of appropriate strategies to support inclusion within a formal learning environment. The proposed legislation raises several concerns that I believe need to be addressed.

Firstly, the proposal to align with the Australian Curriculum. The Australian Curriculum is an incredibly complex document that has been tailored to educate children in a formal schooling environment. Many, if not most, schools employ curriculum specialists to interpret and implement this document. The current Australian Curriculum, with its rigid structure and overcrowded content, often fails to resonate with many children and can lead to disengagement from the learning process. It is evident that a one-size-fits-all approach does not effectively cater to the unique learning styles, interests, and abilities of every student. Furthermore, the sheer volume of content within the curriculum can feel overwhelming and arbitrary to students, making it difficult for them to see the relevance and meaning behind what they are learning. This can result in a loss of motivation and enthusiasm for learning, which ultimately hinders their academic progress and personal development.

Secondly, I am highly concerned about the wording of the proposed changes to section 7, where it mentions that "home education...is in the best interests of the child". Could you please clarify as to who will be making this decision, and what it will be based on? While I understand that there are circumstances where the department must step in, it does read as though all home educating families are being asked to justify their parenting choices around the education of their children. Are you also asking those families who choose to enrol their child/ren in private schools to prove that it is in the child/ren's best interest? Rather than imposing stricter regulations, I urge the committee to prioritize understanding and addressing the root causes of homeschooling trends. This entails listening to and considering the feedback from homeschooling parents, who are directly impacted by these legislative changes. Their insights and experiences are invaluable in shaping effective policies that support the diverse needs of families while ensuring the well-being and educational success of children. It's crucial to acknowledge that home education is often chosen by families for a variety of reasons, including dissatisfaction with the traditional schooling system, concerns about safety and bullying, religious or philosophical beliefs, or a desire for more personalized and flexible learning experiences tailored to individual student needs. For our family, we have chosen to home educate our children for a number of reasons, most importantly that we do not believe individual children fit into perfectly, pre-manufactured boxes. Home educating means

that we are able to follow our children's own interests, allowing them to explore the world around them in their own time, and allowing them to love learning. Moreover, I am worried about the lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding these changes. As a stakeholder in our education system, I believe it is imperative for the voices of educators, parents, students, and community members to be heard and considered in any decision-making process that impacts our education system. I would be highly interested in seeing the community consultation you've completed within the home education sector, especially feedback you've received from families that are currently home educating their children. As one of these families, I must make this clear: aligning with the Australian Curriculum is not in the best interests of either of my children. I am writing you this letter at 2pm on a Monday afternoon. Today, my 5 and 3 year olds have: assisted me in preparing, cooking, and serving breakfast; built a neighbourhood (complete with shops, houses, a pool, and a park) out of a combination of magnet tiles, wooden blocks, and loose parts; completed 2 levels of Mathseeds and extended on this by using manipulatives to demonstrate their knowledge; completed some basic copywork from "Where is the Green Sheep"; made play dough and mixed food colouring to create their desired muted tones; assisted me in creating advertising for our family business, including my 5 year old typing parts of the post; already spent 2.5 hours outside exploring our natural environment and discussing the different wildlife that visits our property; spoken with both myself and their dad about why they love homeschooling so much; helped me to write a grocery list for things that we need; visited our local library to collect books that we ordered in, choose Easter books, and to collect the next level of early readers we need; visited the supermarket to purchase our list, and discussed the prices of different items as well as the nutritional content. This led to an in-depth discussion around why we are a gluten and dairy free family, and what many of the additives in food products do to our bodies; helped to prepare lunch for one another and listened to our current read aloud while eating their lunch; and are currently getting themselves prepared to spend the rest of the afternoon outside where we will be going on a nature walk and completing some Easter crafts. While many of these things we've done so far today have links to the Australian Curriculum, I haven't planned them to be done purely so that I can tick a box. Due to the ages of my children, we do not have our days rigidly planned minute by minute; all of the above has come about naturally from their interests and from our current exploration. A big part of home educating our children is that we can be flexible with our delivery of their learning. Can you guarantee that both of my children would have been exposed to all of the above if they were sitting in a classroom today, while also being able to strengthen their sibling bond? In light of these concerns, I urge you to carefully reconsider the proposed education legislation and to prioritize the best interests of our children, 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.