

## Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

**Submission No:** 329  
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**Submitter Comments:**

**ATTN: The Committee Secretary**

Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000

18.03.2024

I write to include my submission for review to the committee and to parliament. I am a homeschooling parent and **I do not support the proposed changes** under the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, specifically Clause 68 and the inclusion of Section 7, insofar as they will impact homeschooling families in the State of Queensland.

**My concerns with the proposed amendments** centre around the following:

- **The Amendment of section 217 to preclude learning programs other than the Australian Curriculum, and;**
- **The addition of a requirement to link the educational program used with Australian Curriculum outcomes in year-end reporting (currently optional), and;**
- **The addition of a set of 'guiding principles' (Section 7) uniquely concerning Home Educators.**

**Our story:** My daughter (Grade 5) and I are now in our third year of homeschooling. We use multiple curriculums in an integrated manner to provide an enriched and holistic learning experience. **As a parent, I am wholly capable of researching and evaluating curriculums and learning materials for my own child**, which I dedicated many hours to doing at the outset of our educational journey. I chose this path for our family not due to ill health, nor issues around neurodivergence, nor a particularly negative school experience – I chose this path because I saw in my daughter a greater academic potential than was being realised in a school environment, and a zeal for learning that went unnoticed in a classroom setting. **Since commencing, my daughter has thrived.** She has an excellent grasp on language and numeric calculations and has progressed beyond her Year Level in both Maths and English (established through external benchmarking). She has also excelled in languages other than English, and has benefited from individual tuition in sciences, coding and photography. She participates in a swimming squad and equestrian. We are active in our homeschooling community and miss no opportunity for quality social engagement.

**My point:** there is more than one path toward the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values that constitute a well-rounded education.

There is **insufficient evidence** to back the idea that narrowing the definition of a quality education to following the **ACARA/QCAA/VET curriculum** to the letter would support the delivery of **a holistic education**. I would like the Department to cite evidence that suggests that homeschooling fails children. I have seen **no such evidence**, anecdotal or otherwise, **to suggest that homeschooled students fail to meet the same levels of post-secondary readiness as public school graduates**. Conversely, I *am* aware of multiple instances where homeschooled pupils have achieved academic or business success and have a demonstrable connection and commitment to their communities. If the Department cannot provide evidence of clear benefit that justifies the imposition of the Australian Curriculum, it begs the question as to the motivations for such a measure. **A standardised program does not best serve all**; there is simply no such thing as a 'standard student'. Every child has individual talents, passions, and potential for excellence. **Homeschool** can provide increased opportunity to **cultivate a child's particular**

**interests** and capitalise on their natural motivation to pursue the same. Where **ACARA normalises average performance, homeschool strives for mastery of a subject area.**

**If the aim is truly 'Equity in Education', can the Department please advise how this is currently demonstrated by the Australian Curriculum. A uniformity of approach hasn't prevented stratification and segregation of students in public institutions, if assertions contained within the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2021/22 are to be believed. The disparity in academic abilities in some classrooms between 'low performers' and 'top performers' has been cited as being up to 4.5 years. These are concerning statistics that negate the efficacy of a 'one size fits all' approach and challenges the assumptions of this model being the gold-standard of education.**

Why propose the imposition of a system with a track record of consistently abysmal performance as a solution? **The Australian Curriculum can hardly boast with two decades of downward trending academic performance...**

To my mind, it **beggars belief that legislators are pushing for homeschool education to be brought under the same control umbrella as public schools. This flies in the face of their claims to espouse innovation and creativity as chief values. We are seeing the emergence of a K Economy, where in the future, a large proportion of jobs may be swallowed up by technological advances. Faced with this, our children's capacity for creativity and innovation will be their chief capital.**

The challenge of ensuring all children achieve success is multiplied tenfold when said child has either **trauma and/or a learning disability**, in whatever form that manifests itself. In these circumstances it can take a period for families to properly assess their child's capabilities and **differentiate strategies to aid the child** toward self-regulation, and latterly knowledge acquisition. Such cases further highlight a **need for flexibility** in approach to realise the re-engagement of these students with learning. Imposing the very approach that contributed to student disengagement and school refusal in the first instance doesn't seem like a step in the right direction. **Showing such little appreciation for the difficulties experienced by an already marginalised group and failing to offer opt-outs or adjusted programs might also be seen to be discrimination.**

I will also add that at present, **Queensland Homeschoolers** pay for educational opportunities and materials from their own pocket, and **do not represent a drain on the public purse.** These Homeschooling families are not necessarily wealthy, but instead make sacrifices to homeschool. They use whatever socioeconomic means available to them to invest in quality materials and experiences for their children. Contrast this with **public schools, which cost the state** government coffers upwards of **\$18,754 per annum per child** (Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2001). Instead, **the Australian Economy stands to benefit from Homeschooler's contribution of human capital with zero outlay.** In the wake of increased budgetary pressures resulting from COVID 19 expenditure, it **makes no sense to introduce measures that will add to Government sector spending and represent an increased burden on the Australian taxpayer.** To take this one step further, as the government does not contribute financially, it has no business in dictating the curriculum to be used.

While it makes sense to demand evidence of advancement in the key areas of Maths, English and Civics/Citizenship, I contend that the standard conditions of registration with the **Home Education Unit Qld, Section 217, in their current format are wholly sufficient in providing oversight.** These are;

- (a) the child's **parents** must ensure the child receives a high-quality education;
- (b) a parent of the child must give to the chief executive a written report on the educational

progress of the child while undertaking home education;

(2) The report mentioned in subsection (1)(b) must –

(a) be given to the chief executive at least 2 months, but not more than 3 months, before each anniversary of the registration; and

(b) be in the approved form; and

(c) be accompanied by supporting evidence (i.e. dated comparative work samples from the beginning and end of the registration period for the purposes of gauging academic progress).

In good faith, I personally have registered with the HEU, and complied dutifully with every requirement. My understanding is that currently many families do not comply with the mandate to register, since they believe (rightfully) that they **do not require government permission to educate their own children** in the manner they see fit. The proposed amendments will do little to improve sign on numbers. **Reduced participation in the HEU may be the least of the consequences** for the Queensland Education Department; the amendment to section 217 also runs **counter to the spirit of Article 26(3) of the Universal declaration of Human Rights**. Forcing homeschools to teach the same material as public schools rather than allowing families to provide an array of alternative learning environments and innovative teaching philosophies effectively **undermines the parent's right to pedagogical sovereignty**. **What, if any, protections will be afforded to faith-based educators?** The public-school model is rigidly secular by definition – concerns have been also raised about the scrubbing of religious heritage from civics and citizenship segments in recent revisions of the curriculum. Adopting ACARA's model may have a **negative impact on parents' ability to impart a religious worldview to their children**. I submit that **any amendment to the legislation that opens the state up to legal challenge is ill-considered**.

I will add that **parents are entirely capable of analysing their child's work and making judgements as to how to best aid future progress**. It is of central importance to myself as a homeschooling parent, that I can continue to teach for the purpose of lifelong learning, as opposed to having the expectation to merely teach assessment tasks, which to my mind is a pitfall of the Australian Curriculum and a **regularly iterated complaint among public school teachers**. Whilst I laud the Education Department for acknowledging the **Australian Curriculum is overburdened** and their efforts in paring it back, this does not go far enough in trimming the unnecessarily broad scope. The argument for a diversified curriculum for enrichment falls down when it **consistently fails to deliver desired outcomes**. Another commonly heard gripe among professional teachers is the **administrative burden of excessive "audits" and constantly navigating changing reporting requirements**. Linking learning plans to Australian Curriculum outcomes is currently optional under HEU regulation – and should remain so. **The language around this new obligation lacks clarity - how is 'consistent with' to be determined? If the aim of these new measures is to achieve equity in education for all, the question remains - how do additional bureaucratic obstacles advance that goal in any provable capacity?** Cumbersome reporting requirements may deter many families that would benefit from homeschooling from pursuing it. Another concern is that compliance with increasingly complex reporting tasks will rob homeschooling families of valuable learning time.

**Homeschooling families and the HEU are already working in tandem toward a win-win situation**. The **proposed amendments** to the Bill are effectively **putting a hat on a hat**. Worse, the changes threaten to turn the Home Education Unit into a bureaucratic behemoth only concerned with putting ticks in boxes.

**On the introduction of Guidelines (Section 7) for Home Educators:**

I put it to the department that the **wording of section 7 as it currently stands is loaded**;

*'...the guiding principles set out that home education should be provided in a way that is in the best interests of the child or young person, taking into account the child's safety, wellbeing and access to a high-quality education'.*

**This statement effectively undermines prior efforts to build trust and mutual respect between Homeschooling community and the State. As the language currently stands, it accurately describes the *role, rights* and *responsibilities* of a PARENT, which the State is not.**

**The Education Department needs to respect the primacy of the parents in determining their children's education and value system.**

**Referring to UNDHR Article 26(3), I quote: 'Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children'. To infer that the State has the first right and duty to decide how the child will be educated is an inversion of this Universal Truth, and a slippery slope indeed.**

Whilst I am tertiary educated and possess a qualification in teaching, to my mind such **qualifications do not necessarily equate with the ability to impart wisdom or teach skills**. Such arguments are both elitist and baseless. **What *is* required is a passionate commitment to the education and wellbeing of our children – a commitment loving parents are best placed to provide**. The suggestion that a government body is somehow more invested in furthering our children's interests than a loving parent is as preposterous as it is offensive. All that suffices to debunk this notion is a cursory glance at the last two decades' of PISA statistics or the findings of recent inquests into high-profile systemic failures of government departments entrusted with child welfare in this state.

## **Summary**

**The existing framework of oversight for Homeschooling in this state are sufficient. The proposed amendments to section 217 are superfluous to requirements and may dissuade homeschooling families from cooperating with the HEU. The inclusion of the section 7 guidelines and the language used creates an atmosphere of distrust between the State and Homeschool families. Additionally, the proposed measures potentially represent a legal risk for the Department of Education and by extension, the taxpaying public.**

**I cannot support these changes as they do not represent progress for either the State, Taxpayers or the Homeschooling community.**

I sincerely thank the committee for reading my submission on this matter.

Ms. M. Hood

MAROOCHYDORE, QUEENSLAND