

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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From: [REDACTED]
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Subject: Submission regarding EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2024
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Dear Committee,

I am writing to express my deep concern and opposition regarding several of the changes proposed in the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I have a Bachelor of Education (Primary) from QUT and I am a home educator. I have 10 years of experience in educating children in Queensland, both in state schools and my own children at home through HEU, which I continue to do concurrently.

My main concerns about the bill are (1) the changes to the wording of the guiding principles, (2) defining a 'high quality education' as only the Australian Curriculum, Senior Syllabus or TAFE, (3) increased reporting requirements, and (4) the removal of the provisional registration period. I would like to specifically express my support of increasing registration to the end of the year a child turns 18.

Firstly, I oppose the changes in the guiding principles of the legislation that state that 'parents have the responsibility for choosing a suitable education environment for their children' and that home education should be provided in a way that 'is in the best interests of the child'. I believe that the bill doesn't address who decides what is in the child's best interests and is open to interpretation. This kind of requirement is only being endowed on those who choose to home educate, not on families who choose a private school, alternative school (such as Montessori, Steiner, or democratic) or a school outside of their catchment. Home education is just another education choice, which should not require extra justification for the "suitability" of that education choice. Every family has reasons for making the choices they do for their family, but unless the wellbeing of a child is in question as a result of neglect or mistreatment by the home educator, parents should not be required to justify this to the government.

Secondly, I oppose the inclusion of the definition of a 'high quality education' being limited to the Australian Curriculum, and the resulting requirement of strict adherence to it, the senior syllabus or TAFE. While I understand why the national curriculum is in place in schools, it makes no sense to enforce this in the homeschool setting.

The Australian curriculum has been designed for the purpose of standardising education across schools in Australia, including to prepare students for standardised testing, and for ease of transfer between geographical locations; home education is highly individualised education, with no standardised testing, and an inbuilt ease of transfer between geographic locations as their educator remains the same. So while the Australian Curriculum is a resource and tool that home educators can use, the requirement to follow it as the ONLY approved program for them is unreasonable, limiting and unnecessarily laborious to implement in a home school environment.

Home educators can use ACARA as a tool to guide and inform teaching and learning, but can also draw on the entire world's resources in order to provide an exceptionally high quality education that is beyond the scope of the Australian Curriculum. I hope that the Queensland Government or the Australian Government are not so arrogant to assume that the curriculum they have created and use is better than every other resource available the world over. Mandating compliance to an "approved education and training program" would hinder the quality of my child's education because it would disallow me from using some of the incredible resources that are not created in line with the Australian Curriculum. I also wonder why university has been excluded in section 217? If my child begins attending some university classes while still enrolled in HEU, under the proposed amendments this does not "count" as an approved program.

Currently, I teach my children English and Maths individually, as their needs in these subject areas differ greatly. To cover the other Key Learning Areas (KLAs) such as HASS, Science and The Arts, we do family unit studies where we take a deep dive into an area of interest. We've been able to linger on topics that are of deep interest, researching, experimenting, playing and even include our toddler in our learning on that topic. This style of learning facilitates strong sibling and family relationships, results in deep understanding as the topics are interesting and relevant to my children, and it is efficient in meeting the academic needs of all my children at the same time. It also ensures that I am modeling and explicitly teaching my children HOW to learn rather than just requiring the regurgitation of facts, which in the age of information is really the most important skill to have. If it was mandated that I was to follow the national curriculum, I would be limited to the scope and sequence of that curriculum, potentially being required to plan & deliver separate units for each of my children, and even for each individual KLA.

For some context about how labour-intensive such an undertaking is, I will describe the

planning and reporting process of primary classroom teachers (as this is where my experience is), in the hopes that it sheds some light on how unreasonable it is to expect that home educators would just pick up and teach the Australian Curriculum. Teachers in schools are allocated one subject area to plan for a semester, and given a day of non contact time to do that planning. That is still not enough time to complete a conclusive plan and they will often continue that plan in their regular non-contact time and also at home. Once their plan is completed they will swap plans with all the other teachers on that year level, and everyone follows the same plan for each subject. To comprehend that this bill is demanding that homeschool parents do the same for multiple children, but without the training or non-contact time teachers have, and to then deliver all those subject areas in a way that is comparable to the school system is simply absurd. This suggestion for essentially a school-at-home style of homeschooling is going to decrease the quality of the education being provided by homeschool families simply because of the laborious nature of attempting to implement a large scale curriculum to an individual child; parents will spend more time doing paperwork and less time doing actual education and life with their children. We already plan for, facilitate and teach all subject areas, but are currently able to do this in a flexible manner that means the whole family can learn together most of the time, drawing on resources from all over the world, to provide an education that is of high-quality without needing to adhere strictly to the Australian Curriculum.

Thirdly, I oppose the increased reporting requirements included in the legislation. The information already provided by home educators far exceeds the reporting required by Education Queensland teachers and to provide this information for every single subject is unreasonable. Including the provision to demonstrate educational progress for each subject also exceeds the requirements for schools and teachers in Queensland, so it is unacceptable and unreasonable to expect that of home educators. As I have already touched on, the workload required to implement the Australian Curriculum is substantial. As a classroom teacher, reporting is also a massive undertaking, however all of the assessment & criteria is already created for them from the planning they did collaboratively, and so are the reporting comments; they are pre-generated based on the grade a student gets in a particular section of a criteria sheet. It is also important to note that even then, teachers do not report on every subject area as there are specialist teachers who often carry the weight of The Arts, Technology, HPE, and Languages. None of these facilities are available to homeschool families, as we assume the entire responsibility of our child's education; which we are happy to do! But to expect us to

replicate school at home in regards to planning and reporting suggests that the creators of this bill amendment lack an understanding of homeschooling in action.

In addition to this, I am unsure how the EGPA review determined the importance of, or even the HEU's ability to enforce, such intense reporting. Just two years ago, there was a consultation process for the EGPA review, in which it was proposed that HEU would only read a sample of the reports; potentially only 10% each year; as their workload had skyrocketed due to the 192% increase in homeschooling in recent years. Backflipping on this suggestion to now ask parents to report on ALL subject areas every single year does not seem realistic for homeschool families or the HEU.

Finally, I oppose the removal of provisional registration in the legislation. I believe that provisional registration is a measure to protect families leaving the school in an emergency situation and it is unreasonable for children to stay in potentially dangerous or damaging circumstances until a full plan is written.

In closing, I want to emphasise that student wellbeing for all children in Queensland is everyone's responsibility. I do not take that responsibility lightly for my own children, or for the children that I teach in schools, or the children that interact with through the homeschool community and the wider community. I understand the weight and importance of the next generation, which is a large part of why my family chose to homeschool. I understand that this is the premise under which these amendments have been proposed, however I can assure the committee that if these amendments are approved, they will *reduce* the wellbeing not only of my children but of my entire family due to the immense administrative workload that would be placed on my shoulders, with no apparent benefit to my children, my family or the wider community. Please reconsider this approach to improving wellbeing and meet with the homeschooling community and it's representatives to pave a way forward together, rather than driving a wedge between the government and home educators due to this proposal.

Kindest regards,

Belinda Belesky

