

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 523
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Submitter Comments:

Dear Committee Members, I hope this email finds you well. I am writing to express some concerns regarding the proposed Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, in particular Clause 68 and the inclusion of Section 7(da). As stakeholders in the homeschooling community, it's imperative that we engage in a thorough examination of the real issues prompting families to opt for homeschooling rather than simply enforcing rigid requirements. I am not a homeschooling parent. I am a grandparent and am aware of homeschooling as an educational option, as some of my children have chosen to homeschool their children. I have watched as my granddaughter has flourished whilst being homeschooled by her parents. My granddaughter is an intelligent, happy, well adjusted & inquisitive child. Homeschooling has benefited her beyond what I can express. In short, she has thrived being homeschooled. My daughter has always ensured she has met the requirements as stated by the Home Education Unit and goes above and beyond in her determination to provide an outstanding education for my granddaughter. It has come to my attention that the proposed changes primarily focus on mandating adherence to a standardized curriculum without delving into the underlying reasons why many families choose homeschooling in the first place. This approach fails to address the core issues at hand and risks further alienating homeschooling families from the educational system. I do value attempts to benchmark and streamline education delivered by teachers in schools, via the Australian National Curriculum. I can appreciate teachers educate 25-30+ students at a time, these children are not their own children, and teachers usually change classes each year. Teachers seem to want and welcome some guidance as to what and how to teach, and benchmarks to assess their teaching performance against, so they can feel safe and successful in the job they are doing. I can appreciate that having standardisation around this would be beneficial for all. I have concerns about trying to enforce standardisation of this nature in the homeschooling sphere of education, though. From my perspective, the essence of homeschooling lies in the freedom it affords children to learn in a manner that aligns with individual needs, interests, skills, abilities, and learning styles. I notice that the Australian National Curriculum is available to all, and many homeschool families draw upon it, even some follow it completely, as suits their own children's learning needs. Many, though, draw on other learning curriculums that are unsuited to school-based education environments but are very well suited to 1:1, 1:2, or even 1:5 educator to student ratios, and support their children to thrive in a way that would not be possible within the school environment. It's crucial to acknowledge that homeschooling is often chosen by families for a variety of reasons, including dissatisfaction with the traditional schooling system, concerns about safety and bullying, religious or philosophical beliefs, or a desire for more personalized and flexible learning experiences tailored to individual student needs. My significant concern is that by imposing a mandated curriculum, these proposed changes stand to impede this valuable alternative to a school-based education, resulting in worsened rather than improved outcomes for children, as the new proposal intends. From my perspective, the best interest of children, and society in general, is likely to be served by maintaining real and distinct options for children and families when it comes to education and supporting families to make mindful and informed decisions about educational matters. Rather than imposing stricter regulations, I urge the committee to prioritize understanding and addressing the root causes of homeschooling trends. This entails listening to and considering the feedback from homeschooling parents, who are directly impacted by these legislative changes. Their insights and experiences are invaluable in shaping effective policies that support the diverse needs of families while ensuring the well-being and educational success of children. In regard to Section 7(da), I am a bit perplexed to

read that only “home education [...] should be provided in a way that – (i) is in the best interest [...] and (ii) ensures [...] a high-quality education.” Who defines “best interest” or “high-quality education”? My concern is that this addition to the Act can easily be misused by individuals or authorities to stop families from choosing to home educate their children. Is this the reason why this addition only applies to home education, but not for “the State, parents, teachers, school communities and non-government entities”? The choice to home educate children should be the decision of the parents and any attempts by the Government to exert undue influence on this decision is an overreach of authority. I urge you to consider my concerns and remove Section 7(da) and the requirement to follow an “approved education and training program” in Clause 68. In conclusion, I respectfully urge the committee to reconsider the proposed changes to homeschooling legislation and to engage in a collaborative dialogue with homeschooling stakeholders to identify and address the real issues driving this educational choice. By doing so, we can work towards a more inclusive and responsive educational system that respects the choices and concerns of all families. Thank you for your attention to this matter. Sincerely, Lori Maloney