

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submission on the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 with reference to home education

Written and submitted by Lynda Carlos (a home educator and former teacher residing in Queensland)

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Home educator and former teacher

(contact details provided when document was uploaded)

To:

Committee Secretary

Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee

Parliament House

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Dear Secretary and Members of the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee

Hon Mark Bailey MP, Member for Miller, Chair

Mr James Lister MP, Member for Southern Downs

Mr Joe Kelly MP, Member for Greenslopes

Mr Nick Dametto MP, Member for Hinchinbrook

Mr Barry O'Rourke MP, Member for Rockhampton

Mr Brent Mickelberg, Member for Buderim

Thank you for taking the time to consider my response to the [Education \(General Provisions\) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024](#) with specific reference to home education.

Introduction

I write with multiple perspectives, including:

- As a home educator for the last 12+ years (in Queensland for the last 4 years)
- As someone who was active in responding to changes to home education heralded by the Tasmanian Education Act 2016, when I lived in Tasmania, including giving a briefing on home education to Members of the Tasmanian Legislative Council at Parliament House in September 2016

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- As the author of a booklet for Tasmanian home educators entitled [Understanding the Tasmanian home education system](#)¹ (written to help home educators adjust to the Tasmanian Education Act 2016 when it came into force in 2017)
- As someone who coordinated a weekly home education co-operative attended by parents and their children for social connection and educational activities in central Hobart from late 2015 to 2018
- as a former teacher (secondary maths, chemistry, and biology) still registered with the Queensland College of Teachers
- As a former lecturer in vocational and degree-level education (health sciences) and adult educator (English as a second language for migrants and overseas students and literacy classes for marginalised adults with intellectual and psychiatric challenges living in boarding houses in West End, Brisbane)
- As a tutor for over 30 years, currently tutoring students ranging from age 7 to 17 years from different educational settings including school, distance education and home-education.
- As a past member of the Home Education Association Inc. Management Committee

Acknowledgment of the Intentions behind the Bill:

I acknowledge the Minister's stated intentions to ensure that a "high quality education" is available to all home-educated students and to strengthen the [Education \(General Provisions\) Act 2006](#) to acknowledge student wellbeing, inclusion, and diversity.

I am concerned that some of the proposed amendments in the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 will undermine these stated intentions. There are several amendments which, are especially problematic and potentially harmful to children in the home education space.

Amendments of particular concern to me:

In my view, the most concerning amendments to the [Education \(General Provisions\) Act 2006](#), hereafter referred to as the Act, are as follows:

- The move to require home education students to follow the Australian Curriculum or senior subject syllabuses (and chart their progress with respect to these curricula) (Clause 68, which amends s217 (Standard Conditions) of the Act)
- The removal of Provisional Registration, specifically, the removal of the 60-day grace period currently allowed under s207 of the Act, that allows parents to start home educating students prior to submitting their formal education plan (Clause 60)
- The "streamlining" measures which:

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- cut the time allowed for home educators to respond to requests for more information from 28 to 14 days (as per Clause 63)
- allow for the Chief Executive to automatically fail to decide applications that are not submitted in the approved format according to the procedural requirements of S208, removing the obligation to give the applicant 28 days to get their application up to standard (Clause 62, which removes Section 210 of the Act)

I have outlined below the reasons for my concern about these amendments, including two personal case studies to illustrate why I believe these changes will be harmful for some children who would especially benefit from a more flexible and expansive approach to home education.

It is important that the Committee takes on board feedback from home educators on these amendments rather than primarily basing its decisions on advice from institutional bodies or government agencies. In my experience, “experts” in institutional education frequently lack a deep understanding of the realities of home education and the richly diverse range of educational philosophies practised by home educating families.

Changing the Act by requiring home educators to follow the Australian Curriculum and removing provisional registration may sound like common sense to the uninformed but is a superficial and counterproductive approach to regulating the home education sector.

In this submission, I explain why the Committee needs to take another look at the amendments relating to home education and give ear to the voices of the many home educators who have made submissions to this Committee.

Amendments which I regard as generally positive:

- **Clause 25**, amending the upper age for home education registration from 17 to 18 years in line with other states.

Potential Positive Changes to the Act which seem to have been overlooked:

- A provision for home educated students to exercise the option to be enrolled part-time in school.

Part-time school enrolment, up to the equivalent of 2 days per week, was included in the Tasmanian Education Act 2016 and has been successfully undertaken by many students since then.

- The establishment of an advisory body on home education, consisting of home educators with a range of educational philosophies and experience, which would be

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available to consult with the Minister of Education, the Home Education Unit and other government agencies. Other states and territories have established various types of home education consulting groups. In Tasmania, this has even been enshrined in legislation as the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC).

- Recognition of university subjects undertaken as part of a home education program. Some home-educated students do Open University or other university subjects whilst registered for home education. There are home-educated students from Queensland who have even started university courses as young as 14 or 15.
- A provision for home educated students to (optionally) access specialist services through their local school, such as psychology assessments, speech therapy or other supports as deemed desirable by the parents.

Such an offering should in no way be compelled but could be of value to families with children experiencing diverse needs, particularly those in rural or lower socioeconomic communities, and would align with the proposed amendments to the guiding principles of the Act.

My feedback on Clause 18: Amendment of s7 (Guiding principles)

to specify that

“home education of a child or young person should be provided in a way that— (i) is in the best interests of the child or young person taking into account their safety and wellbeing; and (ii) ensures the child or young person receives a high-quality education.

Two key considerations for me as a long-term home educator are that the Guiding Principles should recognise that:

- 1) “High quality” home education does not imply doing school at home nor depend on adherence to a specific curriculum or timetable (more on this later); and
- 2) Except in extreme circumstances, where a child is in danger of severe neglect or abuse, the decision about what constitutes “the best interests of the child” should lie with the parents, not with the state.

On the best interests of children:

Families who choose to home educate their children, do so because they believe it is in the best interests of the child. They are likely to have very good reasons, based on an intimate understanding of their child and specific circumstances, as to why they think that a home-based

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education is the most suitable given their situation. Later in this submission I share two case studies that highlight how allowing a flexible approach to the home education program facilitates the parent to support the child's best interests, considering the child's individual education needs and their psychosocial health and general wellbeing.

Home educators already provide a high-quality education without being explicitly required to address the Australian Curriculum.

I would like legislators to appreciate that home educators are highly resourceful and capable of providing a high-quality education for their children, even if this looks quite different to school or distance education. Home education is more organic, follows very individualised timelines and can have a wider range of end-goals or views of "success", reflecting the diversity of the home education community. Trying to force a school-like conception of "high quality" onto home education through requiring adherence to a unified curriculum, undermines the very strengths and values of home education as a valid educational option.

Examples of the rich range of home education experience:

Home educators access a wide range of educational resources, social and learning opportunities for their children. These often include organising group excursions to museums, science presentations, farms, wildlife sanctuaries, theatre productions, sports, and outdoor education events, including camps, and regular park play gatherings. My children have participated with other home-educated children in many rich educational experiences, including:

- an archaeological dig
- classes in Japanese language, art, drama, coding, creative writing, 3-D printing
- science week events
- swimming lessons
- Parliamentary tours and role plays
- bush survival skills and natural science days at an outdoor education centre
- a tour of an Antarctic ice-breaker ship
- tours and talks at fire stations including to an airport fire brigade
- a tour and talk at a police training academy and at a central city police station
- tours and talks by scientists in various locations, including CSIRO, weather stations, museums
- marine discovery adventures
- several excursions to a radio telescope and its control centre
- a first aid and CPR class for kids
- a floristry workshop
- annual homeschool Christmas markets selling home-made items with stalls run by the children
- bushwalking, archery, horse-riding, orienteering and camping
- book clubs
- home-school co-ops offering opportunities to learn carpentry, mechanics and other practical skills
- weekly sports classes in a range of sports including tennis, volleyball, basketball, soccer and touch football, run by a retired P.E. teacher
- Many live theatre events

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- Wellbeing-focused group activities run by home school parents who are also counsellors or general practitioners with a focus on mental health
- Weekly homeschool park play and social groups

Home educators do not teach their children in isolation – they often access mentors, tutors, online classes, and activities run by local libraries or other community organisations. They may participate in robotics competitions, Lego-building workshops, coding clubs, youth orchestras, choirs, or volunteer for community organisations such as Riding for the Disabled. Home-schooled teenagers often participate in work experience, and many do TAFE certificates, University head start programs or Open University subjects whilst home-educating.

Home educators organise and participate in conferences to learn more and share about their educational practice. Some home educators form study groups to delve more deeply into the principles of a particular educational philosophy. There are groups for those following Montessori, Steiner, Charlotte Mason, Classical Education, Natural Learning (sometimes referred to as unschooling – a term often misunderstood by formal educators), forest or wild-schooling and many others.

Home education is the space in which originality, out-of-the-box thinking, and truly creative, individualised learning pathways can be forged. This is a sacred space to home educators – a space that should be allowed to flourish with maximum freedom and flexibility, not standardisation.

The home education community is politically and ideologically diverse.

Contrary to popular understanding, the home education community is a lot more diverse than cultural stereotypes might suggest. For example, one home school co—op that I facilitated included families from diverse religious backgrounds, a transgender family, parents with quite different political loyalties and significantly different educational philosophies. However, one thing home educators strongly value is freedom of choice – especially when it comes to their own children.

Any Education Act which purports to value diversity and child wellbeing, can only succeed in upholding these guiding principles if it supports parental choice and pedagogical diversity.

My perspective on Clause 25: - Increasing the maximum age of registration from 17 to 18.

Giving students an additional 12 months to be able to remain registered would have been beneficial to our family.

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Our daughter turned 18 in February 2024. She started her home education journey in Tasmania, and we had anticipated that she would continue with her home education through to completion of Year 12 in December 2024. However, because Queensland does not register students beyond the year in which they turn 17, she aged out of the system earlier than we had planned.

If our daughter had been able to remain registered with the Home Education Unit this year, she would have been eligible to do another government-funded School at TAFE certificate and/or a university taster subject this year.

In Tasmania, our family would have been eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part A for our daughter for another 12 months, but because she is not able to be registered for home education in Queensland as an 18-year-old, we are not able to access this payment. This has been financially challenging for us.

Under the existing age limit of 17, home-educating families who have children with special needs, have been losing their eligibility for other financial assistance (such as the Australian Isolated Children's payment), earlier than their peers in other states. Additionally, home-educating parents on Jobseeker payments have had to forego their exemption from mutual obligation with Centrelink 12 months earlier than home-educating parents in other states, meaning that these parents may not have been able to stay at home to assist their children to complete their home education in the vital final year of senior studies.

Changing the legislation to require registration from age 17 to 18 will be liked by some families and disliked by others. Those not financially disadvantaged by the current age 17 cut-off, may be quite happy to be relieved of the reporting burden when their child turns 17 and students are not universally disadvantaged by not being registered beyond this age. It would be preferable if there was some choice about whether to continue registering beyond age 17, rather than one rule for all students.

My perspective on The Removal of Provisional Registration for Home Education

Clause 60 omits chapter 9, part 5, division 2 (section 207) to remove the ability to apply for provisional registration for home education.

Previously, there were two ways to apply for Registration in Queensland. One way was through Section 207, which allowed families to apply for 60 days of Provisional Registration before submitting a formal home education program. This allowed families to start home educating immediately whilst they were still working on developing a formal plan.

I used Section 207 when my family moved to Queensland from Tasmania. The provisional period allowed our family to continue home educating whilst we grappled with understanding the different reporting requirements in a new state. It gave us breathing space while we were busy settling into a new location.

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In my years of active participation in home-educating communities in different parts of Australia, I have found that there is a strong need for an avenue of provisional registration that allows a child to be removed from school prior to submitting a full home education plan. It allows families needing to pull their children out of school suddenly for a variety of reasons (such as severe bullying, sexual harassment at school, school refusal, a mental health crisis, moving, escaping domestic violence), to respond to the needs of their child or family in a safe and timely way without having to go through the stressful and time-consuming route of putting together a comprehensive education plan whilst in crisis, and then waiting a further several weeks before being legally allowed to remove their child from school.

A supportive approach to provisional registration also makes it more likely that families will continue to engage with the system, rather than disappear under the radar.

My feedback on Clause 61 - Requiring evidence a child has made 'progress':

Clause 61 amends section 208 to include a new requirement for applications for registration for home education if at any time within the 12 months before the application is made the child was registered for home education. The new requirement is that the application must be accompanied by a report, in the approved form, that includes evidence satisfactory to the chief executive that demonstrates the educational progress of the child during the period of the child's registration.

Many children in schools go through periods of time, even years in some cases, where they do not noticeably 'progress' at school. In fact, this can be one reason why families choose to exit the school system and start home educating. Whilst the intention of this amendment seems aimed at ensuring students are not set up to fail by chopping and changing their educational arrangements or attempting to re-register after a short enrolment period in a school, it seems to put a disproportionate burden on parents compared with schools – particularly given that this clause is most likely to affect students for whom school has been a repeatedly difficult or damaging experience over a long period of time.

My feedback on Clause 63: Reducing the time allowed for parents to respond to requests by the Home Education Unit for more information:

Clause 63 amends section 211 to streamline the home education registration application process by: setting the minimum period in which an applicant must give further information, or a document requested by the chief executive for deciding the application, at 14 days (rather than the current 28 days).

Even with the provision for the chief executive officer to extend this period, this amendment is problematic for home-schooling parents who do not have office staff to assist them with administrative tasks while they are home educating multiple children with differing needs, managing a home, and possibly fitting in some hours of paid work. Home educating parents do not have the luxury of maternity leave or bereavement leave – they continue to manage their

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older children's home education through births, deaths, illnesses, and family crises. They do not need unrealistic expectations placed on them. They are not salaried staff.

Additionally, there may be times when the information required involves sourcing professional opinions or assessments from psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and others, who may not be available in a 14-day framework. In my tutoring work, I often assist students with learning disorders or ASD, who have multiple professionals and support workers involved in their lives. It's a major occupation for the parents of these children just to manage all their weekly appointments on top of their home education.

If this Bill is aimed at improving the wellbeing of students and recognising diversity, then it must not place undue time pressures on home-educators as this creates a stressful learning environment and distracts the parent from their primary responsibilities to nurture and educate their children.

My thoughts on Clause 62, which seeks to streamline the registration process:

Clause 62 omits section 210 (chief executive must ensure compliance with procedural requirements) to ensure that if an application for registration of a child for home education does not comply with procedural requirements for an application under section 208, the application is not taken to be made and the child cannot be taken to be provisionally registered under section 212.

This clause reads as if it is strategically aimed at eliminating applicants who, in a more supportive system, could be helped to meet the criteria for home education. Is this clause intended to be used to keep home education numbers small by denying unwanted applicants without even requiring the Home Education Unit to give these applicants more time or feedback on how they could improve their proposed program to fulfil the requirements?

By contrast, when the Tasmanian Education Act 2016 and the Education Regulations 2017, first came into effect, the then newly appointed Education Registrar (who had previously been one of the drafters of the legislation) took an intentionally supportive approach to home education applicants. The Tasmanian registration officers provided support so that new home educators could be upskilled to improve their programming.

In my personal experience, many parents who do not have the skill set to write comprehensive programming documents, are, nevertheless capable of providing a high-quality education tailored to their children's individual needs. This was understood and acknowledged by the Tasmanian Education Registrar.

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My feedback on Clause 66, which amends s215 of the Act by reducing the time allowed for Provisional Registration via the s208 route to be reduced from 90 to 45 days:

The wording of this amendment suggests that the Chief Executive's "failure to decide" on an application mean no decision is made and that the applicant simply hears nothing from the Home Education Unit in response to their application.

Surely, it is important that applicants receive a decisive answer, one way or another, to their application.

Also, given the recent increase in applications to home educate, the onus is on the government to resource the Home Education Unit to respond to the increased workload. This clause should not be used to eliminate applicants in times where there is a backlog of applications. Denying registration of applicants simply because the Department has not been adequately funded, is discriminatory and could endanger the wellbeing of some children, especially neurodiverse children, and those with other diverse needs (which may not necessarily be identifiable by tick-box)

My Perspective on Clause 68 which seeks to Amend S217 (Standard Conditions) for the acceptance of a home education application.

I agree with point (i) in the new wording for S217 (1)b that says "*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*" but I submit that conditions (ii) and (iii), and in certain children's cases, condition (iv) may sometimes be at odds with the first condition. Conditions (ii) to (iv) are that the educational program must:

(ii) be consistent with an approved education and training program; and (iii) provide the child with a comprehensive course of study in a diverse range of subjects or learning areas; and (iv) include subjects or learning areas that are the study of English and mathematics

It is more important that the age, ability, aptitude, and development of the child are considered over and above any consideration of adherence to an approved curriculum or of the number or type of subject areas covered. This priority should be explicit so that children's needs are prioritised and that children with diverse needs are not put under unnecessary pressure to conform to requirements that are unsuited to them and cause distress.

Further crucial feedback on Clause 68, which also seeks to define and limit the meaning of an "approved educational and training program" to mean one of the following:

(a) the national school curriculum (known as the Australian Curriculum)— (i) developed and administered by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority established

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under the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act 2008 (Cwlth), section 5; and (ii) published on the authority's website; or

(b) a senior subject syllabus for a senior subject; or

(c) a vocational education and training course at level 1 or above under the AQF; or

(d) a combination of the curriculum, a syllabus or a course mentioned in paragraph (a), (b) or (c).

I stand with thousands in the Queensland home education community who reject any compulsion to follow the Australian Curriculum or Senior Subject Syllabuses.

Whilst the Australian Curriculum and Senior subject syllabuses can be useful resources to home educators, the legislation should **NOT** limit the definition of an “approved education program” to these. Home education is not school at home and should never be limited to following any standard curriculum.

The presumption in these amendments is that a “high quality education” can only be achieved through following “an approved” curriculum (namely, the Australian Curriculum developed by ACARA or a senior subject syllabus developed by the QCAA).

This is not my experience and I think it reveals a fundamental lack of understanding by legislators about the realities of home education and the needs of children and families. Thousands of home educators around Australia have removed their children from school because their children’s learning needs were not met in a system driven by the requirement to deliver the curriculum. This standardized and busy approach to education, alienates and is detrimental to many children, especially those who are gifted, neurodiverse, dyslexic, practical hands-on learners, or experiencing mental health challenges.

I have tutored many school students over the last 35 years, and I have had many parents who were likewise graduates of the school system, confess apologetically to me that they do not have the skills to help their child do even Year 4 level maths. These parents aspire for better for their own children. When parents decide to home educate, they are highly motivated to give their children the best education they can access. In many cases I have seen parents who did not achieve highly in school themselves, suddenly find themselves enjoying maths or English or history as they learn along with their home-educated children. Home educators are highly resourceful, so when they do reach a limit in their own competencies, they find ways to address these gaps by employing tutors, joining learning co-ops, buying interactive subject area software packages, accessing online courses and so on. There are many quality resources available that follow curricula other than the Australian Curriculum.

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Not all states in Australia require home educators to follow the national curriculum. In Tasmania, which has arguably the highest degree of government oversight of home education in Australia, the [Tasmanian Education Regulations 2017](#) provides a Schedule of Standards that describe what a high quality home education program should address, but explicitly states that “There is no obligation for an approved home education program to provide a curriculum other than as specified in the standards for approved home education programs set out in [Schedule 1](#).” Parents in Tasmania are free to apply their own pedagogy without following the Australian curriculum, so long as they can articulate how this addresses the required standards. These Standards were adapted from an amalgamation of work done in 2016 by 3 working parties of experienced home educators including myself.

The whole basis for home education is the freedom to craft an education that is unique to the individual and NOT a replication of school. There are plenty of Distance Education providers in Queensland offering school at home for families who want that. The whole idea of compelling conformity to the national curriculum is anathema to the basic philosophy of many experienced home educators. Following a standardized curriculum can work well for some students sometimes, for some subjects, but it is not appropriate for all students at all stages of their home education journey. It is particularly at odds with the child-led natural learning approach, which has been successfully used by countless home educators for decades now.

Flexibility must be allowed in how a child’s progress is reported. The reporting requirements should not devolve into a tick-box, standardised measurement of curriculum-linked achievements. This would undermine condition 1 of Section 217 of the Act, which states that “*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*”. This also means that the assessment of home education reports must be conducted by human beings not by artificial intelligence systems.

When designing my home education programs, I personally prefer a goal-oriented approach based on my children’s specific interests and aptitudes. I generally choose to report using the goal-oriented reporting template rather than the curriculum-based template made available on the Home Education Unit website as the former is a better fit for our educational pedagogy. Some families prefer to use a theme-based planning and reporting approach, whilst others design their own. There are many valid methods of reporting.

Case Studies that highlight how a curriculum-based learning model can clash with the best interests of the child:

Here are two case studies from my own experience demonstrating that a requirement to follow a standardised curriculum or to measure a child’s progress against a standardised curriculum, is not always in the best interests of the child and can be detrimental to some children’s

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wellbeing. In fact, a good case can be made that this is more the rule than the exception amongst home educated students.

Case Study 1: (A neurodiverse student enrolled with a school of distance education)

I recently supported a distance education (DE) school student during their end-of-term high school Maths assessment based on the Australian curriculum. This student is autistic and has other barriers to participation in regular schooling (which is why the student is learning from home). The parent has asked the DE provider to adjust the program to accommodate her child's learning difficulties. The main problems are that the workload for each subject and the number of subjects required to be studied simultaneously are far in excess of the child's capacity. None of the teachers so far seem to be able to provide a sufficiently tailored individual education plan for the student. The 70-minute maths test which the student sat in my presence, was far beyond the student's ability and caused the student to become extremely distressed and agitated, which they demonstrated by stimming, moaning, crying, and hitting their forehead repeatedly. The student needed help to understand almost every question, even the simple 'familiar' style questions. After the test the student was so upset that they were unable to participate in a social gathering later that day, despite it being their main social outlet for the week. The student is likely to receive an 'E' on this assessment, which they will find devastating.

Being required to follow the full subject range and assessment schedule as per the national curriculum is not working for this student. The pace is way too fast for any learning to be consolidated and the child is increasingly getting the message that they are a failure even though they are studying to the point of exhaustion and meltdown. The parent is also under strain. In the last week, as the parent has worked extremely hard to support her child and advocate in her child's best interests, the parent has developed shingles, which the doctor said was stress related.

It is very unfortunate that there is so little room in this standardized education program for the child to showcase and hone the areas of artistic creativity at which they shine. A conversation I had with the parent this week highlights the difference in quality of outcome that can be achieved through natural child-led learning versus a curriculum-based education for this student; the parent shared that the student is currently pursuing a personal learning project on how to animate their own art pieces and is fully engrossed in the process - happily describing to their parent all the technical details they are learning about animation as they work at their own pace using a computer application. By contrast, only four months ago, when the student's previous distance education school set an assessment task on creating a stop motion animation film, the student was uninspired by the task and overwhelmed by their overall workload, so did not fully complete the assignment. In fact, from my observation, the student took away very little, if any, knowledge, or technical skills from that school-based topic.

If the new distance education provider cannot adequately adapt the education program for the child by end of next term, the parent will look at registering the child for home education.

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Neither regular school nor standard distance education programs are a good fit for many students with diverse needs and the option of home education needs to be available to them. However, it is no good if that last remaining educational sanctuary is turned into a copy of the very systems that have already failed so many students. Unfortunately, Clause 68 in this Amendment Bill threatens to do just that. Clause 68 needs to be re-worked, omitting the requirement that home educators must use the Australian Curriculum or Senior Subject Syllabuses.

Case Study 2: (a home-educated student who went through a period of mental health challenges and emerged more resilient as a result of being free to follow a flexible non-traditional approach to education)

My teenage daughter went through a difficult 3 years after we made our big interstate move back to Queensland in 2020, which dislodged her from the community of friends with whom she had grown up between ages 2 and 14. The covid pandemic broke out whilst we were in transit between our old home in Hobart and our new life in regional Queensland. Since we were tent-camping our way up the east coast of Australia when camping grounds and caravan parks were suddenly closed under covid measures, we ended up needing to find an Airbnb where we could “shelter in place” for the four months of lockdown. The lockdown measures meant that the regular home education excursions and social meet-up groups in our new location stopped happening for most of 2020 and as a result we were unable to get out and build new social networks with our children until long after our move. This was highly detrimental to our daughter’s mental health and rendered her unable and unwilling to engage with any formal curriculum learning, either in a school setting or at home, for a long time. Instead of fighting a losing battle with her, we did what any seasoned home educators would do: we looked for other ways to draw her out of herself and re-engage her love for learning. Our daughter has always loved horses and been involved in horse-riding activities, so we found a horse rescue organization that also offered therapeutic equine experiences and our daughter did volunteer work and personal development training with them 2- 2.5 days per week while she was 14 and 15 years old. During that time, she and another girl were chosen for a special one-off mentoring project in which she had the opportunity to learn how to train an untamed horse. At home we continued reading enriching books out loud as a family and discussing them. We took our daughter to a home school camp at Tunnel Ridge Ranch, where she made a new friend and enjoyed the many outdoor activities. We went on home education excursions, and she participated in a local home-school girls art and discussion group. In 2021, our daughter leased a horse through a local riding school and began competing in equestrian shows for the first time. We were then able to buy land and she bought and trained two off-the-track thoroughbred racehorses, reselling one at a decent profit. This led to our daughter finding paid work experience in the horse-racing industry at age 16, whilst we tailored practical maths and English assignments to her interests. She also learnt some Russian language through the Rosetta Stone interactive software program, taught herself to play the piano in a totally non-conventional way, developed skills in voice acting in a range of accents, joined

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a home school drama class in term 1 of 2022, and saved up and bought her own aeroplane tickets to fly to Tasmania by herself to visit her old friends for two weeks.

There is no way that our daughter would have applied herself to any senior syllabus subjects, or other formal courses during this prolonged period. However, by the time she turned 17 at the beginning of last year, she had rediscovered her sense of ambition and her desire to connect socially.

2023 was an incredibly productive year for our daughter. She enrolled herself in two acting classes per week, played a leading role in a stage performance of “*A Tale of Two Cities*” with Acting Up Youth Theatre Academy, commenced singing lessons for the first time, completed a Certificate 2 through TAFE at School, joined a karate class, participated in an Eisteddfod for the first time, competing in the Senior Drama Championship section, did a term of film acting classes at Leigh Parker Acting Studio, joined a local art class for fun, attended two week-long youth camps, and started going to a weekly youth group, which greatly extended her friendship base in our town.

Now in 2024, she has a new job, is preparing for a Trinity Acting Exam, has found herself a more advanced singing teacher, joined the singing team at our church, is learning music theory, and is researching bachelor’s degree courses in acting, film, or musical theatre for which she intends auditioning later this year. Additionally, she has been invited to join the leadership teams for two upcoming youth camps at Mt Tambourine and is planning and saving for an overseas trip at the end of this year.

I think our daughter’s story underscores how circuitous young people’s lives can be -they do not always proceed in the expected way; challenges arise, and people deal with these in diverse ways according to their individual circumstances. The locus for decision-making in response to these unexpected challenges and reversals, must remain with the family.

It is the parents who have the highest degree of commitment to their children and it is the parents who fund the home education of their children, often at high personal cost, including the willingness to forego a second income in the family and a willingness to drive children long distances (in our case sometimes an hour and a half each way) to access specialised learning opportunities such as film schools or acting academies.

The proposed amendment to enshrine the Australian Curriculum and Senior Subject Syllabuses as the only approved bases for home education programs would not have served our daughter well at all when she was 14, 15 or 16. It would have been a source of stress affecting the whole family for us to try and force her learning along those lines. We did not need this amendment in order to be able to provide a high quality, individually tailored education to our daughter. On the contrary, such a rigid legislative requirement would have undermined our ability to respond adequately to our daughter’s needs and would quite likely have been very harmful to her. If we had felt pressured to follow a more structured education program, I seriously doubt that our daughter would be the flourishing, creative, ambitious, responsible, and resourceful young woman that she is now.

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It is impossible for the state to anticipate and address all the individual needs of a child and the state should not seek to impose systems or curricula designed for institutional use onto families who are educating their children at home.

Four things likely to happen if the Australian Curriculum is forced on home educators in Queensland:

1. More home educators will go “under the radar”.
2. Enrolments in distance education programs will go up (at least initially), but many students will struggle with the workload, online attendance requirements and inability to obtain Individual Education Plans appropriate to them.
3. The home education consultancy industry will boom, with more home educators simply paying “experts” to write their programs and reports for them. This will remove authenticity. It will also deprive families of the opportunity to share, with pride, their own unique education journeys. As a result, the regulator will become increasingly ignorant of the realities of home education and will not be able to provide effective oversight.
4. There will be a growing number of children and teenagers whose needs are not addressed in **any** educational setting. Many children with special needs will be put through unnecessary and prolonged stress and experience repeated failure. Instead of ensuring a “high quality” education for all, more students will become disengaged, angry, or apathetic. There will be an increase in the number of children simply refusing to engage in any curriculum-based learning either at school or at home. The long-term fallout from alienating so many students will show up in future mental health, unemployment, and crime statistics. Meanwhile, making parents enforcers of a standardised curriculum approach to education in the home-based learning environment will damage family dynamics; children will lose trust that their parents have their best interests at heart and distressed families will be increasingly cynical and angry with government agencies for promulgating unworkable policies.

Seven Questions I would like the Committee to answer for me:

1. What evidence, if any, does the Committee have, or know about, that the existing 60-day provisional registration allowed under s207 is endangering children or preventing them from receiving a “high quality education”?

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2. Will these amendments require home-educating parents to report and measure progress against all key learning areas in the Australian Curriculum?
3. What evidence will the home educator be required to submit to satisfy the Chief Executive that their child has made an acceptable degree of “progress”?
4. What additional budgetary provisions is the government proposing to make to help the Home Education Unit cope with the vastly increased work load it will likely experience if these amendments, especially Clause 68, are enacted?
5. What data has the Queensland government collected to determine whether graduates of home education who did not follow the Australian Curriculum or Senior Subject Syllabuses, have poorer future employment or further education outcomes or poorer mental health than students who followed these curricula, taking into consideration like for like (that is accounting for neurodiversity, socioeconomic status and other factors)? Does the Home Education Unit or any other state government department even follow-up home education graduates at the 1-year, 5-year or 10-year mark to see where they end up?

Note: if you are interested in looking at research on this, one of the home education registration officers with the Office of Education Registrar in Tasmania was doing a master’s research project on this at the time I left Tasmania.

6. Does the Education Department, or any other government body, have a maximum limit on the number of students or families they will allow to be registered for home education in Queensland? If so, please make that information public and justify your reasoning for this.
7. Can the Committee reassure me that the assessment of home education applications and reports will continue to be conducted by living humans and not by artificial intelligence systems?

In conclusion:

If respecting diversity is important, as this government claims, then so, too, is respecting and protecting, in law, the diversity of educational options available in Queensland. Healthy ecosystems foster biodiversity and vice versa. I beseech the Committee to consider the importance of preserving the freedom currently enjoyed by home educators so that there will always be a space for students who need creative, nurturing alternatives to traditional curriculum-oriented learning environments.

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Finally, lest it be thought that home education is predominantly or only for students or families who have struggled in mainstream school, let me conclude by saying that, although I personally achieved very highly through my own secondary school experience, graduating in the top 1% of students in Queensland under the old Tertiary Entrance Score system, I elected to educate my own children differently from their infancy. When my daughter was as young as four months old, I joined a home education play group in Brisbane. When we moved to Tasmania before my daughter's second birthday, I immediately connected with the home education community there. Since then, we have been privileged to share our home education journey with many diverse and interesting groups of home educators in both southern Tasmania and, for the last four years, in rural Queensland. I have had the privilege to volunteer alongside home educators from all states and territories as a past Committee Member and volunteer with the Home Education Association Inc.

Whilst I continue to home educate my 12-year-old son, my daughter has now "graduated" from home education, and, having recently turned 18, will soon be voting for her first time in Queensland state government elections. I couldn't be prouder of the young woman she has become.

Reference:

1. *Understanding the Tasmanian home education system* (July 2020 Ed) Published by the Home Education Association Inc. [b65d8d_5a393e570c1e4d1c9c087c37aac0d9ef.pdf \(hea.edu.au\)](https://www.hea.edu.au/files/b65d8d_5a393e570c1e4d1c9c087c37aac0d9ef.pdf)