

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submitter Comments:

As a teacher and former home educator, I have concerns with several of the proposed amendments to legislation regarding home education. First, the requirement for home educators to follow the Australian Curriculum, which fails to consider the diverse learning styles, interests, strengths and challenges of children. Many people who choose to homeschool do so because the requirements of the Australian Curriculum did not suit their child or meet their needs and have found their child to have thrived outside of the constraints of the curriculum with the freedom to learn in their own way by following their own interests. Following the Australian Curriculum assumes that having every child knowing the same things at the same time is a desirable outcome. This cookie-cutter approach serves no-one, particularly not students who are working ahead of or behind the level they are “supposed to be at”, or those with disabilities which make accessing the curriculum difficult or impossible. As a society, why do we seem bent on making everyone the same, when clearly society is much better served – as is the wellbeing of each individual – by being made up of people with a wide range of diverse skills and abilities? My own daughter thrived when allowed the freedom to follow her interests, taking advantage of opportunities not afforded in the Australian Curriculum, including studying online university courses in Forensic Science and Chemistry at the age of 14, learning how to render suet to tallow to make soap and teaching herself hands-on skills such as sewing, knitting and special effects make-up to name a few. She also greatly benefitted from the opportunity to explore her identity as an autistic young woman and build a strong self-esteem free from the constraints and dictates of a curriculum which did not suit her needs. My work in schools has allowed me to witness the negative effects of strict adherence to an inflexible curriculum. Many children are left feeling like failures because they don’t meet the arbitrary standards for their age. This leads to mental health and behavioural issues and is one of the many reasons families leave the school system and choose to homeschool. Children grow and develop at different rates, and as individuals they have strengths and challenges in different areas. Homeschooling allows parents to nurture their child’s strengths while providing targeted support for their challenges along with time and space to develop at their own rate. This improves children’s self-esteem, confidence and mental health. The requirement to stick to the Australian Curriculum would severely hamper this. Another very concerning amendment is the proposed requirement to show that homeschooling is in “the best interests of the child”. Who determines their best interest and based on what criteria? Parents are best placed to know their child’s needs and having to attempt to prove this to strangers who will most likely not understand homeschooling philosophy, practices and benefits is a concerning and unnecessary burden, and a gross overreach of government authority. Homeschooling families already provide extensive evidence to the Home Education Unit that they are providing a high-quality education. My concern with this proposed amendment is that it will be a mechanism for removing homeschooling as an option families can choose, instead requiring “permission” to be sought from an as-yet-unknown body. This is a violation of our freedom of choice.