

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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To the Committee,

With regard to the proposed amendments to the Education Act (2006) as regards to compelling Home Educators to follow the Australian Curriculum, I wish to have my misgivings noted on the proposed changes. My wife is the primary home educator to our three children, aged 10, 8 and 3, the elder two being registered with HEU. My wife has extensive experience as a teacher and tutor in both government and non-government schools prior to home educating.

I am sceptical of the claims of the Education Minister that compelling Home Educators to follow the Australian Curriculum will somehow enhance either the safety and well-being of home educated children, or improve the educational outcomes for home educated children. HEU is a regulatory body only, tasked with overseeing the registration and reporting of Home Educators (a task which it must be struggling with if it has recently suggested only looking at 10% of annual reports) and certainly is not tasked with nor equipped to oversee child safety (a DOCS area of competence).

The claims that child safety will be improved through all Home Educators using the Australian Curriculum is ludicrous. Mental health problems are rampant among school kids today, and online bullying is lamentably frequent. If we were to use the minister's logic, surely the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in our public schools should have solved these child safety problems?

If there are child safety issues, it is conceivable that the curriculum could be followed and the child safety issues remain entirely unaddressed. The suicide incident of a home educated child which the minister has referred to, the child concerned had been a mental health patient and child safety authorities had been alerted. That the child was home educated seems to be incidental to rather than the cause of the underlying child safety issues. Is the minister seriously suggesting that like incidents could be prevented merely by restricting the curriculum choice of Home Educators?

Home Educators are already acknowledged by the Education Department as providing a high quality education.

The Education Department in the committee briefing expressed its desire for the easier transition and integration of children from Home Education into State Schools as a strong reason for enforcing the Australian Curriculum onto Home Educators. However, the overwhelming traffic flow in the last 4 years has been from State Schools to Home Education. If the Department's concern were focused on the child, using this logic, would it not be better to prepare more State Schooled children for entering Home Education? Parents are voting in increasing numbers, either through Home Education or Distance Education their dissatisfaction with existing State School system, and their satisfaction with educating at home (this is acknowledged in the HEA report of 2022, p47 – those who leave rarely go back to schooling, even if it may have been their initial intention).

Home education may not be the norm today, but it beggars belief that parents should have to demonstrate (according to the proposed amendments) that Home Education 'would be in the best interests of the child' when one considers the many people who have been home educated even in recent history. Jane Austen (one of the most studied female authors) was home educated, as was Banjo Paterson and best-seller Agatha Christie. Scientists and Nobel prize recipients Marie and Pierre Curie were both home educated, as was Chinese-American physicist and 1976 Nobel prize winner Samuel Chao Chun Ting. Inventor Thomas Edison was sent to school for three months but

after this didn't work out his mother home educated him for the rest of his schooling. Surely no one in the Education Department would contend that any of these people had a sub-standard education? Performing artists including Taylor Swift, Emma Watson and Billie Eilish were home schooled for all or part of their education, and athletes such as gymnast Simone Biles and surfer Bethany Hamilton (among others) were home educated. Abraham Lincoln was probably the most famous, though far from the only American president to be home schooled. Mary MacKillop, founder of the Sisters of Saint Joseph was also home educated. Many people successfully working in the workforce today have been home educated. Not only did high-quality education exist before universal access to State Schools, it even existed before the Australian Curriculum.

My children receive a high quality education. My wife has three degrees, and she cares for three children. Which State School is going to provide that kind of teacher-student ration? More important than her academic qualifications are her love for learning and for our children. My children enjoy learning. And they're enjoying it more since we moved away from the Australian Curriculum at the beginning of this year. If our family was part of the 20% the Education Department say uses the Australian Curriculum, you can count us out from now on. Some families find some elements of the Australian Curriculum helpful (e.g., Maths), but the rest unhelpful and leave it out (is partial adherence to the Australian Curriculum being counted by the Department as adherence?). We now have greater freedom to focus on Maths, English, and the other areas we wish to concentrate on, in a way which works for us. Going back to the Australian Curriculum (and then adding a reporting framework based around it) will take away from my children's learning, will take away from the structure and content they love.

The Pandemic showed that not only can more people work from home, but that more people can learn from home (both adult and child learners). In the era of the internet and ready access to information, when many people have been working from home for years now, does the Queensland Education Department seriously think that schooling (in adherence to the Australian Curriculum and nothing else) is the gold standard of education and Home Education is sub-par? We live in a changing world. Home Education is able to adapt to these changes better than whoever adapts the Australian Curriculum. Parents know their children better than the Education Department, and tailoring education to the needs of the student has immense benefits.

In an era of increasing numbers of families with Mum and/or Dad have given up the hour commute to and from work, should the normal expectation still be for their kids to do the commute to and from school? My kids don't waste any of their day travelling to or from a school building. They don't waste an hour in the morning counting heads to make sure they're all there. Their lessons aren't disrupted by other kids who should've been disciplined but aren't, or should've been expelled but haven't. If they haven't mastered a subject, they either stay with it until they do, or revisit it later. When they master a subject, they move on. In a classroom, if you haven't mastered it, you get left behind, and if you master it quickly, you get bored. Home Education also allows our family to have more time together. Who wouldn't like that?

My family doesn't have a tax-payer funded admin department. Extra reporting duties (duties which already take my wife away from face-to-face time with our children for 1-2 solid weeks every year for planning and reporting to HEU under the existing system) must be done by our existing admin department – us. Through our taxes we help subsidise other people's child care, help pay for other

people's teachers and support staff in State Schools, and with our own money we buy what we think will be the best education resources for our children, then spend our own time teaching it to them, and after that report on what we've done (and plan to do) to the government. It would be nice if someone from the government said 'thank you'. Instead, it feels like we're being told (through the Minister and the Education Department in these proposed amendments to the Act) 'We don't really trust you to know the best interests of your own children.'

I thank the Committee's time to look at these proposed amendments.