

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1320
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Submitter Comments:

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Dear EGPA Committee Members, I am writing to you to highlight my concerns regarding the proposed amendments to the education bill that has recently been presented to Parliament. As a home-educating parent, I do not support some of these changes that have been introduced and I am perturbed by the impact that they will have on my family and the homeschooling community. I am a personal support worker in the disability sector, specialising in spinal injury clients. Prior to this, I held various roles within the intellectual copyright industry, including sales and business development management. I have been integrating homeschooling into our family life for the past 2 years and will be homeschooling full-time once my eldest son turns six next month (April). The proposed legislation raises several pressing concerns that I believe need to be addressed. Firstly, the requirement to follow the ACARA curriculum. Student engagement is imperative to achieve good learning outcomes and it is evident that you do not need to follow ACARA to access engaging materials. On the contrary; we are fortunate to have an endless supply of incredible learning materials at our fingertips and doorsteps. From my research, the purpose of a curriculum was not introduced to ensure all teachers across Australia are teaching the same thing at the same time but to provide a framework from which educators could make choices on how to focus the child's learning. I was unable to find any evidence to suggest that a national curriculum provides a higher standard of education compared to homeschoolers, quite the contrary. It is not possible for every child in the classroom, or indeed across the state, to receive an identical curriculum education and the required learning supports. An inflexible curriculum does not consider the learning needs of each student so is unable to ensure they are performing at their own level. One of the biggest benefits of homeschooling is that schooling can be tailored; different learning tools can be used and different timelines implemented so that optimal knowledge retention is achieved. Homeschooling empowers our children to take ownership of their education, encouraging independence, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. They are learning how to learn, exploring diverse subjects, and developing a deep understanding of themselves and the world around them. Enforcing the Australian Curriculum will severely limit this opportunistic learning and stifle the ability for us to form multi-age groups as the topics they will be investigating would be dictated according to their year level. As well as rigidity, it will also add additional work and pressure to parents, for both reporting and record keeping. Additionally, both myself and my husband have experienced bullying throughout our schooling years, this had lasting impacts. Bullying is not tolerated in workplaces, yet it continues to run rampant in the schooling system with no clear policy or enforcement strategies in place. Homeschooling provides a supportive and nurturing environment that prioritises our children's mental and emotional well-being. This is something that the government should prioritise and would align with the direction for mental health and wellbeing - Vision 2030. Without the pressures and anxieties associated with traditional schooling, my children will be able to flourish and develop a positive self-image that will serve them well throughout their lives. Finally, taxpayers pay nothing to support homeschooled children, the lifestyle is fully self-funded and an investment that my family (and many others) have decided to pursue. Not only are we taking the pressure of the schooling system, but we regularly support local businesses by attending workshops, classes and community events. For instance, only this week I attended the World Science Festival in Brisbane with my son; homeschoolers made up the majority of the attendance for the three programmed events we attended (Lighting Our Universe: Physical Sciences, Fossils! Queensland's Quirkiest Creatures & Maths, Music & Sum Songs). These sorts of hands-on,

community-based learning opportunities should be embraced as they are invaluable in the desire for learning. I want my children to think outside the box, push boundaries and discover new ways of thinking and interacting with the world. For our family, and many others, homeschooling in its current form enables just that. In conclusion, I urge the committee to recognise the value of homeschooling as a viable alternative to traditional schooling. By embracing diverse educational approaches and empowering parents to make choices that best meet the needs of their children. 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. Additionally, I have summarised some particularly useful reports and materials that may help enlighten you about the benefits of homeschooling for those families you legally choose to pursue the path of education. These are included at the bottom of my letter. I appreciate you taking the time to read my letter and for considering my concerns. I look forward to your response on this potentially life-altering issue. Sincerely, Meghan Bulmer

Additional Information:
OECD Report: The revised 2023 report confirmed ongoing issues with teacher shortages, equity issues, and a significant problem with bullying in Australian schools – reportedly three times the global average. Source: <https://www.educationmattersmag.com.au/education-minister-australian-education-urgently-needs-practical-reform/> Learning First : Australian education in long-term decline due to poor curriculum, report says: The chief executive of Learning First, Ben Jensen, said Australia had stagnated or declined across all subjects in international test results for more than a decade and measures to reverse these trends had failed. “Whenever results come out showing the decline in Australian education we point the finger at teachers and raise issues around quality, but it’s the national curriculum that’s the problem,” Jensen said. Source:

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/nov/27/australian-education-in-long-term-decline-due-to-poor-curriculum-report-says> Every child receiving an identical curriculum education is not possible, nor is it fair. A lock-step curriculum doesn’t consider the learning needs and prior knowledge of the students in the classroom. Our students are not identical, nor is what they need from a curriculum. Source: <https://theconversation.com/first-its-not-an-instruction-manual-3-things-education-ministers-need-to-know-about-the-australian-curriculum-173058>

Homeschool students score above average on achievement tests regardless of their parent’s level of formal education or their family’s household income. The home-educated typically score 15 to 25 percentile points above public-school students on standardized academic achievement tests (Ray, 2010, 2015, 2017, 2024). (The public school average is roughly the 50th percentile; scores range from 1 to 99.) A 2015 study found Black homeschool students to be scoring 23 to 42 percentile points above Black public school students (Ray, 2015). 78% of peer-reviewed studies on academic achievement show homeschool students perform statistically significantly better than those in institutional schools (Ray, 2017). <https://www.nheri.org/research-facts-on-homeschooling/>