

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 129
Submitted by: Gimuy First Nations Homeschool Co-op
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10th March 2024,

Dear Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee,

The Gimuy First Nations Homeschool Co-op is a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who live in Far North Queensland on Yidinji, Yirrgandji and Djabugandji lands that are all registered home educators with the Department of Education, Queensland. We make up 9 families (including 2 qualified teachers) with a total of 21 children and young people. Our co-op does not operate as a school but serves to support other First Nations families with planning their curriculums around their families' values, knowledge and connections providing fortnightly activities for First Nations homeschool families to engage in.

We decided to homeschool our children for different reasons, including unique learning needs, negative experiences in traditional school settings (involving both teachers and students), and dissatisfaction with the rigid and overcrowded Australian Curriculum. Ultimately, we are dissatisfied with the existing education system that predominantly centres settler knowledge rather than our own Indigenous knowledge and Arts practices. These cultural aspects are crucial for the well-being and development of our children, enabling them to make meaningful contributions to society.

Homeschooling has been a saving grace for many of our children and our families. Being able to design our own curriculums means that our children can thrive in an environment where they are not 'othered'. It is a place where their identity and culture stand as a strong foundation and core to all that we do. It is a place where we can comfortably teach our children to navigate two worlds drawing from the best of both. We have the capacity to choose and teach from a combination of world class curriculums and our own invaluable cultural knowledge. For example, our children can learn engineering in the context of Wangal (Boomerang) throwing to re-building a car engine, whilst also speaking our native language (this is an actual example of one of our children in Grade 5)! All children thrive in an environment where they can follow their own interests and take deep dives expanding their knowledge uninhibited by tasks and box ticking.

This submission is being made in response to the proposed changes to the Education Act (Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2024) that we believe will be detrimental to our ability to educate our children as First Nations people.

Australia is a signatory of the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and according to Article 14, section 1:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.

3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Unfortunately, in Cairns (Gimuy) we do not have access to an education in our own culture and in our own language and we are certainly not free from discrimination in our schools. Therefore, we have exercised our rights and chosen to *establish and control* our children's own education and have done so happily with the support of Home Education Queensland.

However, the recent changes to the Act, will seriously impede our ability to exercise our rights as Indigenous peoples. The specific clauses that we **STRONGLY DISAGREE** with, and our reasons are outlined below:

Section 7. Home education of a child or young person should be provided in a way that—

- (i) is in the best interests of the child or young person taking into account their safety and wellbeing;*

We take issue with the wording of this clause because it suggests that the government can dictate what is in the best interests of our children. As First Nations people with a history of being removed into 'mission schools' and having our children taken away for 'our benefit,' this implication is both alarming and triggering. The language used assumes that we lack the insight to determine what is best for our own children. It would be naive for us to trust in co-educating with a constantly changing government that often treats Indigenous people and knowledge as an afterthought. The question remains: who gets to decide what is truly in the best interests of our First Nations children?

Section 206. Who is eligible for provisional registration or registration for home education-

- (b) until 31 December in the year the child turns 18.*

In Queensland's mainstream schooling, grade levels are determined by the financial year, creating a distinction between children born before June 30th and those born on or after July 1st in the same calendar year. We propose that this system be consistent for

both mainstream schooling and home education. If this clause is accepted, it would mean that parents of young people born before June 30th would need to keep reporting on their home education for an entire year after their peers in mainstream schools have graduated. The question arises: why should unpaid and unfunded home educating parents be required to report to the department for longer than a teacher would?

Section 211. (1) change from 28 days to 14 days.

Parents who educate their children at home need sufficient time to teach multiple children effectively. It's crucial to provide them with ample time to respond to the Home Education Unit. Shortening the timeframe for their response would only divert a parent's attention away from teaching their child, compromising the quality of education.

Section 217(1)(b) the educational program used for the child's home education must—

(ii) be consistent with an approved education and training program; and

(ba) a parent of the child must give the chief executive a written report—

(ii) in relation to each subject or learning area that is part of the educational program used for the child's home education;

Section 217. (3) In this section—

approved education and training program means—

(a) the national school curriculum (known as the Australian Curriculum)—

(i) developed and administered by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority established under the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act 2008 (Cwlth), section 5; and

(ii) published on the authority's website; or

(b) a senior subject syllabus for a senior subject; or

(c) a vocational education and training course at level 1 or above under the AQF; or

(d) a combination of the curriculum, a syllabus or a course mentioned in paragraph (a), (b) or (c).

We strongly oppose the requirement to align our educational programs with the Australian curriculum, as also detailed in our response to section 7. Choosing to home educate our children was a deliberate move away from a one-size-fits-all, settler-centred curriculum. This conflicts directly with our Indigenous right to control our own education. The inclusion of this clause would negatively impact our ability to prioritize the needs of our children and tailor individual learning plans according to their

interests. In the current mainstream school system, we observe First Nations children falling behind as teachers feel pressured to adhere strictly to the curriculum. In our experience, this will also mean holding our children back from following interests above their grade levels due to the pressures of meeting the curriculum in other subjects.

The addition of part (ii) to report on all subjects or learning areas creates extra work and is not necessary to establish that our children are learning. Currently, our reporting obligations encompass Maths, English, and one additional subject of our choosing, with this subject alternating annually. Given that much of our learning involves cross-curriculum content, spanning multiple subjects simultaneously, our reports naturally reflect this interdisciplinary approach. Including this clause would needlessly increase the workload for both parents and education officers tasked with reviewing our plans.

Our families homeschool without financial compensation. Our co-op operates without funding, and each family has had to make sacrifices in terms of wages to prioritize the well-being of our children. The proposed changes add additional stress to homeschooling families and seem entirely unnecessary in assessing a child's learning. If these changes are implemented, they will divert our time away from valuable teaching to generate an excessive amount of evidence to meet government requirements.

More importantly, if the existing education system adequately addressed the needs of our First Nations children, there would be no need for us to homeschool. While we acknowledge efforts from Indigenous educators within the sector to innovate learning and teaching methods, we cannot afford to wait for the substantial reforms necessary for Indigenous students to truly flourish in the mainstream school environment. We hope that you can understand our concerns and are able to take into account our unique experience as First Nations home educators and how these changes will affect us.

Thankyou for taking the time to read this submission.

Regards

Gimuy First Nations Homeschool Co-op