

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 REVIEW

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In the recent recommended changes to Queensland's *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*, the new Education Minister the Hon. Di Farmer has proposed home schooling registration changes, that are contrary to the requirements of home schooling families of Queensland.

Despite numerous consultation meetings and presentations of submissions by key stakeholders and hundreds of home schooling parents over the last three years, the Minister has ignored key recommendations of Queensland home educators. Rather, she has presented new changes to the Act that impose restrictions on home educators, and which foreshadow both years of protest and a greater number of home schooling families refusing to apply for the registration of their children.

Rather than facilitating appropriate bureaucratic processes for home educators who cooperate in good faith with the Home Education Unit (HEU), the Minister's confrontational approach will create a new bureaucratic educational mess.

The Australian Curriculum – Inappropriate for parent-based, individualised education.

The Australian Curriculum was inaugurated in 2009 by the then Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard. Since its inception, the Australian Curriculum has had nine revisions.

Implied by the need for so many iterations, is that any version of the Australian Curriculum, previous to each revision was academically inferior to the next, later revision. An alternative view re. the need for so many revisions of the Australian Curriculum may imply that the curriculum has been politicised over the years and has been revised ideologically by the Australian Government for political purposes.

Irrespective of speculations about the need for a revision of the Australian Curriculum, on average every 1.7 years, Australia's national and international academic results have demonstrated objective evidence that it has not delivered high-quality educational outcomes to Australia's school-aged children.

The purpose of the Australian Curriculum is to currently serve the educational interests of 4,042,512 school students who attend 9,614 schools. It is an educational tool directed to the needs of large numbers of students who are educated in a classroom-based approach in Australia's schools.

The Minister's idea of addressing the educational needs of over four million children by teachers trained to do so, by means of the Australian Curriculum, is antithetical to the home educational idea of parents with a vested interest in the personal educational success of their own children, meeting their many and varied educational needs on an individual basis.

ACARA documents make the clear point that the Australian Curriculum is written for professional teachers to support their classroom-based mode. It is not written for parents who are educating their children in line with their individualised educational needs.

"The primary audience for the Australian Curriculum is teachers. The curriculum is written in plain and concise language while utilising the vocabulary appropriate for professional practitioners of each learning area. Consistency in terms of language and structure is used to support teachers in planning in and across learning areas.."

ACARA, (2020). The Shape of the Australian Curriculum, Version 5.0, June 2020. Page 11, 1).

The Minister has prescribed that home schooled children in Queensland are to be educated by adherence to the Australian Curriculum. The Minister's proposed changes restrict the curriculum choices of home schoolers to the curriculum that the minister uses for mass educational schooling in Queensland. This system is not designed for the individualised educational approach characteristic of home schooling.

The Australian Curriculum - Inappropriate as a form of High-Quality Education

Given the poor educational outcomes of Australian school students, nationally, the Australian Curriculum does not fulfill the Objects of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*.

The latest national and international academic testing results demonstrate that the Australian Curriculum has not been effective in:

- i. helping to "*maximise*" the "*educational potential*" of a significant cohort of Australian children
- ii. enabling a significant cohort of Australian children to become "*effective and informed members of the community*"

It is important to note that there is no supporting evidence to justify the imposition of the Australian Curriculum upon home educated children in Queensland.

Rather, the evidence indicates that the Australian Curriculum has not delivered a high quality education to the school-based student cohort of Australia. Australia's school-based students (K-10) have been exposed to the Australian Curriculum since 2009 over their first eleven years of school attendance. The evidence indicates that the academic outcomes of Australia's k-10 school cohort are very poor. In fact, the following data indicate that the Australian Curriculum is not the best pedagogical instrument to achieve the objects of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*.

NAPLAN

The 2023 NAPLAN results demonstrate to us the ongoing academic decline of Australia's school students' academic standards.

Some of the latest NAPLAN results include the following:

- One third of school students failed to reach the minimum standards in numeracy, reading and writing. These figures do not include the 25% of students who were withdrawn on the test days, suggesting that the figures may have been worse if all students were present for NAPLAN testing.
- Thus, 430,000 of the 1.3 million students who sat last year's NAPLAN tests, are performing below expectations, when averaged across all year levels and testing domains.
- More than 40% of year 3 and year 9 students fell short in grammar and punctuation.

- 100,000 year 9 students fell short in numeracy.
- In each of the east-coast states 20,000 year 3 students fell short in reading.
- Only 15 % of students (20,000) performed above the expected standard.

PISA

This academic decline has also been reflected not only in Australia's recent NAPLAN tests but also in international tests over the last two decades. For example, the OECD's Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) testing over the past 20 years, demonstrates that Australia's average performance in the following domains has declined.

- Reading literacy fell by 26 points;
- Mathematical literacy fell by 33 points and
- Scientific literacy fell by 24 points.

The PISA programme measures the ability of 15 year old children across 78 countries to use their reading, mathematics, and science knowledge to meet real life challenges. The latest comparative results reveal that the average 15-year-old of today is more than a year behind the average 15-year-old of twenty years ago and is several years behind their Asian neighbours.

The most recent OECD results showed that just 60% of Australian year nine students read at a proficient standard. These results are despite a 60% increase in school funding over two decades. (Harkin, 2023)

Compared to the 78 nations participating in PISA testing, currently, Australia's PISA rankings are:

- 29th – Maths
- 17th – Science
- 16th – Reading

PIRLS

The PIRLS assessment measures the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study. This test assesses the literacy standards of 15-year-old students in 76 countries.

The PIRLS measures have been taken since 2003. The following current results also indicate a decline in academic standards since that time. Australian Students' standards are:

- Down from 11th to 29th in Maths
- Down from 8th to 16th in Science
- Down from 4th to 16th in Literacy

This new Minister limits curriculum choices of home schooling parents. Home schooling parents want broad educational choices that they deem to be appropriate for their own children. They do not want the one-size-suits-all approach that the Minister has required for mass, classroom-based schooling in Queensland, that obviously fails a significant proportion of school-aged students.

The Australian Curriculum as a Growing Ideological Document

Home educators have deemed that schooling in Australia has taken on an ideological approach that is extraneous to the delivery of a high-quality education. Harding and Couper, 2024 (in peer review) has sought to document the reasons why Australian parents have

chosen home education. Essentially these parents have cited the philosophical incompatibility of what is currently taught in schools, with their views on what education should be like and with the values that they hold as parents. Some of the key philosophical objections that they cited include the imposition of:

- Marxist/materialist philosophies
- Relativist philosophies
- Identity politics
- Sexual ideologies incompatible with their family values
- Black armband history
- Critical Race Theory
- Radical Green ideology

Dr. Bella d' Abrera of the Institute of Public Affairs identified the influence of the excesses of extraneous ideologies by lobby groups who have infiltrated the Australian Curriculum, for example, in the Australian Curriculum's Cross Curriculum Priorities.

In what d' Abrera entitles "Dreamtime Maths" she cites addition and subtraction learning exercises for Years 1 – 5. Students in these year levels are to learn the skills of addition and subtraction by means of Aboriginal Dance. D' Abrera recommended that these political ideologies need to be stripped away from subjects like maths and science, in order to produce lessons that encourage children to learn basic skills, without the clouding of non-essential political ideologies in the minds of children.

Further d' Abrera also cites statistics learning exercises in the Australian Curriculum in which older students are required to implement, by using data from the "Reconciliation Barometer" which was created by Reconciliation Australia, as their statistical resource. She sees this infusion of political ideologies into the Key Learning Areas of the Australian Curriculum as a growing politicising feature of the Australian Curriculum.

D' Abrera concludes that Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum has become a dominant means for educational bureaucrats to politicise Australian children and that those Australian children, in turn, are being developed into political tools.

Removing Provisional Registration of Home Educated Children

The Minister wants to shut down the current two-step registration process. She wants to delete the first step in registration process, which allows home educating parents to present their curriculum choices to the Minister. If she shuts down part of the registration process that is currently working, why is she doing this? Why "fix" what is working? Why remove the step in the registration process that home educators have stated in the review process, that needs to remain? Why "fix" or more to the point, "unfix" what is working well now?

This suggestion will introduce problems between the nexus of a child leaving the school system and achieving the registered status of being a home educated student. The Provisional Registration status is important to clarify to all, that a child is in the process of being registered, and is not truant.

Removing the Issuing of a Certificate of Home Education

Minister Farmer has recommended the removal of the issuing of a certificate that identifies that a family is home schooling their children. This leaves home schooling families with no official identification that their children are not truant, and that the Queensland government

recognises that they are being adequately educated. Why remove this, the only means of identification as a home schooler from Queensland home schooling families? Why would she do this?

The Queensland Government subsidises all schooled children in Queensland. The Queensland Government does not any subsidies to home schooling families. Home schooling parents pay for all expenses for the education of their children (in addition to paying for the education of children in both state schools and non-state schools, by means of the taxation system. The minister should at least require the registration body to acknowledge that children are registered for home schooling in Queensland.

Home Educating Parents are Bona Fide Educators and their Requests of the Minister should be Respected.

Home schooling families have a vested interest in providing the best, most suitable educational experiences for their own children. Home schooling parents do not seek an easy pathway when it comes to educating their own children. If they want an easy, inexpensive educational pathway for their children, they can put their children on to the local school bus and send them to their nearest state school. They reject this educational option and commit their lives to the educational option for their own children, of their choosing.

Home schooling parents have a vested interest in ensuring that their children get the best of educational opportunities. In fact, they also choose to be a single-income family in order to achieve that outcome. This commitment to achieving the best educational opportunities for their children is demonstrated in their choice to become a single-income family. Thus, one parent takes on the full-time role of supervising the education of their children, whilst the other parent earns an income to support the family. They do not take on the responsibility to educate their children frivolously. It is a major commitment. This commitment involves forgoing a lucrative dual-income economic status,

- as one parent takes on an unpaid career for as much as twenty years.
- Forgoing personal career goals of the supervising, home tutoring parent as they commit to the education of their children.

It is a cynical thing that the Minister has turned on home schoolers in such a confrontational way. The Minister should reconsider her ways and take on board the many representations that home educators have presented over the past two years of cosmetic “consultations”. They should be respected and their pedagogical requirements should be respected by the Minister.

The Ongoing Refusal to Implement the Parent Advisory Panel

In particular, the Minister should implement the government’s recommendations from the Home School Review of 2003, when the government’s report recommended that a Parent Advisory Panel be created to advise the Minister about the unique issues around home schooling. The creation of such a panel would avoid the current confrontationalist approach of the Minister and would grow a consultative and collaborative approach between the Minister and all home educational stakeholders.

If it is appropriate for schools in Queensland to have a parent advisory body, why not for home schooling?

It would be helpful for home educators to be able to discuss their matters of concern with the Education Department. Some of these matters of concern include:

- The formation of a Home Education Advisory Committee as recommended during 2003 review into home education. (Jeffrey & Giskes, 2004). There are models of this in other states. Victoria's committee is a good example of such a committee.

Recommendation 7 of this review was to establish a Home Schooling Advisory Committee. This recommendation was not implemented.

4.4.7 Recommendation 7 – Establishing a Home Schooling Advisory Committee

The review recommends that a 'Home Schooling Advisory Committee', together with its role and responsibility, be established by regulation, and that it report annually to the Minister for Education.

The membership of such committee should reflect the diversity of the home schooling community and include parents who have registered their children to be home schooled. The committee should work with the Department of Education to develop a set of protocols to manage the interface between registered home schooling families and government agencies.

Request

My request is that the Minister reject the changes to the Act that home educators have repeatedly objected to and that she would implement Recommendation 7 of the 2003 Home Schooling Review.

Home Schooling's Growth across Australia.

Terry Harding - March 2023

Home schooling is the pedagogical practice where parents take the full responsibility for their children's education instead of delegating that responsibility to another person or institution. Rather than sending them to government or non-government schools for their formal education, home schooling parents construct their children's educational settings in the family, the family home, and their local and broader communities. Home educators choose their preferred educational method, philosophy, curriculum, resources, and timeframes that they deem to be best suited to their children's educational needs.

Whilst home schooling is rare in some countries and illegal in others, both research and media reports indicate that the modern home schooling movement is growing significantly across the globe, including in Australia (English, 2019; English & Gribble, 2021; Green-Hennessy and Mariotti, 2021; Hamlin & Peterson, 2022; Harding, 1997, 2011, 2022a; Harding & Farrell, 2003; Ray, 2003, 2013a, 2021 a, b & c, 2022c). The resurgence of this educational movement in Australia from its eighteenth century origins to current times is making a significant change on Australia's educational landscape (Harding, 2022b).

In all Australian states and territories, anecdotal evidence supports the view that increasing numbers of parents are choosing to educate their own children, at home. With access to the world's information via the internet, a vast range of high quality curriculum materials, and the availability home schooling support groups and networks, this home-based educational movement appears to be a growing phenomenon (Bryan, 2022; English, 2019, 2021; English & Gribble, 2021; Hamlin & Peterson, 2022; Harding, 2022a; Henebery, 2022).

Currently, there is no accurate, comprehensive statistical calculation of the numbers of home educated students in Australia, as there is no reliable way to know how many school-aged children are being home schooled.

The purpose of this study is to understand whether there is a quantifiable indication that home schooling is really growing in Australia. One reliable way of gaining information about home schooling student numbers is to review the home schooling records of each state and territorial education department.

In Australia, each state and territory are lawfully responsible for the education of school-aged children, with each jurisdiction having its own education act. This responsibility is entrusted to each of the jurisdictions' respective ministers of education and their education departments. Each Australian state and territory's education act makes provision for home schooling and for the registration of home schooled students. Thus, each education department retains the numbers of home schooled students who are registered to be home educated in their jurisdictions.

However, there is a major limitation to obtaining a comprehensive quantifiable indication about home schooling numbers because there are significant numbers of home educated students who are not registered with government educational authorities (English & Gribble, 2021; HEAQ, 2019; Townsend, 2012). Because of this unknown number of unregistered

home educated students, it is impossible to accurately quantify the numbers of Australia’s home schooled students.

Despite this inability to quantify the numbers of all home educated students, a report on the number of home educated students who are registered with their respective state and territory education departments would be a valuable contribution to assist in understanding the trends as to whether home schooling in Australia is growing or not.

In pursuing whether there is a reliable quantifiable indication that home schooling may be growing in Australia, I have sourced data from all government bodies responsible for registering home schooled students in each Australian state and territory. This data was sourced from government websites where it was available, the annual reports from government education departments, and in the two cases where the statistical information was not published, from personal communications with the government persons responsible for that information (see Annexure A).

The data gathered for this study is an accurate, reliable, and comprehensive reflection of the numbers of home schooled students in Australia, who are registered with their respective departments of education.

Table 1 below represents the numbers of registered home schoolers in Australia’s states and territories between 2018 and 2022, as reported by the various educational authorities.

REGISTERED AUSTRALIAN HOME SCHOOLED STUDENTS 2018-2022					
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
ACT	302	305	322	395	413
NSW	5429	5906	7032	8993	12149
NT	110	124	145	152	200
QLD	3232	3411	4297	5008	8461
SA	1315	1360	1606	1795	2443
TAS	976	1068	1160	1160	1303
VIC	5333	5562	6405	6836	11332
WA	3563	3720	4116	4562	6151
TOTAL	20260	21456	25083	28901	42452

Table 1 Registered Home Schooled Students 2018-2022

Source: The Education Departments of all Australian States and Territories: (Annexure 1)

Figure 1 below, is a diagrammatic representation of the data in Table 1.

Growth of Home Schooling Student Registrations in Australia

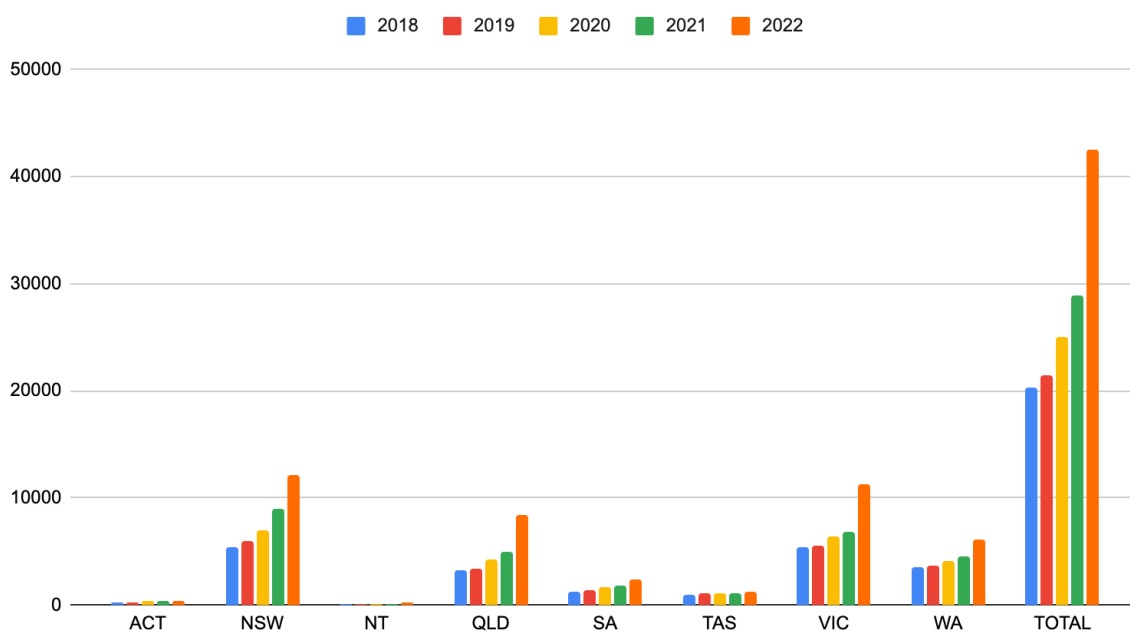


Figure 1. Registered Home Schooled Students 2018-2022

These data indicate significant growth in the number of registered home schooled students in all states and territories.

For example, the total number of registered home schooled students from 2018 to 2022 has increased by 110% over five years. This growth trend is characterised in each state and territory, although the growth was more pronounced in the eastern states of New South Wales (124%), Queensland (162%) and Victoria (112%). However, other jurisdictions also saw significant percentage increases over the period including The Northern Territory (82%), South Australia (86%) and Western Australia (73%).

It is clear that there has been a growing uptake of home school registrations throughout Australia over the five years from 2018-2022. This growth has been consistently increasing over the period from 2018-2021. However, there has been a significant increase in student numbers between 2021 and 2022. Where the increase in registrations in a single year has outstripped the growth of other single years over the 2018-2021 period.

For example, once again in the eastern states, in a single year between 2021 and 2022 student increases were as follows: New South Wales (35%), Queensland (69%) and Victoria (66%) along with The Northern Territory (32%), South Australia (36%) and Western Australia (35%).

Two questions arise from these increases in student registrations in all states and territories. Firstly, why is there continued annual growth in home schooled student numbers? Secondly, why has there been such a dramatic increase in student numbers between 2021 and 2022?

Given that there are many home schooled students who are not registered with their state and territory educational authorities, the number of home schooled students in Australia is well above the government figures which total to 42,452 registered home schooled students. This

gives rise to a third, albeit unanswerable question which must be, how many children in Australia are being home schooled?

All that can be said about the confirmed numbers of home schooled children in Australia is that the official government figures indicate a clear upward trend in families choosing to home school their children.

Clearly, further research is needed into the reasons why a significant minority of Australian school-aged students are being increasingly transferred from traditional schooling into home schooling.

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