

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submitted by: Niki Cotter
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SUBJECT: Concerns Regarding Proposed Changes to Homeschooling Legislation

I am writing to express some concerns regarding the proposed changes to homeschooling legislation. As stakeholders in the homeschooling community, it's imperative that we engage in a thorough examination of the real issues prompting families to opt for homeschooling rather than simply enforcing rigid curriculum requirements. I also have concerns regarding the inflexibility and overcrowded nature of the Australian Curriculum, particularly in how it impacts children's engagement and learning outcomes. As a concerned parent and advocate for educational reform, I strongly believe that there is an urgent need for more flexible schooling options that prioritize the diverse needs and interests of students, rather than adhering to an outdated and irrelevant curriculum.

It has come to my attention that the proposed changes haven't considered why families choose homeschooling in the first place. This approach fails to address the core issues at hand and risks further alienating homeschooling families from the educational system.

As a parent of three children, who all have diagnosed disabilities and are also neurodivergent, I have spent thousands of hours consulting with numerous specialists and allied health experts to determine how to best educate my children for over a period of 20 years. I have liaised tirelessly with, now their former, mainstream schools to try to implement these recommendations. Unfortunately, what my children require was just not able to be achieved by any of their former mainstream schools. My children all learn better with several different learning styles – those of which aren't an option at any mainstream school.

My experience with the main stream schools, who follow this apparent irreverent Australian Curriculum, will be outlined below. Keep in mind that this is over 20 years' worth of experience behind it.

My eldest daughter has struggled her entire schooling life until she dropped out in year 11. My daughter had been physically assaulted, at both primary and high school level, on several occasions including other types of constant bullying issues, never being able to comprehend what she was learning in class, nor were her teachers ever interested to go further in-depth with any topic due to the 'class size' and 'how much work they needed to cover'. I had even proved that a teacher was getting my daughters fellow classmates to mark the other classmate's own tests. Which they would of course then mark them 100% correct, even though you could clearly see that my daughter hadn't even answered all the questions, let alone got them right. But hey, as long as the teacher ticks the box that she is competent then that's all that matters right? So mainstream schooling was absolutely useless to assist my daughter and support her to be interested to learn and want a greater understanding and knowledge base. Only since she attended TAFE has her education become enjoyable and was a great way of re-motivating her to want to learn again.

My middle son is now at the beginning of completing his final year (12) at YMCA. This is a flexi high school. He had originally been attending the local (catchment) mainstream primary and high school. He had experienced constant issues with bullying and because of his flight or fight responses obviously suspensions were a very common result – which they

were always happy to send him home but not with any actual school work to proceed with. So that taught him what he had to do – not very helpful to say the least. So here is my son who hardly ever attended school and basically became completely disengaged by the middle of year 8. I wasn't handling things well by this point and felt I was an absolute useless parent. Acute Heath referred me to Mission Australia.

We started receiving support from Mission Australia, they informed me about flexi high schools. This is when I got introduced to the staff at YMCA. They were a god send. The fact that my son now travels 2 hours every morning - leaving at 7.30am, and attends every single day since year 8 – and isn't home until 4pm, and he is now completing year 12! With high grades too! He has also completed three certificate II qualifications. Without their support my son would have sadly ended up exactly the same as my daughter.

Now onto my youngest, again the same story, constant bully issues and this also started from prep. He attended his local (catchment) mainstream primary school. The same as his brother and sister had also attended. He attended this school until the end of what was meant to be his year 2 but basically hadn't actually attended school for longer than 30 mins every school day by this point – if he wasn't on suspension for his fight or flight. I had tried to get the school to support him with alternatives or try different styles and methods, as they had already gone through this with my other son & daughter. The HOD for the SEP decided she knew my son better and would just force him to be in the class when clearly it wasn't working in this structure. We tried having specialist sit with the school to find better ways to structure his learning – this eventually ended with them saying he 'can't be supported here'. I then found Mastery Schools Australia (MSA), which you should know is a school apparently for children with learning disabilities, but clearly by the 5 months being there - they did not help - with now what is labelled as 'behavioural issues'. He didn't last 10 minutes of a school day, unless of course he was suspended for his 'behavioural issues'. They also advised they wouldn't take him back unless we sent them a letter saying how amazing the school was. That won't ever be happening.

So, what are my options? His local (catchment) primary school can't help him, nor can MAS. What choice do I have left? I haven't got spare money in this economy, but I also want to make sure that my son is actually going to continue to have a quality learning experience and enjoy adding to his knowledge base. All the specialists that my son has had - have all told me that homeschooling will be the better environment for him. This is to provide him with a safer and more relaxed experience. Help him get better control of his behavioural responses but also grow up to be a better functioning adult for the future. Adhering to the Australian Curriculum would render this impossible for my child, and to this date, has been the actual issue.

Since starting home school I am now fortunate to have the flexibility to choose how I provide a high-quality education for my son, and my once struggling and disengaged son is now thriving. He will now engage with his homeschooling for over 4-5 hours a day, even through the school holidays, he is busting to learn new and exciting information which is growing his knowledge base more than he ever did whilst in mainstream schools and following the Australian Curriculum. He has also been gaining life skills which will be essential for him as a functioning productive adult in the future. We have connected with other homeschooling families via social media groups – this has been an absolutely amazing

and inspiring experience for my youngest son. The dramatic change of behaviour has been just been so overwhelming for my son and for my family. Also, the behaviour of his peers, of a higher quality and more intrigued on learning themselves than those he used to be around when he was in the mainstream school environment following the Australian Curriculum.

Additionally, there is a pressing need for curriculum reform that prioritizes essential skills and competencies relevant to the 21st century. Rather than adhering to a curriculum that feels arbitrary and disconnected from real-world contexts, we should focus on cultivating critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and communication skills that are essential for success in today's rapidly changing world.

According to recent research collected by the Home Education Unit (2022), two of three home educating families have chosen to do so because of an underlying disability or health issue. It's crucial to acknowledge that homeschooling 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.

One of the primary motivations for homeschooling is to provide our children with a personalized learning experience that fosters their intellectual curiosity and allows them to learn at their own pace. These new regulations threaten to restrict this flexibility and stifle their natural inclination to explore and discover the world around them.

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. I urge the committee to explore alternative schooling options that offer greater flexibility and autonomy in curriculum design and delivery. By providing more choices for families and educators, we can create learning environments that are better aligned with the diverse needs and aspirations of students.

In conclusion, I respectfully urge the committee to reconsider the proposed changes to homeschooling legislation and to engage in a collaborative dialogue with homeschooling stakeholders to identify and address the real issues driving this educational choice. By doing so, we can work towards a more inclusive and responsive educational system that respects the choices and concerns of all families.

Thank you for considering my perspective.