

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 125
Submitted by: Charmaine Cameron
Publication: Making the submission and your name public
Attachments: No attachment

Submitter Comments:

Dear Committee Members, I write to express my deep concerns regarding the recent proposed amendments to the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. As a home-educating parent, I believe that certain provisions in this bill could have detrimental effects not only on my family but on many others within our community. I am the mother of an 11-year-old daughter who began homeschooling in October 2023. While various factors led to our decision to homeschool, including my daughter's neurodivergence and diagnosed learning disability, the primary motivation was her struggle to progress academically within the traditional schooling system. Despite being taught the Australian Curriculum for five years, my daughter's reading, writing, and spelling abilities remained at a 1st-grade level, prompting our exploration of alternative educational approaches. As a parent of a neurodivergent child, I have dedicated extensive time and effort to consulting with specialists and allied health experts to determine the most suitable educational path for my daughter. Despite our efforts to collaborate with her former school, traditional methods proved ineffective in meeting her needs. Consequently, we have adopted an interest-led learning style, which has proven to be the most engaging and effective approach for her. However, adhering to the rigid structure of the Australian Curriculum would undermine this approach and hinder her progress. The proposed changes to procedural requirements for home education applications, particularly Clause 61, Section 208(2), raise concerns regarding jurisdictional overreach and potential hardship for families. Requiring reports on educational progress outside of registration periods places an undue burden on families, especially those navigating trauma, and extends beyond the committee's jurisdiction. Furthermore, mandating evidence of progress during unregistered periods fails to account for home-educated children and their families' unique circumstances and challenges. Similarly, amendments outlined in Clause 68, Section 217(1)(b), introduce stringent requirements that may infringe upon the autonomy of home educators. Requiring home education programs to align with the Australian Curriculum and encompass diverse subjects disregards individualised learning needs and imposes a standardised approach.

Additionally, mandating written reports for all learning areas specified in the educational program adds administrative burden and diminishes the flexibility inherent in home education. The stipulation that home education plans and reports align with the Australian Curriculum raises concerns about governmental interference in educational choices and philosophies. This approach undermines the diverse and innovative approaches that home education often fosters, limiting educational opportunities for children with unique learning needs. Moreover, mandating the inclusion of mathematics and English at all grade levels may not accommodate home-educated children's varied learning trajectories and interests. Furthermore, the requirement that home education plans and reports be "consistent with" the Australian Curriculum introduces ambiguity and raises questions about interpretation, potentially leading to conflicts with regulatory authorities.

The proposed requirement for home education plans and reports to align with the Australian Curriculum raises additional concerns regarding resource accessibility and support for homeschooling families. While traditional schools have access to a wide range of resources, materials, and professional development opportunities to support curriculum implementation, it is unclear how homeschoolers would access similar resources. Questions arise regarding funding availability for homeschooling families to acquire the necessary resources and materials aligned with the Australian Curriculum. Will homeschool parents receive financial support to purchase required

textbooks, educational materials, and technology resources? Traditional students often have access to Microsoft programs and other educational software for free or at a reduced cost. Will homeschooled students have equal access to these resources to support their learning journey? Currently, these programs are at the cost of parents. Additionally, concerns arise about the professional development opportunities available to homeschooling parents. Teachers benefit from annual professional development days to enhance their teaching skills and stay updated on educational best practices. Will homeschool parents have access to similar professional development opportunities? Any regulatory changes must strike a balance between accountability and flexibility to ensure that the unique needs and circumstances of home-educated children and their families are respected and supported. I am also concerned about the lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding these changes. As a stakeholder in our education system, I believe that input from educators, parents, students, and community members is essential in decision-making processes that impact our children. I urge you to reconsider the proposed legislation carefully and prioritise the best interests of our students, teachers, and schools. In conclusion, I implore you to advocate for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to policymaking that values all stakeholders' input and ensures our education system's integrity and quality. Thank you for considering my concerns, and I look forward to your response on this critical issue.