

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1237
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Re: Proposed changes to Home Education Legislation

Dear Parliamentary Committee Secretary,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the recent proposed education legislation changes in our state. As a constituent and a member of the community and an experienced leader in the educational sector, I believe it is crucial to voice my apprehensions about the potential impact of these changes on our education system.

I am in the senior administration of a prominent private coeducational school in the south of Brisbane. I have taught senior maths and science in schools for over 20 years. My wife is also an experienced high-school teacher. We have also home educated our three children for their entire schooling. My eldest daughter has just commenced her university degree at UQ having achieved an ATAR equivalent rank of 99.00. My son is currently of Year 11 age, with aspirations of attending University to study in the field of mathematics and my youngest daughter has just commenced her high school journey. They are all well-adjusted, neurotypical students with a network of friends, sporting teams and part-time jobs. None of them have followed the ACARA curriculum or QCAA syllabi.

Subsequently, the proposed legislation raises several pressing concerns that I believe need to be addressed. We chose to home-school our children so that we could truly individualise their learning. This is something all schools purport to do (including all the schools I have worked in). However, with the confines of a classroom structure and an externally prescribed curriculum, no school can achieve this goal. The flexibility within the home setting means home schoolers can. The proposed changes to section 217 would fundamentally shackle home school families. Forcing families to follow and report on a curriculum structure devised for schools does not allow them to tailor learning to the needs of students or the strengths of teachers.

Schools and the associated curriculum work hard to prepare students for their life after school and replicate real-world scenarios through the way they design lesson sequences or use excursions. Home educated students have a lot more opportunity to actually learn through living life in the real world. Our children have learned so much geography and history through our world travels. This is a passion our eldest daughter continues to pursue by studying world history at university. They have learned about financial maths through starting businesses and investing their own money. They have learned ecology through our frequent visits to diverse biomes. They have developed an appreciation for art through visiting the best museums and galleries in Australia and around the world. I could go on but the point is clear. A school-based curriculum simply cannot provide the same level of immersion that homeschooling can offer. Why confine families to the theoretical through prescribed curriculum when they can offer such a rich learning to their children through direct experience?

As a currently practicing teacher in senior biology, I am aware of the processes that were followed by QCAA in creating and editing syllabus documents and their subsequent amendments. While these have worked to ensure consistency between schools, they have equally deprived teachers, who are often passionate in their fields,

from exploring other topics of interest and relevance to them and their students. They have dictated specific assessment types, which have little relevance to the future studies or careers of students. I appreciate and value of these documents within a school system. I do not however see a need to expect parents, without an educational background or immense subject knowledge, to follow them. The goals of parents and the education department are undoubtedly aligned. We want our youth to be well-adjusted, literate citizens with the skills and knowledge required to succeed in the next stanza of their lives and ultimately to become productive members of society. There are more ways than the ACARA and QCAA guidelines to achieve this goal.

I appreciate the need to demonstrate educational progression to ensure the continued development of students. However, the conditions of how this is to be interpreted by the proposed legislative changes are vague at best. Further, educational progression, in the context of the dynamic balance between academic rigour, life skill development and the mental, physical and emotional wellbeing development of young people is difficult to quantify when considering individual child needs. The flexibility of study options currently in place positions home schooled children in the best place to achieve this progression. My own children are testament to this, as they have advanced well beyond the school curriculum in some areas and are at par in others. They have also had access to a myriad of opportunities that schooled children have not. As such they are now very able to integrate with people of all ages, think critically about issues, solve both academic and real-world problems. They have a passion for learning. They have the skills to run a household and are financially literate. I cannot say the same for the vast majority of the students I teach in schools each day.

Finally, we have worked with the home education department for about 12 years now. We have followed their guidelines and our educational values to ensure a quality education for our children. We feel that these proposed changes to the legislation have come about with very little consultation with the home-schooling community.

In light of these concerns, I urge you to carefully reconsider the proposed education legislation and to prioritize 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. I ask that you do not make changes that unnecessarily increase the bureaucratic workload of families or the education department and that you allow all students the opportunity to explore the full repertoire of avenues for higher study, including a pathway to university through studying university subjects at school. I also seek greater clarity in the terminology used and the intent of the proposed changes.

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.

Sincerely,

Tory Mills
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