

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 527
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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 curriculum requirements. 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. The Australian Curriculum is an incredibly complex document that has been tailored to educate children in schools. Many schools employ curriculum specialists to interpret and implement this document. As a homeschooler, we don't have access to this level of expertise. In order to implement this, we would need to base our learning off over-simplified textbooks, rush through topics and stop the practical, hands-on nature of our learning. In a 1:1 setting, this is not a high-quality education. Additionally, as an active participant in the homeschool community, we participate regularly in multiage learning co-ops and group activities. We regularly capitalise on instruction and lessons from other parents, community members and experts in their fields. Sometimes, this sparks interests and passions within our children, and we are able to go away and deeply explore an area of interest. Enforcing the Australian Curriculum will severely limit this opportunistic learning and stifle the ability for us to form multi-age groups as the topics they will be investigating would be dictated according to their year level. 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. 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, Jarrod Smith