

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Committee Secretary Education, Employment,
Training and Skills Committee

Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000



13 March 2024

Dear Ms Farmer MP and committee members,

I am writing to share the positive impact that home education has had on our family and my concerns over the proposed imposition of the Australian curriculum on home educating families.

The proposed changes in clause 68, in particular the s217(1)(b)(ii) requirement that home education must be consistent with an approved education and training programme (as defined in s217(3)), will stop home educators from being able to create the individualized learning pathways that are so essential to many children. In many ways most children would thrive best on a personalized educational pathway and childhood experience but that is not a fair or reasonable expectation in a school based system with the volume of children to cater for. Home educators take a huge pressure off the schooling system with their teacher to student ratio particularly for students who have diagnoses or learn differently.

The vast majority of home educators who choose a flexible curriculum do so to benefit their children's education. We have the capacity to really get to know our child and how they learn, to move with our child, incorporate their interests, nurture their natural love of and eagerness to learn and the time to cultivate their talents. Each child is an individual and when they have the time to learn and to love who they are, time to practice at their particular giftings and have confidence in themselves as an individual it is so much easier to teach them needed education on top of that framework. They step out into the world already knowing how they can contribute to it, what subjects they are gifted in and how that will transfer into further study and career. Flexible learning is proving to be the advantage that many children need to be their best which benefits our communities and the world.

For us personally we have 5 very individual children. We have at times utilised the Distance Education model which uses the Australian Curriculum and with any length of time with the Australian curriculum our children have gone backwards emotionally and mentally which has negatively affected their academic achievements.

As an example, our son did year 6 to halfway through year 7 with the national curriculum. With his love of science and maths we thought that he would get through the higher levels of those subjects better in a more structured, year level based system. We thought ACARA would help him advance but instead it had the opposite effect, he totally crumbled mentally, emotionally and academically under the workload and structure. He lost his love of science as his science knowledge was not taken into account in the science assessments which were marked down for his lesser English ability. Our leading scientists certainly need a good understanding of English but how many of our future scientists are being discouraged from excelling at the tender age of 12 years old when they are marked down for their English capabilities in a science exam?

Our son also has loved Maths throughout most of his schooling life but with ACARA there is a set structure with no avenue for a child to slow down or speed up and this killed his love of Maths. The DE school's answer to him struggling was that he only needed to do the core subjects of Maths, English, Science and HASS which might be great for some children but had my son feeling like he was a failure and made his learning experience unenjoyable and very stressful. When children are stressed and not enjoying their education their brains are not as capable of learning or retaining knowledge. For many children a flexible curriculum increases their capacity to learn.

We changed curriculums for our son and went through the Home Education Association with a flexible programme and he is a completely transformed teenager. He is confident, loves himself again and sees his value in the world. He is devouring uni level science books, enjoying Maths and self-tackling tricky math concepts, he won't stop until he has mastered a concept. He learns the English needed for life and uni much better with a concept focused, straightforward approach than he did with beautiful units that wove learning throughout the term but for him had him drowning so much under the volume of tasks that he missed the main learning concept. He doesn't learn about history, geography, art and languages at the correct year level according to the Australian curriculum but he devours books, DVDs and hands on learning on these topics and has a much deeper understanding than he ever did trying to do set learning at a set time in those subjects. He is able to weave all this knowledge into real life and make decisions standing on the shoulders of our ancestor's historical knowledge and scientific understanding rather than just seeing them as separate-from-life school subjects.

With the proposed changes we know from past evidence that our son's life will regress. He has not needed his psychologist's support for 6 months. Our daily reality with ACARA is frustration and tears 5 days a week and fortnightly sessions with his psychologist to support him to a level where he barely scrapes through life. I fail to see how this will benefit my son and others like him. He is highly educated. He is confident and thriving and looks forward to studying his way towards his career goals. Your current proposed plan is an attempt to benefit his education and childhood but it will achieve the opposite of that.

As our older children step out into senior years and the workforce we can see the benefit that a flexible curriculum has given them. The pausing of some subjects in year 9 for their mental health before the heavier senior years workload, the focusing on a particular subject/concept for a while to really understand it or cement it, the taking time out to cultivate a talent, the chance to deep dive into a topic and see it from different angles, all these things have helped them academically rather than held them back. Our eldest has just turned 18 with certificate III's in IT and in Library and Information services already completed 6 months ahead of time. She has a job & plans to work before starting her diploma soon. She knew what she wanted to do from year 6 and with flexibility was able to focus on learning in the way that she needed to whilst still completing her schooling to year 12.

Our 15 year old isn't so sure what she wants to do and a flexible programme means that she can try out some real world experiences without missing out on schooling. She is able to create a structure where she can do a placement in childcare with a TAFE Certificate II and an AUSLAN certificate and still include her love of history with the required year 10 subjects of Maths, English and Science. When TAFE has assessments due she can focus on them that week and focus on other subjects when TAFE is quieter. Not needing to submit dozens of assessments to a set time schedule actually means she learns things more thoroughly and connects with learning content more quickly with a more focused and enjoyable approach. She is getting the opportunity to try different work environments and find out where her skills and abilities lie beyond academics without needing to compromise on

the quality of her academic education and without increased anxiety because her curriculum is more flexible than ACARA.

Our 6 year old did her prep year with the Australian curriculum and was considered 'behind' at the end of 2023 because her English assessments were based on reading full sentences and she still had a few letters that she did not know. The DE school suggested repeating prep even though she was ahead in Maths and already knew everything that was being taught in prep Science before she was taught it (the result of being child number 5 in a science loving family). That might seem like a small thing but it is not really the best possible scenario that a child needs to do an entire year of subject content that they already know.

We have done a flexible programme for her in 2024 for year 1 and that has enabled her to move ahead in subjects where her understanding is higher and progress at a slower pace with subjects that she needs more time to fully comprehend. Coming to the end of term 1 she has progressed further with her reading than she did all year in her DE prep year because we have had the time to focus on her individual needs and utilise a greater variety of programmes. When she has a day where she is loving learning reading and really on a roll with it we can just focus on reading and leave other subjects for another time. The Home Education Association currently just needs to see progression so now our 6 year old can move ahead with science and learn things that are new to her. With the proposed changes she will be held back again by curriculum requirements and will be bored ticking curriculum boxes which will leave her with no spare time to learn at the knowledge level she is actually at in subjects like Science.

With a flexible curriculum all our children can move with real life situations without having their school learning affected negatively. Inevitable circumstances such as sickness, extreme weather, tricky subjects, struggles with reading, mental health struggles, dentist/doctor/ OT/ psychologist appointments, ASD, ADHD and dyslexia uniqueness do not result in missing days of school or in falling behind all because our programme is flexible time wise, content wise and tailored to cater for their areas of struggle and cultivate their areas of gifting.

My own story is one where I was in school some years and home educated others. In my teen years I chose to home educate the remainder of highschool until grade 12. The flexible curriculum meant that I wasn't sitting around waiting for other students to finish tasks, I could dive deeper into subjects that I loved and I could structure my day into a schedule that I thrived on. I had no issues studying Accounting after school and later on doing a Counselling diploma in my 30's.

In order for our younger 3 children to be able to thrive and explore the world and themselves as successfully as our older children and I myself have, we as parents need to have the freedom to not strictly follow any one curriculum or year level schedule. We have seen huge academic benefit in pausing curriculum learning for mental health, tweaking programmes, having some subjects in higher grades while others are in lower and many other things that a flexible approach allows us. When individually tailored across 13 years of schooling it all balances out and young adults who have learned this way are not behind or disadvantaged. In fact they may often have a more accurate understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and more confidence in who they are as an individual. They often know how they study and learn best and are already experienced in the tools they need to motivate themselves and nurture themselves through tricky study or life situations.

Please reconsider the changes that will take this freedom of individualized learning away from us. Our children are thriving because they are not tied to one way of learning. They are thriving academically, mentally and emotionally because their uniqueness can be catered for and

championed with our flexible learning programme. To stick to the Australian curriculum would be a backward step academically for our family.

I have included my contact details because I would love to hear your thoughts on this and answer any questions that you have.

Thank you for your time,

Angie Christoff

