

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 863
Submitted by: Christy Shell
Publication: Making the submission and your name public
Attachments: See attachment
Submitter Comments:

Dear Committee members,

I would like to express my great concern over the suggested changes to the Education Act as they pertain to children that are homeschooled.

To provide a little background context, I am a fully qualified teacher having taught in Australia and the UK for over 10 years before I started homeschooling. Before becoming a teacher I was a Biochemist and worked in pharmaceutical laboratories for many years. I am mother to 6 children, 5 of which have ASD, some with ADHD as well. Two of our children also had significant hearing loss as smaller children and although these issues have seemingly resolved somewhat there are significant issues associated with this loss. When our 4th child was born deaf I began a Masters of Education (deaf education.) We recently moved from Victoria to Queensland after homeschooling through the strictest lockdowns experienced in the world. We relished the opportunity and freedom that Queensland offered, even though the homeschool requirements are more involved than Victoria.

I have significant concerns about the change that homeschooled students should more strictly follow the Australian Curriculum. This curriculum is not designed to be taught in a space other than a school setting which will provide significant challenges to homeschoolers. During its development there were various parts of it that had to be negotiated on between the states due to the schools facilities, specifically the laboratory facilities, which meant that many aspects of some subjects is less than ideal. When we homeschool, although we do not have personal laboratories in our home we have the freedom and flexibility to carry out various experiments of great scientific merit at any age. The curriculum especially in the early stages is crowded and this takes away from a very strong focus on literacy and numeracy. Strict adherence to the curriculum will significantly disadvantage our children as much of our time in the early years focuses exclusively on literacy and numeracy. We don't ignore other areas of study however the learning in these areas is not as overt to the children.

Should I be forced to strictly adhere to the Australian curriculum my youngest children would be severely disadvantaged as they experience significant issues in literacy and/or numeracy. My 8 and 6 year old spend most of their days working on their basic literacy skills and while we cover all the curriculum areas our focus is dedicated to them having a rock solid foundation for their reading. Without this foundation EVERYTHING else will be superfluous because they will struggle to use it in their adult lives. As with most ASD people their learning profiles are drastically different between subjects and sometimes even within different strands of the same subject. This can be seen with my 8yo who is phenomenally quick in mathematics. If I had to stick to the standards of his assigned year then I would be significantly holding him back for no good reason other than an average student at his age should be taught certain things. The changes also don't take into account the variance of ages between states, so while the curriculum is standard

across the country for a particular year, the age of the children learning it is not. In Victoria students have to start school by the time they are 6.5 years which meant my eldest could have started in 2017 however we didn't choose to send him until the following year. When we moved to Queensland he was assigned a year of schooling based on his date of birth alone and effectively skipped a year. This has obvious repercussions in his learning journey, except that because we homeschool we continue as normal and there are no gaps or disruption to his learning. I should also add he is well above his age level in his studies. This obviously isn't a state issue however it is particularly relevant here as homeschool students are assigned a year based on their age and the ability of holding them back until 6 years 6 months is removed. Ideally a homeschool child should be required to cover a breadth of subjects but they should be required to do so at the level they are capable with at that point in time. My 8yo is still working at a prep/grade 1 level in English should be able to work at a grade 6/7 level in math. My experience working within the education system is that this is virtually impossible to accurately do in a classroom report effectively and it would hold true that it would be just as difficult to document in homeschool.

I appreciate the need to ensure that all children receive a thorough, academically rigorous education and wholeheartedly support it. The massive boon of homeschooling is that we can pick and choose from every curriculum in the world. This would seem to me to be a massive advantage over just following one curriculum that does not have a great record of producing highly educated children, sure some reach that but the vast majority wallow in mediocrity at best.

My other concern is the process of approvals to homeschool. The language of the amendment, I feel, leaves the interpretation wide open and thus leaves home schoolers at the mercy and whim of the government and/or department of education. The suggestion is that someone other than the child's parents will determine if homeschooling is in the best interests of the child. I understand the aim of this is to protect children who are in less-than-ideal families or situations however the removal of a parent's right to choose the mode of education is a serious overreach of governmental power. Almost all homeschool parents do not take the full responsibility of their child's education lightly. It is a MASSIVE investment in their child(ren) often resulting in the loss of career, income and other opportunities. Homeschooling is funded solely by the individual parents/families with NO funding provided from the state government (who save thousands by us doing so). In my case, I have given up my career as a successful science/math teacher and we rely solely on my husband's income. This will have flow on effects in my later years as my superannuation is also not building as it otherwise would have. The crux of it is not the loss of income or the tougher financial situation as we fund our children's education ourselves, it is that I know that my children will not thrive in a

school system that cannot support low achievement effectively and concurrently extend them in areas of excellence. Bullying is rife and little to nothing seems to be done, and I know from my professional life how frustrating it was to be so helpless to effectively assist my students. Teachers are severely overworked and inundated with paperwork that is not specifically academically related which negatively effects their ability to effectively teach. So we decided rather than pass our responsibility of educating our children to the department of education we would take sole responsibility for it.

Clarification of who and how approval of homeschooling would take place into the future is needed. The wording needs to be very precise so that there is no room for variance in interpretation. The rights of the parents to decide their childs education must be upheld until such a time as they prove unworthy or incapable of exercising that responsibility.

Finally I am concerned that the extra workload on the Home Education Unit will further reduce the current customer service which is dire. It is almost impossible now to talk to anyone in the unit if you have concerns, need clarification or to sort out issues. The registration process is long winded now with parents waiting for extended periods to receive full approval even if they provide all of the documentation required. The assessment of reports is extraordinarily long (I submitted my childrens reports in early January and don't honestly expect to receive a response until at least mid next month). The ramifications of this is irrelevant if we are doing what we should however if something is going amiss then it could be months before the HEU even know about it. If we need to report on all areas of the curriculum in detail this time frame could potentially blow out exponentially, especially if the increase in homeschooling continues to occur. As a teacher if I waited even one month to report back to a parent on a childs progress I would be facing some unpleasant discussions with my head of department and the principal. The HEU needs to get better not have more demands placed on them when they already clearly cannot cope.

In conclusion, I appreciate the efforts that are being made however, they show how poorly informed the Minister for Education (and those that developed these changes) is in regard to home education. The complete snubbing of the homeschooling community who are crying out to be heard and understood, just further confirms the ignorance which seems to abound. I implore you to consider mine and all the other submissions as we try to help you understand how this will affect our children.