

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 440
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Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the recent education legislation changes that have been proposed in our state. As a member of the home educating community, I believe it is crucial to voice my apprehensions about the potential impact of these changes on our education system.

I have been home educating my son since 2021 and in this time, have come to know many wonderful families within the homeschooling community. In 2022 I started a free community meet up group in my local area, where home educating families could gather, support one another and flourish together. We've been on excursions, carried out lots of Science experiments, gone on nature scavenger hunts, explored art techniques, celebrated key days throughout the year, visited parks and nature spots across Brisbane, borrowed museum kits and so much more! Over the past 2 + years, I have witnessed the way the children have thrived.

My background is in primary teaching, and I have worked in both the private and state sector over the years, in Australia and the UK. What stands out to me the most about the homeschooling community, is the amount of authentic learning that takes place, springing from places of deep interest and relevance to the child's life. It's wonderful to hear the children freely talk about things they have been discovering!

I have heard of harrowing stories of school bullying, children floundering in mainstream classrooms and severe school refusal scenarios. With 1-1 support, the parents have been able to offer support for their emotional wellbeing and also to improve their academic outcomes. I have witnessed the way children have flourished after just a few months of homeschooling. Anxieties dissipate and they have their zest for learning back, due to following their interests and passions.

Then there are the families who have joined the community because they feel it's just the best way to do life as a family. How wonderful it is, when they can be exploring a similar topic together, at differentiated depths of learning! Many of the families in my local community group have degrees and backgrounds in medical and academic fields.

The proposed legislation raises several pressing concerns that I believe need to be addressed. Firstly, I have concerns about what is considered the best interests of the child. I believe the parents should have the right to decide what is in their child's best interests.

Daily school refusal due to fear/separation anxiety/too much sensory stimulus/overwhelm/bullying is a very real thing. Parents who are dealing with these issues daily should ultimately have the right to choose. I believe that if this is put solely into the hands of the school leadership, then there could be more detrimental consequences down the track, if the child is just left to survive in mainstream, rather than thrive at home. I appreciate that many children do thrive in mainstream education, attending a physical classroom each day, but there is a growing portion of children who don't thrive in these conditions. Perhaps it would be beneficial to research why this is the case.

One of our families from my local homeschooling community have gymnasts who will very soon represent the nation! Home education gives them the flexibility they need to train and polish their skills and routines. With all their daily training, it is in their best interest to live the lifestyle they have, without the pressures of attending school each day from 9-3pm.

Moreover, I am worried about the lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding these changes. As a stakeholder in our education system, I believe it is imperative for the voices of educators, parents, students, and community members to be heard and considered in any decision-making process that impacts our schools.

In light of these concerns, I urge you to carefully reconsider the proposed education legislation and to prioritize the best interests of our students, teachers, and schools. I implore you to advocate for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to policymaking that values input from all stakeholders and ensures the integrity and quality of our education system.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and for considering my concerns. I look forward to your response and to further dialogue on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Catherine Francis