

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Dear Committee Members

I am opposed to home educating families being made to align to the Australian Curriculum as I know from firsthand experience that it won't work for my family. In addition, I also oppose having to show progress against the whole of the curriculum.

Saying that the Australian curriculum is a high-quality education and forcing parents that have been left with no other choice but to register their children with home education because the Australian Curriculum has not worked for our children is taking away our children's right to receive any sort of education at all. So basically, if my child is not able to retain let alone make any progress using the Australian Curriculum then my child has no right to any sort of education?

I have finally found the best way my child can successfully learn and I do not want that to be taken away from us. My child needs an education that works at my child's pace and is flexible to help my child to have options to figure out what does and doesn't help them to retain what they are learning and to be able to show progress. My child deserves to receive an education that has been proven to work for them and has helped them to achieve educational goals. I will continue to do what is right for my child to help them succeed in their future.

Here's our story of how we ended up becoming a home educating family.

My child attended an early learning centre for a year and still at the end of that year my child was falling behind the rest of the children. They were not able to absorb and maintain things as simple as what is the name of the letter "L" and what sound does the letter "L" make. When each child took their turn to draw a lowercase "L" on a whiteboard in front of the class, my child being the last one to take a turn and having watched all the other children draw the L, my child was unable to draw a straight vertical line to represent a lower case "L". The thing that made this even worse is that my child has multiple "Ls" in their first name including the first letter. My child learnt nothing in that year and when I asked them about staying on for another year, I was told it wasn't necessary and was encouraged to enrol them into Prep, although they would only be turning 5 the following year when they would be in Prep.

My child was diagnosed as Autistic and ADHD, they have low muscle tone as well as having many other challenges and learning difficulties.

I enrolled my child at a local public mainstream school which was the biggest mistake I have ever made in my life. In the five weeks my child was at this school (in which they actually only attended approximately three weeks) they would not stay in class, and they would sneak out and wander off before the teacher and teacher's aide would realise. The teacher's aide would be sent off to locate my child and try to convince them to come back to class which took a lot of convincing. This would continue to happen throughout the day, every day, they were at school. My child could not engage with the school work as it was beyond my child and everything in Prep was too fast paced with no time for a neurodiverse child to be able to absorb let alone retain what they were meant to be learning.

The final straw with this school was when my child was physically attacked by a staff member of the school with multiple adult witnesses, including myself witnessing it. If I had not been there, I do not like to think what could have happened to my child as it needed adults to stop this staff member from physically attacking my child. I presented my child at the local police station to try and report what had happened and showed the police officer the injuries my 4-year-old child had received from an unprovoked attack by an adult my child didn't even know. I was told there was nothing they could do about it because it happened on school grounds and it was quoted to me just to be aware that the school would most likely "sweep it under the rug", which is exactly what they did by gaslighting, intimidation and bullying.

My child and I were both left traumatised by this experience. This is something that six years later is still incredibly hard to talk about it and I don't like that I have to bring this up but I am a voice for my child and I am trying to do what is best for them.

I tried to find another form of education to help my child and to be able to have them in a safe environment. We ended up learning about Distance Education and enrolled with one. My child for the first year did prep level work and still made absolutely no progress. The following year with the same Distance Education School and repeating the same work (for a further three terms) and my child still made no progress and did not retain anything that was taught to them. The school did not try to change the work in any way to try to see if there were different options or ways that would engage my child in the learning to help them retain the information. My child was getting left further and further behind.

I asked for help on a Facebook group and was met with so many friendly and helpful people who suggest a Distance Education school called Faith and described how similar it was to home education but with the support of teachers. I enrolled my child with this school for term four and we had some teachers come out from Faith to our home and meet my child and did some games and other stuff with my child to get to know them as an individual and to find out as much as they could about my child's struggles, weaknesses, strengths, interests etc to figure out an individual learning plan for my child. My child made more progress in those last few weeks of that year and had learned more than they had in any other educational setting. It was amazing to finally have someone who listened, understood and most of all truly cared about my child as much as I do and also wanted to see my child achieve and grow.

We continued with Distance Education via Faith the following year and it was so incredible to see my child flourish and start to become confident in their learning and go from calling themselves stupid and dumb to being so excited to learn and making progress and most importantly retain the information they were learning. They finally, for once, were proud of themselves!

Sadly, the new Faith, run by new people, is no longer the old Faith we knew and loved. We were now made to follow the Australian curriculum and the workload and speed that was expected of children to learn was forced back on my child again. Any and all progress my child was making came to a complete stop. My child was back to calling themselves stupid and dumb, was constantly having meltdowns and did not want to do the work as it was beyond them.

We were left with no other choice but to make the leap to home education via the Home Education Unit. It was incredibly sad and unfair that my child lost the support and friendships they had built with the original teachers (via the old Faith). Thankfully from what I had learnt about education options and resource choices under the guidance of the old Faith and being able to learn my child's individual learning style I was ready and able to write a plan that was perfect for just my child. This plan included everything that helped my child to achieve reaching goals in their education. My child has flourished and has come so far, now able to do things I honestly thought at one point they would never be able to achieve.

Beyond my child's education they are able to have the flexibility to be able to have time to learn everyday life skills that a lot of people take for granted. These life skills have taken years of therapy and constant practice to finally be able to develop those skills and continue to work on others. None of this would have been possible if we had been forced to continue with following the Australian Curriculum and not recognising the individual needs of my child.

My child also has the flexibility to be able to see their friends regularly and form long term friendships and support systems. They also have the time to participate in activities, such as dancing, with their peers. My child's dance teacher has recognised that my child learns differently and at a different pace to many of their peers. As such, she is working with the national body to develop a truly inclusive, but differentiated curriculum, that will allow my child and other neurodivergent children to participate, progress and feel proud of their achievements. This is what a high-quality education actually looks like. People taking the time to understand a child's needs and tailoring a pathway that will ensure they succeed. Surely this is what all children deserve and governments are obligated to provide.

I ask you to take my personal experience on board as you consider these changes to home education and ask yourself if these changes will really achieve a high-quality education for all children.