

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

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The Honourable Ms Di Farmer  
Minister for Education  
Queensland Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane  
QLD 4000

Dear Minister Farmer,

I trust this letter finds you well. I am a teacher with over twenty years' experience working in a variety of settings: primary, high and tertiary, state, private and community-run schools. I home-educated my own children in the 90s for four years, and am now doing post-graduate research on Home Educating Mothers in Central Queensland. As a scholar and advocate for equitable education, I write to you with sincere concern regarding Clause 68 of Amendment s 217 (5) (3), particularly its implications for neurodivergent *and* gifted and talented children within Queensland's educational framework, and such students who are currently being educated at home.

You will know that home education is the fastest-growing educational choice in Queensland, with over 10 000 students currently registered with the HEU and another 20 000 estimated "going under the radar." Speaking from experience as a Special Needs teacher I can tell you, hand on heart, that in the course of my research I have met the most amazing, dedicated mothers who have given their ASD children an exceptionally good education that they simply would not receive within the system. One example of many: a highly autistic child who was non-verbal and treated very poorly at school was removed after a few days (when he was 4) and is now (at 17) studying theology, history, philosophy and linguistics at university level. When I asked his mother if their family followed ACARA she laughed and said it was impossible. She gave one example, that her son, being highly autistic, is time blind. He will NEVER meet the Year 3 outcomes for reading the time. And that's okay; so far that is not impacting his university studies or his job as an archivist.

Clause 68 of Amendment s 217 stipulates that an "approved education and training program" primarily refers to the Australian Curriculum. While recognising there may be some potential benefits of "standardised" education, I urge you to consider the limitations and potential repercussions of adhering solely to a "one size fits all" curriculum approach, especially concerning neurodivergent children.

As you no doubt are aware, in your capacity as Education Minister, neurodiversity encompasses a broad spectrum of neurological differences, including but not limited to autism, ASD, ADHD, dyslexia, and various learning disabilities. The rigidity of a standardised curriculum can present significant barriers for neurodivergent learners, as it often fails to accommodate their diverse learning styles, strengths, and challenges. By tethering educational provision exclusively to this standardised model, we risk overlooking the individualised needs and potential of neurodivergent and other students with unique learning needs. In my role as a "Special Needs" teacher working for Education Queensland, I saw this time and time again, not because the teachers weren't working hard—we all

worked *extremely* hard, drowning in paperwork—but because the system simply isn't equipped to meet the very unique needs and interests of individual students. It cannot be done with our current models.

Research consistently demonstrates that neurodivergent children thrive in environments that embrace flexibility, personalised learning approaches, and accommodations tailored to their unique neurocognitive and social/emotional profiles. Throw in the nurturing space that deep love, commitment and belonging to a family provides, and you have ... home education. Limiting children's educational opportunities to a homogeneous curriculum not only undermines their academic progress but perpetuates a system that fails to recognise and celebrate neurodiversity as a valuable aspect of our society. It breaks my heart to think of all the wasted gifts and talents that have slipped through our education system.

Therefore, I respectfully urge you to reconsider the current approach outlined in Clause 68 and advocate for greater flexibility and inclusivity within Queensland's education system. This necessitates meaningful consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders, including educators, home-educating parents, advocacy groups, and neurodivergent individuals themselves. By engaging in collaborative dialogue and incorporating diverse perspectives, we can develop more responsive, inclusive educational frameworks and options that cater to the needs of *all* learners. It is my understanding that the Tasmanian Government is an example of best practice when it comes to consultation with home-educating groups.

Moreover, I encourage the Queensland Government to explore avenues through which it can really support and empower all home educating families. This may involve providing access to specialised resources, edu.au email addresses for every student so they may access knowledge freely, professional development opportunities for parents and caregivers, and establishing networks for peer support and knowledge exchange. Perhaps the Queensland Government would even consider reimbursing families for educational costs, because many families have had to forego a second income to home educate their children, and they are doing it tough financially. By fostering a kind, supportive environment for home educators, the government can enhance education outcomes and promote the wholistic development of neurodivergent and gifted learners within our communities, as well as reduce the pressures currently being experienced by those in the Education System.

In conclusion, I implore you to prioritise the well-being and educational equity of neurodivergent and other children by reconsidering the restrictive nature of Clause 68 (5)(3) and advocating for a more inclusive, flexible approach to education in Queensland. Together, we can work towards a future where every child, regardless of neurodiversity, has the opportunity to thrive and excel in their chosen field. My research has revealed that if there were education alternatives to what is currently on offer, some mothers would happily respond! One day we may even embrace a BOTH/AND approach, and allow home educated children into schools a couple of days a week! We are only limited by our imaginations (and the holy dollar, admittedly, but it is clear big things need to change in the educational arena). I would certainly be interested in being part of a working group, should you so desire.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I am confident that, with your leadership, commitment, and willingness to work with home educators, we can effect positive change within Queensland's education system.

Yours sincerely,

Nicola Apps  
Mother  
Grandmother  
Teacher  
HDR Student