

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

**Submission No:** 1270  
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Subject: Concerns Regarding Proposed Changes to Homeschooling Legislation

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to you with my concerns regarding the proposed amendments to the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill that has recently been presented to parliament. As a home educating parent, I object to the proposals in the Education Bill 2024 that have been introduced and I am worried about the impact that they will have on my family and the homeschooling community.

I am an ex-mental health nurse who is currently homeschooling my neurodivergent children into our 4th year of home education. We have not always been home educated, however, we did find out an exceptionally hard way that the Australian Curriculum followed in public schooling can not always accommodate children with different abilities.

My eldest daughter is Autistic and attended public schooling in 2020. She experienced bullying, discrimination, trauma and began to harm herself and express suicidal ideation while enrolled in public education. She did not understand information presented to her, and she had very little interest in learning about topics with little relevance to her. After a year-long battle of trying to make it work, we took the leap into homeschooling at a cost to my career. This was not a decision to take lightly.

From homeschooling her for the past 3 years we have had the flexibility to explore a diverse range of educational activities based around her interest, and have been able to meaningfully engage her in a high quality education. While she struggles with some areas, she has blossomed in others and aspires to be an author of fantasy literature. She is in the process of writing her first book, and plans to study creative writing at a tertiary level when suitable.

Initially, we had to work around issues relating to school trauma, such as putting a maths sheet in front of her where she would experience PTSD symptoms, including flashbacks, meltdowns and intrusive thoughts. Under the current homeschooling guidelines, we had the flexibility to use other methods to engage her in mathematical fundamentals, which ultimately achieved the same results as the ACARA curriculum. Without this flexibility and inclusivity for diverse learners, I would have a traumatised, illiterate 10 year old.

What was most notable is her anxiety and mental health drastically improved, and there have been no episodes of self harming or ideation of how to end her life due to the flexibility to be able to choose what we learned, and how we went about it.

I am asking you to consider the blanket implementation of the ACARA curriculum and how it impacts those with a disability. It has been with hundreds of hours of therapies, research and hands-on work with my child, that I have been able to determine how to teach my child and with what curricula she responds to best. We have been able to relearn subjects that she was unable to engage in at school and had the flexibility to work at our own pace; this has been crucial to overcoming nearly all of her obstacles faced by her disability.

The drafted amendments are making it compulsory for all home educated students to adhere to the Australian Curriculum. This would remove the flexibility to our learning that has brought about my child's success over the last few years. It would limit what and when we could study and dictate what level she should be learning at each year. She would be penalised for falling behind and would be unable to move forward at her own pace. Many neurodivergent children have markedly varying skill levels across different learning areas. There are profoundly gifted children and children who have dyslexia and dyscalculia. Average doesn't work for these children, and is why we have implemented our own plans.

Moreover, the Australian Curriculum is designed for classroom teaching, not for small groups or families of multiple ages. Trying to teach two children different topics in science, history, geography and art is simply impractical. Many other homeschoolers learn in small learning pods with multiple ages to make use of community expertise, shared excursions and collaborative projects. Home education in practice looks markedly different to classroom education, but when done successfully (and not in line with the ACARA guidelines) is immersive, deep and high quality.

Furthermore, in regard to children with disabilities, many participate in activities under the NDIS to increase their capacity. This capacity may look like self care skills, promotion of independence in daily activities, improving executive dysfunction and ultimately improving their capacity to learn, which directly positively impacts their ability to learn from home curated curriculum. If you were willing to consider a holistic approach to education, including the day to day challenges many diverse learners face, the implementation of a rigid curriculum is not the answer for individuals who require flexibility and imagination in terms of how to meet them where they are at to enhance their learning ability and enjoyment. The planned changes would push families into a school at home environment where the child's needs - educational, physical, spiritual and mental - are not met through a standardised approach and rigidity, while overlooking the individual needs of the student. Currently, we have the ability to meet these needs of a child on a personal level, providing the support and scaffolding for them to succeed.

I am concerned that the department has not specified who would make the judgement on which students would be suitable for homeschooling. As we have found with the NDIS who proposed a blanket approach to supporting individuals on the autism spectrum was that it was just that - a spectrum. A spectrum requiring individual needs, tailoring to needs and individualised support. This concept lends itself to home education also. No one knows how to support my children better than myself and my husband. Where my child was not suited to the school environment, we took action. This is not an attack on schools or the curriculum covered in schools, it is simply the reality of our situation, and understanding that as parents, we are to make the best decisions for their best interests.

Further concerns arise in the area of discrimination, specifically around those with a disability, neurodivergence, giftedness and other reasons such as health conditions and religious belief. I do not feel that the proposition to implement ACARA syllabus is fully understanding of these groups and forcing families to implement a curriculum that was

written for delivery in school setting based on 'normal' abilities is neither inclusive nor empowering for these individuals already facing day to day challenges.

Lastly, I wish to touch on the topic of child safety, specifically regarding the announcement of the homeschooling student with complex mental health problems that died as detailed in the report "Deaths of children and young people Queensland 2022-2023" that was presented to Parliament and publicly released.

While I understand that the current system does lack visibility in terms of child safety, I ask you to consider a few points:

Home education is largely social. We congregate in social groups, have camps, events and activities where we show up in the public space. We are publicly seen and known in our communities, including parks and libraries.

Our children, specifically those with disabilities, often participate in weekly activities with therapists. Allied health professionals are mandatory reporters.

To receive assistance with funds for textbooks and accessing educational material or for centrelink payments, we are required to present to our general practitioner to have forms signed off stating that homeschooling is in our best interest for the child. Medical professionals are mandatory reporters.

My concern is that the bill is a reaction to this episode and is not acknowledging that it was the child's safety that failed at the hands of mandatory reporters, not their home education. While both are paramount, this is not reflective of the majority of registered homeschoolers.

While I understand this is a layered, complex issue, I humbly request that you listen to and involve the community that are actively and successfully homeschooling when proposing changes to a bill that affects a minority of people who have chosen Home Education over other avenues.

Thank you for reading my concerns.