

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 318
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Dear Committee

Please find following my submission in relation to the *Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024* recently introduced to Queensland Parliament.

I am particularly concerned with the proposed amendments in relation to **home education**.

The *Explanatory Notes* to the Bill state that the amendments are to:

- 1) **enhance the regulation of home education** (page 1) by
- 2) **prescribing the requirements for the education program**, including that it be consistent with an approved education and training program (page 8)

And in relation to the guiding principles, that home education should be:

- 3) **provided in a way that is the best interests of the child and ensures that the child receives a high-quality education** (page 11)

I will address each of these points in reverse order on the following pages.

Regarding ‘the best interests of child and high-quality education’:

The phrase ‘best interests of the child’ is not defined nor made clear by the legislation (please refer to the *Legislative Standards Act 1992* section 4 (3) (k)) despite the *Explanatory Notes* stating there is no identified inconsistency with FLPs (page 17).

The *Statement of Compatibility* states in the school absences section (page 3) that ‘what will be in each child’s ‘best interests’ will depend on their personal circumstances’. Is the phrase ‘best interests of the child’ in the proposed Bill at section 7 in relation to home educators to be interpreted in the same way? Who determines what the personal circumstances are that determine the best interests of the child? The parent? The Education Department? Someone else? This is ambiguous and home educators need this clarified.

In similar vein, ‘high-quality education’ is not defined nor is it a guiding principle for all those who do not home educate. All other educators are only required to provide positive learning experiences, an inclusive, safe and supportive learning environment, and recognise educational needs and wellbeing (proposed section 7(b)). Why are home educators prescribed guidelines above and beyond that of any other educator? The guidelines should be equal for all.

I’m not suggesting that high-quality education is not important. In fact, it is already mandated in the existing legislation for home educators at section 217 (1)(a).

Research indicates that one of the main reasons parents choose to home educate is because of a perceived failure of schools to provide a high-quality education. According to a home education survey completed by the Education Department in November 2022, 20% of home educating parents have teacher education qualifications. One in five parents are teachers and are choosing not to send their children to school. A concerning statistic.

The survey also found that at least 45% of parents have a Bachelor Degree or higher qualification. This is not an insignificant point, as often home educators are portrayed to be uneducated, lacking insight and unable to make informed decisions regarding their children’s education. Home education attracts all sorts of families very capable of educating their children, and it always comes with great personal sacrifice.

As I discuss later in my submission, home education provides invaluable flexibility in terms of being able to present a tailored curriculum to students.

Individualised learning is surely the crème de la crème of a ‘high-quality education’.

I do not believe section 7(da) is required in the legislation.

Requested course of action:

Remove section 7(da) from the proposed Bill. If not removed, explain:

- What are the best interests of the child and who determines them
- Why home educators are subject to additional guiding principles, and define the terms involved

Regarding ‘prescribing the requirements for the education program, including that it be consistent with an approved education and training program’

I am most concerned with this proposed amendment.

The ACARA website states, ‘the curriculum provides teachers, parents, students and the community with a clear understanding of what students should learn regardless of where they live or what school they attend’. It is a complex document, designed for teachers to achieve learning consistency in schools throughout the country.

Home educators are not concerned with learning consistency between families, nor do they compare themselves with the school-attending child next door. That’s because they are deeply vested in making curriculum choices that are ‘in the best interests’ of their children. Technology now presents home educators with literally a world full of resources and programs that can be accessed and tailored to suit an individual child’s needs and interests. They don’t require a legislated curriculum to tell them what to do.

Not only do they not require a legislated curriculum, implementing the ACARA will be difficult for families who prefer to teach certain subject matter to all children at once (for example, history). It makes more sense to teach the same subject matter to all children at the same time, rather than teach 4 different history topics to 4 children.

The ACARA is not a practical solution for family education, and it will become a significant burden on educators mentally, administratively and practically.

The ACARA is not THE standard in high-quality education. Homeschooling provides invaluable flexibility in terms of being able to present a tailored curriculum to students. Imagine if every student in a school received an IEP (individual education plan). Requiring compliance to the ACARA limits the unique opportunity home educators have to provide education that is in the best interests of the child.

Furthermore, senior syllabus subjects cannot be properly implemented in a home setting. The QCAA states that a syllabus’s function is to support schools in delivering the QCE and calculation of ATAR rank. Each year study plans are submitted for approval by schools. The QCAA will not be reviewing and approving study plans submitted by every home education family with a senior secondary school student. The administrative load would be enormous, and home educators are not trained in the implementation of these syllabi.

Section 217 (1)(ba) also requires reporting on every learning area. This is a dramatic increase in the existing reporting requirements.

It is not in the best interests of home educated children to restrict home educators to using ‘an approved program’ (section 217 (1)(b)(ii)) and limit approved programs to either the ACARA, a senior syllabus subject, or a VET course (section 217 (3)).

I do not believe the existing section 217 requires amendment.

Requested course of action:

Do not amend the existing section. Otherwise, reconsider and explain:

- What support is going to be provided to home educators to implement the ACARA
- Remove the requirement to complete QCAA subjects
- Detail the extent of reporting required on each subject area

Regarding ‘enhance the regulation of home education’

The purpose of the bill is regulation. Home educators do not want more regulation. Support, yes. Validation of their right to choose, yes. Administrative nightmare, no.

Education from the home is a fluid, intermingled, and highly tailored education. The existing legislation contains reporting requirements, and a course of action if reporting requirements are not met. The Department can already request additional information if there is reason to believe reporting or planning is insufficient.

There is no reason to increase the burden on home educators who are already meeting these requirements.

Parents will be spending more time researching, interpreting, reporting and administrating a process which takes them away from the more important task of educating their children. Reporting should be a joy not a burden.

Conclusion

I hope that my submission has raised issues that you will thoughtfully consider and act upon, before recommending any changes to the existing Bill. More liaison and consultation with “real” home educators is needed.

About me

I have had the privilege of home educating my four children over the last decade, and in 2022 returned to Queensland after 17 years interstate. My first two children are academically advanced and I was not convinced that their school could provide an education that met their needs (both tested highly gifted, and in some subjects were working multiple years above grade level). Lack of teacher skill (for example, spelling errors), lack of understanding of gifted students, and an apparent inability for the school to work with me to meet my children where they were at academically led me to conclude that home education provided an opportunity for a tailored curriculum, allowed for asynchronous development and enabled my children to explore areas of interest in more depth at a younger age. I also have a child that shows signs of dyslexia. Teaching him at home enables him to go at his own pace and focus on areas that need extra work.

Professionally, I am a Chartered Accountant, with degrees in Commerce and Arts (Japanese) from the University of Queensland. Home educating my children is not a decision that I have made flippantly. I have willingly sacrificed a professional career and most of my spare time, to do what I think is best for my children – and that is to home educate them.

Yours sincerely

Corinne Deighton