

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 200
Submitted by: [REDACTED]
Publication: Making the submission public but withholding your name
Attachments: See attachment
Submitter Comments:

12th March 2024

Dear Committee Members,

RE: CONCERNS REGARDING AMMENDMENTS to the EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) and OTHER LEGISLATION AMMENDMENT BILL 2024

I write to you as a highly educated mother of four children and a new home educator in Queensland who values high quality learning for all children. I am extremely concerned about several aspects of the proposed amendments to the Home Education requirements in QLD. Most significant of these concerns is the proposed requirement of home educators to follow the same rigid and standardised Australian curriculum that is used in classrooms, ACARA.

Homeschooling provides a unique opportunity to educate children with flexibility, intelligence and a deep understanding of the individual needs of each child. Good mental health outcomes for families is often a huge motivator for beginning on this path. Homeschooling in a large family requires thoughtful delivery for multiple age groups of children simultaneously. The depth and breadth of a topic is adjusted in an age-appropriate manner for each child. Teachers in schools struggle to achieve full curriculum delivery in one age group, despite being provided with additional training and regular support from specialised staff in its implementation. How is this proposed requirement of forcing ACARA onto homeschooling families either practical or sensitive to the unique environment of homeschooling?

My children are neurodivergent, and I would like to briefly explain our experiences that led us to homeschooling. We left mainstream schooling at the completion of 2023, due to ongoing distressed behaviour from our children. School refusal was a regular feature in our life, causing stress with employers and school alike. After just one year of full time school, my prep age daughter had restricted her diet immensely, and was experiencing daily headaches, stomach aches and meltdowns. The weight of comparison, expectation and demand to fit in saw her mental health plummet. My eldest daughter too, would often curl into a ball of a school morning, crying and refusing to move or engage with the world. Two intelligent, bright and curious children by nature, both losing their spark because of diverse needs that were unable to be met through a standardised setting.

In early 2024 we began distance education with a public school in QLD, filled with hope and optimism that we could still be 'keeping up' with peers while learning at home. These hopes were quickly dashed. Our family was falling apart due to the huge expectations in trying to implement two separate age levels of curriculum, in what essentially became two unsustainable back-to-back school days. Both children required 1:1 support to engage with the dry and fast paced curriculum. The content lacked personal meaning, and deadlines and assessment loomed within the first week of starting. I contacted teachers and no accommodations were made – my children just needed to be 'braver', 'more resilient' and we needed to 'keep trying' so they could tick their boxes. After only two weeks, there was complete refusal from both children to participate in the curriculum and our family relationships were suffering. My husband and I looked at each other in despair and decided there had to be a better way.

We found it with the Home Education Unit. We discovered an active, vibrant community of likeminded parents, who needed a different approach for their children. The relief was immense. We discovered that education did not need to be a distressing, standardised, one size fits all experience.

The safety of knowing we could begin with provisional registration while we recovered from school trauma and came up with a new plan going forward was a welcome shift in energy – we began to hope again. In just a few short weeks of home schooling, both of my daughters have improved mental health. The weight of expectation being lessened, they are now able to access creativity and curiosity that had been entirely shut down. My youngest has begun eating well again. They have found their brave and resilience in experiencing new, different things of their choosing – a new sport through the local homeschool community, new friendships, learning through engaging topics and interests in an age-appropriate way. Taking difficult concepts at their own pace. Being supported with gaps in their knowledge that the speed of the overcrowded Australian curriculum did not allow time to consolidate.

Di Farmer has stated that the proposed law amendments will benefit every student and family. She stated that getting home education students to follow the Australian Curriculum was for the purpose of accessing a high-quality education, no matter who they are or where they live in QLD. Approximately 2/3 of the homeschooling community have chosen to do so because of disability and diversity. A high-quality education is already stipulated and monitored by the Home Education Unit in QLD. What evidence is there that this is not being adhered to? The more we have taken a deep dive into different learning approaches, the more we understand and value that there are many and varied ways to achieve a high-quality education. No child comes in a ‘standardised’ form – it stands to reason that not every child will flourish academically with a single approach. The Australian Curriculum was designed for consistency across schools, and for use in classrooms with large groups of children. It was not developed with the specific needs of small group learning across age groups in mind.

Homeschooling is not and should never become ‘school at home’. The very beauty and success of homeschooling is due to the freedom to develop skills at the child’s pace. It is important families don’t lose the freedom to choose meaningful, individualised learning activities for their children. Whatever the driving reason behind their homeschooling decision, the vast majority of parents pour an incredible amount of love, sacrifice and commitment into their children’s education. We are motivated by positive mental health outcomes and a desire for our children to succeed in their chosen lives and careers. Do we still refer to the curriculum for reference at times as we go along – absolutely! It is a resource freely available to us to use as part of our planning and schooling. Should that be legislated and imposed with strict conditions of adherence onto vulnerable, struggling families who have found hope in education for the first time in years? Absolutely not.

Thank you for your support in listening to the genuine concerns of our collective QLD homeschooling community and in hearing the voices of many who disagree with this new legislation. We look forward to hearing some positive changes to this legislation before it is voted upon, in consultation with genuine homeschooling families who want what is best for our children.

Yours sincerely,

xxxxxxxxxxxxxx