


Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submitted by: 
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RE: The Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Dear Committee,

I have serious concerns about the proposals in the Education Bill 2024. AS a constituent and a member of the community, I feel it is my duty to voice my objections. I have outlined some specific concerns below,

- **The requirement for a full plan to be written prior to provisional registration.**

Submitting a full plan at the time of removing a child from school is unrealistic for many families, and could potentially leave children in unsafe situations at school. Specifically, situations where the child's physical wellbeing or mental health is being negatively impacted.

An example would be the case of my own daughter, who was homeschooled for 8 months in Grade 5. She is currently in Grade 9 in mainstream school. My daughter had loved school from prep through to Grade 5. In Grade 5, due to a range of factors, she became extremely unhappy, anxious and unwell in the school environment. She had reached the point where she was urinating up to eight times per hour at certain times of the day, and crying hysterically every night for about half an hour. I finally said "enough is enough" and made the decision to remove her from school to pursue homeschooling.

At the time, both her paediatrician and the teachers at school had stated that they believed it was possible that she might need to be medicated to help deal with the symptoms she was displaying. We had also sought the assistance of a urinary continence specialist, who thought a long rehabilitation period with pelvic exercises might be required. I felt that removing her from school would help to resolve her continence issues, overwhelm, and anxiety - as they had specifically coincided with a range of issues that had been occurring at school. Naturally I wanted to explore this option before we put a 10-year-old onto psychiatric medications and a pelvic rehabilitation program.

Due to the fact that we had 60 days to submit a plan, I was able to remove her from school as soon as things became utterly unbearable for her, and as soon as I had realized that circumstances at school itself may be the root of the problem. Within five days she had stopped hysterical crying at night, and within eight days she had

stopped the frequent urination. This was after nearly two entire months of her suffering. Within such a short time our daughter once again became the happy and engaged child we had known before. There was zero need for her to take medication or undertake pelvic rehabilitation – she simply needed to be removed from the school environment that was not serving her at that time.

Had I had to submit a full plan prior to getting provisional registration, I have no doubt my daughter would have continued to suffer with the excessive urination frequency (a sign of high anxiety in her case) and would have continued to suffer the nightly hysteria for the additional weeks that it took me to prepare the plan, causing unnecessary distress and harm. I urge you to please reconsider this amendment, as I really fear that many children may be at risk of harm as a result of this requirement.

This particular proposed amendment seems to be in direct contradiction to the Department of Education's stated approach of "keeping children and students safe by protecting them from harm or risk of harm." It also seems to be in contradiction to Dianne Farmer MP's claim that "we need to make sure that the interests of the student are the priority - especially in regard to their wellbeing and safety - and this is what this legislation will do." To the contrary, this proposed amendment is likely to have the complete opposite result, whereby children remain in situations that are not conducive to their wellbeing or safety, simply because many parents will not have the resources or capacity to produce the detailed plans required by the department as soon as their child requires a move to homeschooling.

The other issue that I am highly concerned about is:

- **The requirement for all homeschooling families to follow the national curriculum.**

I have particular concerns about this for children of high school age. One of the absolute blessings of homeschool is the ability to tailor a program that fits the abilities and interests of the child. Homeschooling parents, unlike teachers, are not catering to a cohort with limited 1-on-1 time. And they are not catering to a large group of children who have a variety of future endeavors. Homeschooling parents are catering to individual children with more focused interest-based learning areas.

By the time students have reached high school, they tend to have defined areas of interest. Many have an idea of what they might like to pursue as a career. Even those who don't have very defined interests will tend to know what subjects they really have no interest in at all. Many precious hours can be taken up by having to do all subjects within the national curriculum, regardless of whether the student has any interest in or aptitude for some of those subjects. Being forced to study subjects that are of little interest can really demotivate kids and destroy their love of learning,

having a knock-on effect on all the subjects they might otherwise have been interested in. Hours can be wasted on covering curriculum for subjects of no relevance or interest to the child. Hours that could be dedicated to developing a much higher level of understanding of specific areas of interest, ensuring the child remains engaged with their love of learning.

By the time they have reached early high school, children have had many years of exposure to most subjects, and many already know that (for example) they have little interest in science, but are incredibly interested in literature, creative writing, media arts and drama. Or that they have little interest in comparative literature, but are extremely interested in math and science. An incredible benefit of homeschooling is that kids can follow their interest areas and explore them to a level that most schools can only dream of teaching.

Homeschooling students (when unbound by the national curriculum, as they are now), are also exploring subject areas that are not provided as part of the curriculum. Students in Grade 8 or 9 (or even younger!) can be studying psychology, or archeology, or marine biology, or a languages that are not available at their local primary or high school. They can be studying alternative subjects in great depth and with great interest. Or they can be dabbling in many subject areas that aren't offered at schools, but that can serve them well in the workplace later. For example, some homeschooling students are exploring special effects makeup in late primary or early high school, or learning about building and architecture. Exploring these rich and varied subjects can help them to identify interests that can be turned into jobs.

The ability to explore subjects of interest rather than following the curriculum can be a fertile breeding ground for young people to develop high-level skills in particular specialty areas. What a shame it would be to have all homeschool kids spending valuable time and energy on studying history or calculus when their passions are creative writing, psychology and teaching. The contribution that these kids can make to the workforce after homeschooling should not be discounted. Homeschooling students tend to identify their passions early and follow them with enthusiasm. And they become adults who love their jobs and thrive in them. Just as students who love and are interested in their work tend to remain engaged and thrive.

Children who are homeschooled can also expand their areas of interest and take TAFE course or even university level subjects far earlier than their peers at school if they are not bound by curriculum requirements. Some homeschooling students are studying at university from as early as 14 years of age! This would simply not be possible if they were bound by the curriculum. Early access to university can result in early placement into the workforce.

A one-size-fits-all approach can never recognize the diverse needs of children, nor is it in their best interests. In large classrooms in state, Catholic and private schools it is not practical or possible to teach in a way that meets the needs of every child. Hence the application of a national curriculum in this circumstance makes sense in some ways, as teachers cannot possibly be expected to adjust their resources and subject content to suit the interests and learning styles of 30 different children. This is precisely where homeschooling with a flexible curriculum can deliver a higher quality education and better outcomes for students. Parents who choose to homeschool (often at great cost to themselves) are committed to providing an education that is tailor made for their child. Parents can specifically tailor the content and type of delivery to suit their children's needs. This cannot be done if they are required to follow the national curriculum, which was designed for a completely different teaching environment. Imposing the national curriculum would be a step backwards for students who are currently able to receive personalized curriculums in the homeschooling environment.

Imposition of the national curriculum is also likely to heavily impact students with neurodivergence, disability and children working above or below their grade level due to giftedness or learning disabilities. Imposing a one-size-fits-all structure such as the national curriculum could in fact be seen to be discriminating against these individuals.

- **The lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding the proposed changes**

I believe it is imperative for the voices of educators, parents, student and community members to be heard and considered in a decision making process that impacts our ability to educate our children to the highest standard.

I would like to know:

- How the government propose to protect against the scenarios I mentioned earlier in this correspondence, where students may need to be transferred to homeschooling due to issues of safety and/ or wellbeing?
- How a one-size-fits-all structure such as the national curriculum can deliver the best learning outcomes for every child, regardless of their abilities, interests or learning styles?
- What literature is available to suggest that following the national curriculum is in the best interests of every child, regardless of ability or interest?
- What literature is there that demonstrates the benefits of an individualized curriculum tailored to each student, and delivered in a flexible manner?

I urge you to urgently reconsider the proposed legislative amendments. I believe these amendments would not be in the best interests of students who are homeschooling, or for society at large.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission and for considering my concerns. I look forward to your response on these important issues.

Yours sincerely,

(Name withheld for privacy reasons)