

## Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

**Submission No:** 1220  
**Submitted by:** Deborah McVicar  
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**Submitter Comments:**

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

I am writing to you to **express my strong opposition to the proposed legislation that will require home education programs to be consistent with an approved education and training program**, specifically and solely the Australian Curriculum for Years P-10 and the senior subject syllabus as developed by Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) for Years 11&12. I am deeply concerned that parents are losing the right to choose what a high quality education looks like for our own children. I am a qualified teacher who chooses to educate my own children at home. I have been registered with the Home Education Unit for about a decade, and am looking forward to another dozen years. As I have experience delivering a customized education at home, and am invested in the long term outcome of this proceeding, I believe it is crucial to voice my apprehension about the impact this legislation will have on this particular educational option available to all Queensland families.

This proposal illustrates a misunderstanding of the function that registration for home education provides for families. It is crucial to recognize that home educating families do not seek to replicate traditional schooling at home. We already have an established school-at-home option through enrolment with Queensland Schools of Distance Education. Registering with the Home Education Unit serves those who wish to secure a different experience – empowering families to deliver a program originating from the needs of their unique student.

I object to the term “quality education” being specifically and exclusively defined as adherence to the Australian Curriculum. While that is one way to provide a quality education, it is only one way, and would become the only way legal in this state. We are in agreement that every child does deserve access to a high quality education, but that need not look the same for every child. Presently, families registering for home education in Queensland have the opportunity to provide a truly bespoke education for each child. We are able to deliver an individual, responsive, robust curriculum that takes advantage of the wide range of resources and pedagogies available from across the globe, intentionally selecting those that best fit the values and objectives of the family. The boundaries between parenting, educating and living well are less distinct within the home environment, and we can offer our student’s opportunities to engage with content that are richer and more varied than within a traditional classroom. Home educators are uniquely positioned to be flexible in catering to our student’s needs and to be truly responsive to the emergent curriculum. The capacity to cluster topics, and have autonomy over the sequence, depth and breadth and context of learning aids the child in engaging with genuinely meaningful inquiry questions or play-based learning that begin with the child, rather than inquiries or play that has been orchestrated. This enriched educational lifestyle is custom fit, and as such supports the learner to flourish, yielding fruits of inquisitive, insightful, motivated life long learners.

There are already in place safe-guards to assess the quality of education being provided at home. Under existing conditions, home educating families are required to submit a plan to the Home Education Unit outlining skills, content, learning experiences, resources, and assessments for the year ahead. Part of the determination of it being “high quality” includes discussion of how the submission is responsive to the changing needs of the child, as indicated by short and long term educational and personal goals and having regard to the age, ability, aptitude and development of the child concerned. Registration is renewed each year, subject to the provision of evidence of growth, and for each sample we must discuss where we think this correlates to same age peers and standards using the Australian Curriculum.

The proposal to narrowly define quality education as simply delivering the prescribed curriculum disseminated in every other avenue – state schools, independent schools, distance schools – is simplistic, limiting and inappropriate for the context of education at home. Some subjects, like Mathematics and English are heavily skills based, and most would agree, should be taught sequentially in a sustained and organised manner. The difference between what children are taught and in which order for these skill subjects, is not too varying, regardless of where they get their schooling. One of

the advantages of home education is that children are met where they truly are, and have the luxury to be taught 1:1 and move at their own pace through the developmental continuum, regardless of what year level that material has been designated. Requiring home educators to stick to the prescribed outcomes for a given year level would deprive students of receiving a responsive and considered program to the degree which they currently enjoy.

Most other subjects are content based, for example topics within Science and History, where the content could reasonably be studied at many ages, and indeed are all throughout the world. Within the Australian Curriculum, these have been arbitrarily assigned to particular year levels, not necessarily for any particular reason except to ensure they are covered at some point in the programming. **It is primarily enforcing this same schedule on to home education environments to which I object.** Though this dissemination of content makes a great deal of sense within the wider school system, where many students, teachers and schools across the state keep in sync, it is inappropriate for a home learning environment. It has been designed for classrooms of the same age students regardless of personalisation or prior knowledge; it does not take into account a student's aptitude or prior knowledge, both of which a parent has privileged information and is positioned to be most keenly aware.

One would assume that at some points along a child's educational journey in traditional school, the student would be required to participate in units that they already know, for the sake of keeping uniformity within the classroom and wider school system intact. However this would be unreasonable in a home education setting, where parents would be required to reteach skills and topics that a child already knows, simply because that is what is required for their year level in the Australian Curriculum, which in turn is a condition of their registration. In this situation, the home educating parent would be required by law to submit a plan to teach this topic, thereby surrendering the opportunity to pursue something more applicable to the learner, and then be required to get work samples to submit as fulfilment of their obligations. This kind of token teaching to generate receipts of learning purely for documentation purposes only gives lip service to the notion of "learning".

Another reason I am convinced that the Australian Curriculum is inappropriate for home education settings, is that this prescription of specific content topics to particular year levels does not support the small scale multi-age cohort typically found within home education settings. This would make compliance unnecessarily onerous for families with multiple children to teach content subjects like science and history, which are often taught successfully as a family, where siblings across bands could engage in a shared topic like biomes, or Australian history at their own capacity. Instead families would be required to find enough time in the day to teach not only individual skill subjects, but now also individual content subjects for each student, greatly diminishing the many documented benefits of multi-age groupings for both the educator and the children.

Beyond the Australian Curriculum, the proposed changes will now require students in Years 11 and 12 to be consistent with the senior subject syllabus developed by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA). This is especially prescriptive, stipulating allowed study topics for each unit, and specific forms for assessments. It is unclear whether this mandatory adherence to such prescriptive programming for seniors, including compulsory reporting illustrating our fidelity with conditions and the submission of student work samples, will receive commensurate recognition of meeting the requirements for those senior subject syllabi, and therefore now contribute to the student's Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE). Otherwise, these reforms will limit their ability to participate in the alternative pathways to higher learning and employment that already exist, giving nothing of value in return.

Under the current conditions, home educated senior students enjoy a wide range of educational opportunities and pathways to further education and employment opportunities. Students continue to receive a customised education that prepares them for the adult world, and the flexibility of home education affords them the option to do work experience placements, and undertake school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. A popular opportunity for home educated teens is to study units at Open University, TAFE or participate in university pathway programs in their final

years of enrolment with the Home Education Unit. All of these options are absent from the narrow definition of quality education specified in the proposed changes.

**I would like to see s 217 (Standard conditions) remain the same.** However, I could see a suitable compromise for all stakeholders, where there is more accountability from home educators, while retaining our autonomy to create our own curriculum, with a requirement to broadly address each of the traditional realms of Mathematics, English, Humanities and Social Science (History and Geography), Science, The Arts, Languages, Technology and Health and Physical Education in both our annual plan and submitted portfolio of work samples. This would allow parents to continue to teach responsively to their individual students, while demonstrating to the Home Education Unit that a comprehensive and thorough education is being provided.

It is apparent that there is a profound disconnect between the drafting of this legislation and the intentions and needs of homeschooling families like mine. Home education is truly bespoke, thoughtfully crafted for a custom fit. By its very nature, it can be flexible in a way schools cannot be, and just as the personal nature and adjustable timetable of an education at home cannot be scaled up to the wider school system, it would be inappropriate to take a planning document intended to synchronise schools nationwide, and scale it down to families. Do we care so little about a child's right to have their needs met that we will actively prevent families from thoughtfully, intentionally responding to those individual needs as they see fit? If this legislation becomes law, there will be no avenue left in the State where a child can be the centre of their own learning journey. And that is a crying shame.

As a homeschooling parent deeply invested in my children's education, I urge the committee to reconsider these restrictive measures and instead focus on supporting families in providing a rich and diverse educational experience tailored to the needs of each child. Please support policies that promote flexibility and the parental right to discern what exactly constitutes a quality education for our children.

Thank you for considering my perspective.

Kind Regards,

Deborah McVicar

*Homeschooling Parent*