

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 957
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Publication:
Attachments:
Submitter Comments:

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee](#)
Subject: Proposed changes to legislation re: Homeschooling
Date: Wednesday, 20 March 2024 5:35:17 PM

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to express my disagreement with the proposed changes to the education legislation proposed.

As it stands homeschoolers are often held to a much higher account in the administration of their education plan than teachers teaching large cohorts. No school I am aware of supplies a detailed HESP for all their students individually across all learning domains (even schools who claim to have individualised plans have not done this in my experience, and more concerning are the schools who are meant to do it for students with disabilities where funding is attached and they do not complete this admin task), and the progress markers for each student are not clear in relation to the specific areas of each curriculum topic outcome (in the mainstream education system). We removed our children from school after COVID when we realised the standard of curriculum being delivered to our children was not in line with the appointed year levels. Additionally, on having a placement assessment done, we found that basic numeracy foundations that they should have been competent for their ages and stages were not. As someone writing legislation designed to protect and enhance students' learning outcomes, I don't need to tell you how critically important early years foundations in numeracy (and literacy) is.

Regarding academic outcomes. It is widely acknowledged that literacy and numeracy levels in Australia are declining. This is of measurements taken largely from formally educated students (with a non-representative amount of homeschoolers participating) in the testing that is used to inform these numbers. A better focus for amendments would be to capture those broad numbers of students in standardised teaching practice across schools, requiring evidence based practice across all schools and year levels and an increase in funding to reduce student-teacher ratio to support students, provide teachers funded time to develop individualised plans that are developed in consultation with parents, and improve these outcomes first. A review conducted by the NSW Government in 2014 noted that academically there was no statistical difference in homeschooled versus formal schooled students, and in many instances their averages were greater than that of formally schooled students. From the same paper *"In relation to NAPLAN tests, the analysis showed that students who were previously home schooled scored significantly higher in the Reading and Grammar & Punctuation tests, generally by about 20-25 marks (or about one-third of a standard deviation) in Reading, and 15-25 marks in Grammar & Punctuation."*

Quality research that is Australian based is difficult to obtain, however a lot of research has been completed overseas including in comparable countries such as the USA and UK. Homeschooled students have been reported to score higher on tests of academic skill (Noting this research does not provide controls for family and social demographics). Social abilities which is a much underlooked component compared to academics in our school system (despite clear research that EI is a far better indicator of academic outcome than academic knowledge), is reported to be at best on par with formally schooled children, but in most instances shows a statistical significant difference - in favour of homeschooling with homeschooled young people scoring higher on these tests.

In respect to the changes in legislation there is a lot of the Australian curriculum that teachers themselves say is not relevant. Without a full review of the national curriculum and whether it serves our children and young people today, it is preemptive to add this as a

condition to home educating families. Additionally, the teachers themselves say the curriculum is at times difficult to get through. I do wonder what the research is on the correlations between a very full curriculum and the speed it's taught versus the foundational elements of core subject areas.

The current education system is not designed to support our children, but to support the workforce. It has a curriculum which is still dated, aspects of the curriculum that are not relevant, it lacks a curriculum that is relevant to our changing world. Our young people's physical and mental health has some alarming statistics, and the long school days do not help this. Suicide rates among our teenagers are only increasing. Focusing on a small, comparatively, cohort of educators is not going to help fix these issues. While schools themselves are not the cause of the health issues, they are contributing with access to unmonitored social media, unvetted marketing propaganda targeting body image and self image. There is an ongoing push for parents to enrol their children into more and more organised activities and sports. Children and young people go from one curated environment to another, and in some instances coming home to large volumes of homework; with little opportunity afforded for genuine unstructured, unsupervised play. Play has been clearly demonstrated as a key marker to physical and mental wellbeing across all the ages and stages of life.

Deciding to homeschool our children has afforded our children to be in emotionally safe environments where their psychosocial health and wellbeing and development can be of equal importance to academic outcome. When our children were at school all three children experienced bullying. We can stand on the sidelines and softly encourage social interactions with them knowing they are safe, supported and protected. And when ready they venture out to those independent playdates and sleepovers - knowing they are safe.

Bullying Examples:

The school was ill equipped to deal with this. It included my then 5 year old son on the school specific bus being told by a 15 year old high school student she was going to kill him, whispering over and over in his ear. He was nothing short of hysterical and hyperventilating when I got to him. When I addressed it with the school it was suggested I speak to the parent as I would understand the families difficulties given the work I do - my son's experience and wellbeing was not the priority in my conversations with the school. When he expressed concern walking to lunch past her classroom we were advised that he needed to move on as it was a past issue.

It included his 'friend' sitting in the sandpit telling my son "I'm not really your friend, my mum says I have to be." Over and over on a daily basis. It took six months of my son being out of the school to be able to share that with tears and shame all mixed in. These are just two examples. The list is long.

Teachers would say the child needed to develop resilience. A child doesn't need to develop resilience to bullying. His feelings are normal, and to be expected given the experiences he had at school. As a community we need to work much harder on bullying and it's not something we can say schools do overly well. It's a complex area.

Another incident is of our eldest daughter, a child spent a lot of time segregated her from other female friends. Depending which teacher you spoke determined the response. At 6 and 7 years of age, some considered that all children needed to be inclusive because it was a small class and that exclusion was significant, others said children need to learn about this process. The child doing it knew what she was doing, and would look back and smile and continue the behaviour as soon as the teacher was turned; on the occasions I was present at the school and observed the teacher did call it out. This behaviour was never

resolved and that child has moved schools and continues the behaviour.

These are not minor examples, and can have life long impacts. There is more to be measured in success than academic levels, and legislation needs to focus on protecting our children and young people across all domains - in tangible application (please note the child safety frameworks that have been rolled out do NOT do this , they are designed to protect the Government and big organisations from litigation). Legislation that becomes prohibitive in application can not be said to do that.

Our children have the opportunity to participate in real and genuine extended play that is free of structure or direction - through this play they engage in a wide range of learning concepts including maths, science and literacy; while at the same developing emotional intelligence with complex and high stakes negotiations as to who plays what roles, and get which pieces of equipment.

Our children have developed interests they may not have had the opportunity to if they were in school, including at 7 years of age building and programming robots, at 8 years of age beginning a cake business with genuine external customers, at 7 years of age looking at physics and force and manipulating designs to achieve desired outcomes. Our child who routinely wakes at 5:00am can do their core subjects at 8:00am when they are bright and alert and not 5 hours later when their fatigue levels are starting to increase and concentrating is waning. Our son who enjoys fun sports is not forced into competitive games which he does not thrive in.

As an aside to the current Bill of Amendments, also to be considered is that schools receive funding for students, home educating families do not. If your proposed legislation goes ahead, it should be considered an urgent review into funding for home educating families for them to become eligible for funding to support these additional requirements.

It is my opinion, on the weight of available legislation, the declining academic outcomes within schools of core subjects and the increasing rates of mental and physical health concerns in our children and young people, that this bill of amendments should not be adopted into legislation.

Kind Regards,
Marian Ellul

