

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1126
Submitted by: [REDACTED]
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Attachments:

Submitter Comments:

Dear Committee Members, I am writing to express my concern in relation to the proposed education legislation changes in Queensland. As a constituent, parent and educator in the community, I would like to express my apprehension about the potential impact of these changes on our education system. I am a solo parent, previously working as a tutor of school aged children but now primarily a homeschooling parent. I have had to wind down my professional career due to homeschooling commitments. I have a higher research degree from an Australian University and have mostly worked in the field of education/awareness in the disability sector, with a recent personal and professional interest in neurodivergence. The proposed legislation raises several concerns for me that I believe need to be addressed. Firstly, the requirement that the national curriculum be followed is highly restrictive. I believe this requirement will seriously limit choice for learning opportunities and educational outcomes in Australia, in particular for neurodivergent learners, or those who otherwise find it difficult to engage with a single curriculum. By forcing the use of a single document state-wide, you are limiting educational freedom, and ultimately restricting the myriad of educational and employment possibilities available to a significant portion of the future workforce. The OECD Learning Framework 2030 identifies the unprecedented social, economic and environmental developments that are changing the education landscape, and points out the opportunities this presents alongside its challenges. These are exciting times, full of opportunity and possibility. Learning in return needs to be fluid, flexible, responsive and relevant. I believe the homeschooling space is well placed to respond to the individual learning needs of those who can not attend an educational institution. Secondly, the proposal to remove the current probationary period, with a requirement to register immediately together with an educational plan is unrealistic. According to the Queensland Government's Home Education Unit's PARENT WITH CHILD/REN REGISTERED FOR HOME EDUCATION RESEARCH INSIGHT REPORT \ | NOVEMBER 2022 over 60% of homeschooling children have a disability or health concern which prohibits school attendance. The same source cites 45% of homeschooling families never intended to homeschool. Many are removed from school as an absolute last resort —no one wants to lose income to support their children at home in the current economic climate, and it appears the approximately \$22,000 per annum allocated to each school aged learner is not available to children who cannot attend a school, making the economic burden on homeschooling families immense. A trained teacher is not expected to develop an educational plan for an entire year overnight, so I'm curious as to why a parent or guardian of a traumatised or disabled child is. Together with increased reporting responsibilities being proposed, the increased financial and administrative burden on families whose children are not supported by schools should not be an acceptable solution to what is essentially a gap in the school system. In addition, I am worried about the lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding these changes. As a stakeholder in our education system, I believe it is crucial for the voices of educators, parents, students, and community members to be heard and considered in any decision-making process that impacts our schools. There appears to have been no consultation with the homeschooling community or its representatives. I understand there is no official Queensland state homeschooling association, but I also understand well-known representatives that presented to the EPGA review were actively excluded. Homeschooling families not only were not informed of these changes in time to respond, they were also denied the opportunity to nominate a representative. For context on my position, my child attended one term of prep in 2023, suffered significant post traumatic stress, and received intensive medical assistance

and therapy in the weeks following. My own anxiety was at a very high level for a very long time, and it took a few months before we were both able to re-engage in teaching and learning. Once ready, my child attained straight A's in her distance education course. Had we pushed through the trauma with immediate engagement in the education system we would both have suffered extreme burnout at significant expense to the state. My child is neurodivergent. She is a gifted 6 year old, with autism and ADHD. Though distance education has relieved me of developing a learning plan during a period of healing, we also increasingly access a number of other curriculums, including those used by distance education schools in other countries. At times my child is unable to engage with a particular requirement so becomes at risk of disengaging and failing. This problem would increase tenfold in an under-resourced classroom environment, especially while she is unable to communicate and advocate for her needs (communication deficits remain a lifelong challenge for autistic people). Increasingly we are switching between different curriculums to maintain that interest and drive to learn, as well as exposing her to alternate methods and means of communication and expression. If we were locked into one curriculum, that drive to learn would quickly dissipate. And what a shame that would be for a child with a high IQ who has so much to offer this world. Gifted children remain the least accommodated neurodivergent group in Australian schools, with no funding allocated for giftedness. Extension programs and scholarship opportunities for high ability students do not address the specific neurodivergence of giftedness or twice-exceptionality, and so homeschooling remains the best educational option. Ultimately though, we are global citizens. We learn within the world we exist in, not just one state, country or culture. While I recognise schools as institutions need a standard to follow, homeschool families homeschool for a huge variety of reasons, and the amendments proposed present a level of control that would be detrimental to many learners, and to freedom of choice in this country. I also understand there are a number of unregistered homeschoolers around the country. I'd like to suggest that imposing this level of control on what and how children learn as well as increasing the administrative burden on families is likely to drive more and more families underground. I know that in my circumstances, as a highly educated and loving parent of an intelligent neurodivergent child, that may be my only option should the use of a single, specific curriculum be made mandatory. In light of these concerns, I urge you to carefully reconsider the proposed education legislation and to prioritise the best interests of our students, teachers, and schools. I implore you to advocate for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to policymaking that values input from all stakeholders and ensures the integrity and quality of our education system both now and into our rapidly evolving future. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and for considering my concerns. I look forward to your response and to further dialogue on this important issue.