

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submitted by: [REDACTED]
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To the Committee Secretary, Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee

I have been a home educating parent in Queensland for many years. I have four adult children who were all home educated and are now employed and/or studying. I am still home educating currently. I have great concern over the proposed changes to the legislation regarding Home Education in Queensland.

In particular, I have these three major concerns:

1. The bill proposes that home educating families must plan and report to the national curriculum. I do not believe this is in the best interests of the child.

This might sound good in theory, but the national curriculum was written by teachers for teachers. It is written in a very specific way using professional educational language. This will be very hard for parents to interpret and know how to implement. In addition, many home educating families are doing so because their children did not fit into the mainstream school system and it's national curriculum requirements because of trauma, disability, difficulty in keeping up with the pace of the school work, or being ahead of their class. To require home educating families to make their home education match the school curriculum and pace, counters the goal of families to educate their children in a way that suits their skills and abilities and individual learning styles.

In particular, consider this section of the bill:

Clause 68

Section 217(1)(b)—

omit, insert—

(b) the educational program used for the child's home education must—

(i) be suitable for the child having regard to the child's age, ability, aptitude and development; and

(ii) be consistent with an approved education and training program; and

How can a parent make sure the program suits the child's ability, aptitude and development as well as being consistent with the national curriculum if the child is not the "average" student and doesn't have the ability to fulfil all the requirements of the curriculum? Or perhaps their child is advanced in ability and therefore wants to learn over and above the curriculum or at a different level than what is required? Home educating parents focus on being able to tailor their child's education to their specific needs. This is the whole point of home education. Having to ensure their program aligns with the national curriculum will make doing so much harder.

If parents are required to make sure their programs are consistent with the national curriculum, will the department be giving training to all parents on how to do that? Will they teach them what the curriculum terminology means? Will they provide them with templates on how to program according to the curriculum? Will they provide them with templates on how to report according to the program on all subject areas as this bill requires? The extra time that all this programming and reporting will take will ultimately take away from the time available to give the child the quality education the bill is asking parents to give their children in the first place.

Furthermore, the Australian Curriculum is an incredibly complex document that has been tailored to educate children in a school environment. Many schools employ curriculum specialists to interpret and implement this document. Home educators do not have access to this level of expertise. In order to implement this, we would need to base our learning off over-simplified textbooks and rush through topics to fulfil curriculum requirements. This will reduce the time taken to use practical, hands-on learning strategies that benefit and stimulate the child's education. Therefore, this requirement in the bill will counteract the goal of giving our children a high-quality education.

In addition, according to recent research collected by the Home Education Unit (2022), two of three home educating families have chosen to do so because of an underlying disability or health issue. For these children, working to the Australian Curriculum is not providing them a high-quality education or meeting their immediate needs. They have chosen this avenue because of the flexibility it affords. This enables families to educate and care for their children in a manner that suits their learning style. Most of these students have left mainstream schooling because they could not learn in a traditional learning style.

Homeschooling allows the flexibility to work with children's learning interests and readiness, ensuring that their education remains engaging and meaningful. It gives the freedom to choose curriculum and topics that align with their needs and passions, fostering a love for learning that extends far beyond the confines of a standardised system. Let me give a personal example. My eldest child is on the autism spectrum. During their teen years, they found traditional learning styles difficult and especially struggled with the mainstream maths syllabus. However, they were a prolific reader and writer. I tailored studies to suit them, in order to gain success and a sense of worth and ability rather than push on them a curriculum that would stifle learning, cause stress and a feeling of failure. My child was able to start their own cleaning business during their teen years as well as a casual job. Senior studies were spread out over 3 years to reduce pressure. Formal schooling was completed just before age 19. After that, my child completed a Tafe course, and since then has gained full time work in that field where they have been remarkably successful. At age 22, they bought land and built their own home here in our town. I know from my sister's experience of being on the spectrum and going through mainstream schooling and failing, that if my child had been forced to conform to a particular curriculum, they would have felt like a failure, with self-esteem plummeting to the point of not knowing their worth and not feeling motivated to try anything. How different my child's experience has been thanks to the flexibility of home education!

Homeschooling enables families to prioritise the needs of the child and how they progress on their individual growth journey, giving extra attention and time where needed, especially where health and other conditions impact on learning. For example, one of my children had a number of debilitating health issues in their teen years. I decided to halve the workload so as not to add extra stress on the child while they recovered over many months. This ended up meaning an extra year was added to their schooling. However, even though they graduated a year after their peers from a school environment, they were able to achieve an OP 3, get 2 scholarships to university and be in the honours college at Griffith University for the 3 year degree they completed. On the

other hand, my niece (of the same age as my child described here) confessed to me after finishing school that she never really “got” some things in maths early on in her schooling, but was pushed on without really ever understanding these foundational maths concepts. Therefore, she fared poorly in senior and has gone from one job to another since finishing school and is currently unemployed and not sure what to do with her life. Obviously, keeping to the curriculum didn’t work out well for her.

Furthermore, what is quality education? Children, in fact all people, are not the same and should not be educated according to a certain framework that is suitable only for some. That is not quality education. Many employers are finding that young adults entering the workforce from mainstream schooling do not have any of the skills required to perform the roles currently available within our economy. On the other hand, homeschooled graduates are often sought after and are more well-adjusted to not only enter the workforce, but engage in independent learning, seeing ways to improve and do work better, because home education fosters these qualities. My four adult children are a testament to this fact. They are all successful in their workplaces and highly sought after by internal and customers alike for their manner, abilities and work ethic.

To add to this, consider the fact that many famous people of the past did not finish or do well at school (eg Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein). Their talents were fostered elsewhere other than the classroom or being aligned with a curriculum. Home educating environments foster creativity, ingenuity and invention as well as entrepreneurial skills and a sense of discovery and a love of learning that can continue for a lifetime. Having to adhere to set curriculum parameters would stifle these important skills and values. We owe it to our children to give them a diverse and enjoyable learning experience so that they can become the best version of themselves they can, and therefore, make a valuable contribution to the State’s economy and lifestyle in the future.

Therefore, I do not support this change to the legislation as it is not in the best interests of the child.

2. I am concerned about the proposed changes regarding the requirement of the home education plan at time of application, removing the provisional registration option and the reduction of the show cause response time to 14 days. This is not in the best interests of the safety of the child.

In many cases, home educating families have taken this route because of trauma such as bullying or domestic violence. It takes time to recover and adjust after trauma – for the child and the parent. Some children just need a break totally from any expectations on them in order to heal and move on. Adults have stress leave available. Children are in much more need of such breaks. They may even need counselling. Parents also need time with their children to support them during trauma. Then they need time to think how they will gather resources and begin the home education process. It also may mean financial stress as the parent now has to reduce their work load or look for alternative employment in order to help their child with the transition and with home education.

The help from the HEU is limited and parents rely on volunteers in the community to help them get sorted in the home education journey. To have a plan at the time of

application is unrealistic in these cases. In addition, 14 days is far too short a time to expect families to be showing cause if they are undergoing traumatic circumstances. The transition to home education under any circumstances takes time and much research and resources investigation. It will be very difficult to try to organise to start home education in a time of adversity, particularly if parents are expected to get a program together covering a wide variety of subjects matching the national curriculum.

Therefore, I perceive these are unfair and unrealistic changes to make in the legislation and I do not support these changes because they are not in the best interests of the child.

3. I am concerned about the requirements for senior students.

The bill proposes that senior students must be engaged in studies that are approved namely, the Australian Curriculum, or the senior syllabus or Tafe or RTO or a mix of these. What if the student wants to start university early or do university studies as part of their senior studies? Two of my adult children did this during senior. It enabled them not only to have exemption from those subjects if and when they commenced a degree after finishing school, but enabled them to find out if that field of study was something they wanted to pursue or not. If QCE points are able to be gained by doing university subjects during senior, then why is this option not listed as an approved education and training program? Surely the Department would consider university studies as quality education? And what about music studies (eg AMEB), or doing the The Duke of Edinburgh Award? Indeed, the “approved” studies listed in the bill are not the only means of gaining quality education. There are many and varied ways to be educated and the options listed in the bill are too restrictive. Legislating that a quality education equals only a few options is not a realistic expectation to put on home educating families that are producing well-adjusted, contributing members of society apart from these restrictions.

Therefore, I do not support this change as it is not in the best interests of the child.

In summary, I am concerned that the bill has been introduced without proper consultation with current homeschooling families and I hope that you will take my feedback into consideration. For education to be inclusive of all students, I believe it is important to understand the reasoning behind the education decisions of the families who have chosen to home educate.

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. A blanket approach of forcing all families to conform to a set curriculum will ultimately curtail educational progress in this state. Children, and indeed all people, are unique individuals. A “one size fits all” approach to learning will not bring about good educational outcomes for everyone.

I believe that imposing the Australian National Curriculum on homeschooling families would be counterproductive and would only serve to exacerbate the issues of children falling through the gaps in the traditional education system. Homeschooling provides a unique opportunity to address these gaps by tailoring education to the individual needs of each child and fostering a supportive learning environment that promotes academic success and personal growth.

In conclusion, I respectfully urge the committee to recognise the importance of flexibility and individualised learning in homeschooling and to refrain from imposing unnecessary restrictions that may hinder our children's educational journey. Let us continue to embrace the freedom and flexibility that homeschooling affords, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to receive a high-quality education that meets their unique needs and aspirations.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.