


Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submitted by: 
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14th March 2024

Dear Committee Members,

RE: PROPOSED CHANGES TO EDUCATION LAWS IN QLD, 2024

Concerns:

I write this submission from a place of deep concern that future choices for my family will come under the jurisdiction of this proposed legislation that is **not appropriate for the values it claims to uphold**. I hold two main concerns about the proposed bill. The first issue of concern is the government overreach of being able to decide what is in the best interests of my children. The second is the poorly informed idea that the Australian National Curriculum is the only way to provide children with a high-quality education.

Our family do not currently homeschool our three neurodivergent children, however strongly value the choice to do so in future and therefore have a sincere interest in these legislative changes. We have seriously considered enrolling with the Home Education Unit on many occasions due to the distress that the demands of mainstream schooling impose on our family. In addition to attending weekly allied health and specialist appointments for our children, we are exhausted from spending countless hours advocating for accommodations required to meet the needs for my children – many of which unfortunately remain unmet.

Parents should remain the primary deciders of what is 'in the best interests' of their children:

Our two school age children have been through extensive diagnostic processes involving Paediatricians, Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Psychologists, Teachers and family members. They have been identified as neurodivergent, with specific physical, communication, emotional and sensory support needs. Despite overwhelming evidence, only one child has been 'verified' in the education QLD system at the school they attend – receiving support only when there is 'enough capacity'. My other child has remained unverified - a decision we vehemently disagree with. This means that they are not able to access essential accommodations for their needs within the mainstream school environment. It is inexplicable to me, that parents, even with the support of multiple highly trained professionals, are unable to override the education department's decision-making without significant, expensive and tiresome advocacy. This is at the detriment of families and the children the department claims to advocate for. Once this extends to home education, where do families failed by the mainstream schooling process turn to?

Just this week, I emailed the classroom teacher, politely enquiring as to the availability of a potentially helpful accommodation, on this occasion referring to a small piece of equipment. I was advised that those are allocated to children 'with specific needs' and that my child was not eligible to receive that support, unless we provided it at our own effort and expense. In another recent interaction with the head of the school's special education team, I also requested flexibility for one of my children and was advised that in the absence of a significant academic impairment, for which my child would not qualify, no modifications could be provided. My child was then forced to withdraw from the activity, which is discriminatory and had detrimental effects on my child's self-esteem and perceived self-worth. Yet another example: one of my children came home from school extremely distressed in all his behaviour. Naturally, I contacted the class teacher to enquire what had happened at school. I was advised that he was 'fine at school' and to 'discuss it' with my child - the same child who has a genuine communication disability and alexithymia. When we did ascertain an idea of what

happened in class from our child and reported back to the teacher, we were dismissed and no further support was offered. We have been in school meetings with multiple professional stakeholders and talked down to by educators as inferior contributors to our children's lives. This is despite every evidence suggesting it is the school system itself with failings and an inability to cater to the genuine needs of all students.

Many school weeks are filled with similar interactions, and it is the unfortunate, discriminatory and unethical reality when others, who do not know the effects of their actions, are making decisions about what they deem is 'in the best interests' of my child. My children are bright, intelligent and filled with the same potential for success as any child – yet decisions are made constantly to discriminate against them and undermine us as parents. Home education and the flexibility offered with in it in its current form, allows refuge for families determined to support their children to succeed in their lives and future careers.

The Australian Curriculum is not the only way to provide a child with a 'high quality education':

The second point of concern, is in the premise that the Australian Curriculum is the only way to provide a child with a 'high quality education'. In the most generous of terms, this assumption is not backed by evidence, nor does it hold true in reality for many families, including mine. Filled with arbitrary tick-box style instructions, the Australian Curriculum was designed for use by trained teachers in the school environment. Teachers of high school curriculum usually only teach a couple of main subjects, and despite having a 4 year degree, are usually not required to plan for or provide education across all subject areas. Similarly, unless working in rural and remote areas, primary school teachers are usually not teaching any more than one year level at a time using the Australian Curriculum. Their time to learn and plan is a paid role, that involves support and professional development.

Di Farmer and her supporters have not considered the implications of homeschooling families teaching multiple years levels for children, across every stipulated subject area. These changes will require intensive planning and reporting, in an unpaid and untrained role. If they have, then the proposed legislation changes are a targeted attempt to return all children to the mainstream schools that failed them with zero regard for disability or diversity, through an inability to comply with these unreasonable expectations.

A high-quality education can be provided very successfully in the home education environment. Parents can take each child's specific needs, strengths and interests into consideration and choose from a range of learning materials. There are already requirements in place for planning a high-quality education and reporting on successes and reflection on areas requiring thoughtful change. **Di Farmer has not produced any evidence that the current systems are failing, nor taken into consideration the voices of genuine homeschooling families.**

Conclusion:

I would ask the committee to thoroughly consider the practical implications and quiet agendas behind the proposed changes to the QLD education laws. We were taught in school that **Australians live in a democracy.** If this is true, this legislation requires **meaningful debate** and **genuine discussion**, with **amendments that reflect concerns** of the parents and citizens this committee represents.

Kind regards,

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