

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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In Relation to the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN LOBBY

About Australian Christian Lobby

Australian Christian Lobby's vision is to see Christian principles and ethics influencing the way we are governed, do business, and relate to each other as a community. ACL seeks to see a compassionate, just and moral society through having the public contributions of the Christian faith reflected in the political life of the nation.

With around 250,000 supporters, ACL facilitates professional engagement and dialogue between the Christian constituency and government, allowing the voice of Christians to be heard in the public square. ACL is neither party-partisan nor denominationally aligned. ACL representatives bring a Christian perspective to policy makers in Federal, State and Territory Parliaments.

acl.org.au





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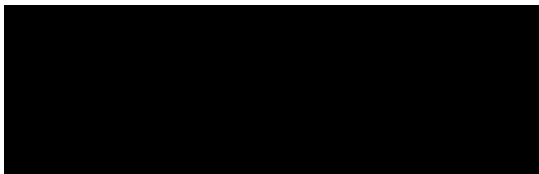
21th March, 2024

Dear Committee Secretary,

On behalf of the Australian Christian Lobby (**ACL**), I welcome the opportunity to make this submission in response to the ***Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 (Bill)***

The ACL would be willing to meet with the Committee Secretary of Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee to discuss this submission and we would appreciate the opportunity to appear as a witness at a public hearing.

Yours Sincerely,



Rob Norman
State Director | QLD

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Australian Christian Lobby's Submission in relation to the *Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*

Introduction

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) is a grassroots political movement. The ACL has a nationwide support base of over 250,000 individuals, with approximately 45,000 residing in Queensland.

The ACL has many supporters who are part of the home school movement and is well placed to address issues of concern to this community.

Executive Summary

Almost 50,000 families homeschool their children across Australia. Queensland accounts for over 10,000 of these families. There was an almost 200 per cent increase in homeschooling in 2023 alone in Queensland, with 10,048 students registered for home education, up from 3411 in 2019.

These families often choose homeschooling because:

Every child is unique, and a one-size-fits-all education system cannot cater to their individual needs. Some children who struggle in institutionalised learning environments flourish in a home learning environment.

Homeschooling recognises that parents are the primary educators of their children, and the home environment, along with parental involvement in their education, is instrumental in shaping children's values, beliefs, and behaviours.

Rather than seeking to restrict the operation of the Queensland home community, the Government should seek to promote, support and expand it.

Major Concerns

The Bill raises major concerns that will fundamentally undermine parental rights and their ability to create a customised education program that best fits their child's needs. It also fails

to recognise the benefits of home schooling to the public education system and sends a message of seeking increased control rather than support.

1. Parental primacy and choice of curriculum:

The third paragraph of the “Nomenclature, guiding principles and technical amendments”, page 11 of the Explanatory Notes states:

“Further, the guiding principles set out that home education should be provided in a way that is in the best interests of the child or young person, taking into account the child’s safety, wellbeing and access to a high-quality education.”

This is problematic and raises two important questions about the Bill;

- i. “Who decides what is in the best interests of the child or young person?”
(Clause 18, amendment of s 7)
- ii. “Why is a high-quality education limited in context to the Australian Curriculum?”
(Clause 18, amendments of s 7 and Clause 68, amendment of s 217)

Many parents chose home education because the Australian Curriculum is inadequate for the needs of their child. The high, and increasing, number of parents opting for home education should underscore the need for less, not more, restrictions on home educators.

Home schooling delivers the following benefits for Queensland children, which the Government should support, rather than seek more control over the community:

Individualised Educational Strategies

Homeschooling facilitates tailored approaches to address children's unique needs and interests, fostering a personalised learning experience. Homeschooling's individualised nature is not constrained by rigid schedules or timetables, allowing for flexible learning methodologies and exploration of diverse content areas. Parents can integrate multidisciplinary subjects aligned with their child's passions, promoting engagement and profound educational experiences.

Enhanced Support for Students with Special Needs

Homeschooling provides enhanced support for children with special needs through personalised attention and a conducive learning environment. Parents can ensure that their children's academic and additional requirements are adequately met, resulting in improved educational outcomes and overall family welfare.

Flexibility in Educational Delivery

The inherent flexibility of homeschooling empowers parents to devise customised schedules and adapt educational delivery to various settings, including travel or accommodating children with health challenges. Parents can determine optimal learning periods based on their child's preferences, enabling tailored educational experiences aligned with diverse daily routines.

Integration of Lifestyle Preferences

Homeschooling accommodates diverse lifestyle choices, such as deferring formal schooling, adhering to specific faith principles, or embracing holistic educational approaches. Families opt for homeschooling to create an educational environment that resonates with their beliefs, values, and lifestyle choices, fostering an integrated and fulfilling educational journey within the home

2. Excessive reporting burden:

The increased requirement for parents to provide evidence of educational progress and submit written reports to the chief executive is excessively burdensome and infringes on parents' rights to determine the assessment methods and reporting mechanisms that best reflect their child's educational achievements and progress.

Page 8 of the Explanatory Notes, "Home Education", states an objective of the Bill is: *"strengthening parent reporting requirements by clarifying the annual report must provide evidence of the educational progress of the registered child, and requiring that where an application for registration is made within 12 months of the child's previous registration ceasing for any reason – the application must be accompanied by a written*

report evidencing the educational progress for the child during the previous registration”

Section 217(1) (ba) introduces an excessive reporting burden for each subject or learning area, this creates an unreasonable reporting burden.

3. Alleviation of Strain on State Education System

The systemic issues of an overburdened and underfunded state education system, means that homeschooling should be supported and encouraged by all governments. We develop below the strains on the public education system and the benefits of homeschooling to the overall education budget and system.

Funding Deficiencies and Socioeconomic Disparities in Australian Public Schools:

According to 2023 [research](#) by economist Adam Rorris¹, unless the Commonwealth and State Governments take remedial action to rectify funding deficiencies in new agreements, public schools may incur an annual deficit exceeding \$6 billion between 2023 and 2028. This shortfall would amount to nearly \$39 billion over six years.

In his report, Rorris reasons, "The decline in actual funding of public schools exposes the shocking reality of neglect experienced by public schools. The current school funding agreements will leave public schools flatlining more than 9% below their specified SRS funding in seven out of eight states and territories in 2028."

According to the report's findings, Australia's public schools face challenges in providing adequate support for students with special needs, attributable to increased class sizes and constrained resources. This situation contributes to exacerbating the existing socioeconomic disparity in education.

An ensuing 2023 [study](#) by Sahlberg et al.² for The University of Melbourne revealed that public schools in Australia cater to 65% of the nation's children, including over 80% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students. In 2019, government schools enrolled significant percentages of various student demographics:

¹ Adam Rorris "How School Funding Fails Public Schools, How to Change for the Better" https://www.aeufederal.org.au/application/files/3817/0018/3742/Rorris_FundingFailsPublicSchools.pdf

² Sahlberg et al., "A Better Fairer Start for All", Australian Government Primary Principals Association & The University of Melbourne https://www.vpa.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/VPA/Reports/AGPPA%20Report%2023_DA2-2.pdf

- 82% of low socioeconomic status students
- 84% of Indigenous students
- 76% of high disability students
- 82% of students from remote areas

As per the report, the unequal allocation of government funding for Public Schools contributes to widening gaps among socioeconomically disadvantaged Australian children enrolled in these institutions, exacerbating their disparities over time.

Sahlberg et al. contend that existing social data demonstrates that socioeconomically disadvantaged children encounter significant academic challenges when they enrol in schools with predominantly disadvantaged student demographics compared to institutions with greater socioeconomic diversity among their peers.

The report establishes a direct link between lower educational attainment among low socioeconomic status students during their schooling and decreased engagement in employment, education, or training later in life. Sahlberg et al. emphasise that insufficient funding for government schools can exacerbate these adverse consequences and increase dependence on social welfare programs, public health services, and legal systems.

Trends and Challenges in Home Education in Australia:

A 2022 [study](#) by Australian researchers Slater et al.³, on behalf of Edith Cowan University, Perth, identified that an increasing number of Australian families opt for home education as the preferred educational pathway for their children. The study revealed that predominantly female guardians choose to forego income, with the majority lacking financial assistance to defray the expenses associated with homeschooling.

The study identified key factors influencing this decision, including a child's developmental differences necessitating accommodations, dissatisfaction with educational standards (including the curriculum), and concerns about social and emotional well-being, particularly among students with mental health conditions and learning difficulties.

³ Eileen V. Slater, Kate Burton & Dianne McKillop (2022) Reasons for home educating in Australia: who and why?, *Educational Review*, 74:2, 263-280, DOI: [10.1080/00131911.2020.1728232](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2020.1728232)

Slater et al. argue that these findings are consistent with [data](#)⁴ collected during the home education registration process in New South Wales (NSW), which indicates that reasons for homeschooling include "special learning needs" (24%), "Philosophical" (23%), and "Religion."

[A 2016 study](#) by Liberto & Maree⁵ identified that child-led and interest-inspired home-based learning approaches positively mitigate learning difficulties.

The study's results highlight that certain students necessitate alternative educational methodologies for academic achievement. Rigorous regulatory frameworks adversely impact student learning by constraining flexible opportunities and educational methods. Regulations mandating specific content delivery parameters with restricted flexibility to adapt to children's interests and agency diminished learning effectiveness and compromised student well-being.

Liberto and Maree contend that their findings align with existing data, indicating that homeschooling and flexible learning effectively address learning difficulties, utilise distinct strategies, and yield better outcomes than special education teachers. However, regulatory constraints hinder the effectiveness of these alternative strategies.

Trends and Challenges in Homeschooling and Education Standards in Queensland

A 2023 [study](#) from the Queensland Department of Education⁶ reveals a 20% increase in registered homeschoolers since 2022, rising from 8,461 to 10,048. Moreover, there has been a substantial growth of 152% in primary students and 262% in high school students opting for homeschooling in the state over the last five years.

A subsequent 2023 [survey](#) conducted by the Queensland Department of Education Home Education Unit⁷, involving over 500 homeschooling parents in the state, revealed significant findings:

- 45% of surveyed families did not initially intend to homeschool.

⁴ New South Wales Education Standards Authority "Home Schooling Data Reports, relating to 2022", July 2023 <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-02/home-schooling-data-reports-relating-to-2022.pdf>

⁵ Giuliana Liberto | Rebecca Maree English (Reviewing Editor) (2016) Child-led and interest-inspired learning, home education, learning differences and the impact of regulation, Cogent Education, 3:1, DOI: [10.1080/2331186X.2016.1194734](https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1194734)

⁶ Queensland Department of Education, "Home Education Registrations August 2019-23" <https://qed.qld.gov.au/our-publications/reports/statistics/Documents/home-education-registrations.pdf>

⁷ Enhance Research, 'Parent with Child/Ren Registered for Home Education Research Insight Report'

Queensland Department of Education, Home Education Unit, November 2022.

<https://education.qld.gov.au/schools-and-educators/other-education/Documents/research-insight-report.pdf>

- 61% of families had a child with a disability or health issue, including conditions like ADHD, autism, behavioural issues, and mental health concerns.
- Many families expressed concerns about bullying.
- Families reported that their child was not learning effectively at school and expressed a lack of desire to attend, leading them to opt for homeschooling as the only viable choice.

The 2013 [Naplan results](#)⁸ reveal that nearly 40% of Queensland students are not meeting the new national reading, writing, and mathematics standards, marking the lowest performance among mainland states.

Across various tests, including reading, writing, spelling, grammar, and numeracy, a higher percentage of Queensland students received the lowest scores than other states. Specifically, 38.1% of Queensland students were classified as needing additional support or development, surpassing the national average of 32.8%.

Queensland students scored nearly 11 points lower than the national average across all year levels, with significant gaps observed in Year 9 writing proficiency. These results highlight significant disparities based on students' locations and cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In a 2024 ABC [article](#)⁹, Queensland University of Technology education researcher Dr Rebecca English outlined various legal and educational factors influencing the rise in homeschooling.

Dr. English noted that "Many [parents] are disaffected with the way schools are being run" due to concerns regarding "policies and procedures" and an emphasis on "standardised testing." She further highlighted key drivers such as disability, school refusal, behavioural issues, and parent's ability to work from home.

Dr. English also pointed out issues related to bullying, neurodiversity, and the challenges faced by classroom teachers in accommodating diverse student needs as a motivator for homeschooling. Additionally, she suggested a legal connection between the increase in homeschooling and the broader teacher crisis, indicating challenges in retaining and attracting quality classroom educators.

⁸ Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 'NAPLAN National Results'

<https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results>

⁹ Lily Nothling "Homeschooling skyrockets in Queensland in wake of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions" ABC News, 22 Jan 2024 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-01-22/homeschool-surges-queensland-post-pandemic-restrictions/102015880>

A 2024 [media release](#)¹⁰ from the Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) emphasised that more than 180 teachers across several State High Schools would take industrial action due to persistent teacher vacancies and challenges for teachers and school leaders in meeting the education standards expected by the Queensland Department of Education.

QTU President Cresta Richardson stated, "Ongoing teacher vacancies have resulted in oversized classes, teachers covering multiple subjects, and limited support for beginning teachers from experienced staff." Ms Richardson noted that school leaders are taking on additional teaching responsibilities, leading to extended work hours and increased workload on weekends and leave periods.

Ms. Richardson highlighted the negative impact of these vacancies on both students and educators, stating, "Until all teaching positions are filled permanently, students will experience learning disruptions, and teachers and school leaders will face adverse effects on their psychosocial well-being."

Conclusion

Parents choose homeschooling as it allows them to design a personalised learning experience that caters to their child's strengths, interests, and areas requiring improvement while reflecting the family's values and beliefs.

This tailored educational approach ensures that children benefit from individualised attention and support, leading to a more profound grasp of academic concepts and fostering comprehensive development.

Recommendation 1: *Parents must be primal in all decisions regarding their child's education and as such should also be empowered to decide what is in the best interests of their child including which curriculum is able to provide a "high-quality education for their child's needs".*

Recommendation 2: *Current reporting requirements¹¹ should not be increased but should be streamlined to aid parents who opt for home education.*

¹⁰ Queensland Teachers Union of Employers, 'Teachers to stop work over staffing shortages', 29 January 2024. https://www.qtu.asn.au/application/files/9017/0649/0688/QTU_MEDIA_RELEASE_TEACHERS_TO_STOP_WORK_OVER_STAFFING_SHORTAGES_29_Jan_2024.pdf

¹¹ <https://education.qld.gov.au/schools-educators/other-education/home-education/reports>