

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Committee Secretary
Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Committee Secretary

I am writing to the Committee in relation to my concerns about the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I am a Home Educating Parent who would be directly impacted by the proposed amendments to the Bill. I am worried about the impacts that these proposed changes will have on my family and the wider home educating community. I therefore, do not support some of the proposed amendments that have been proposed in relation to Home Education.

Our story

Like many parents I decided to send my child to a local private Kindergarten and then on to a local state school. We had a very positive time with our Kindergarten and so were looking forward to progressing on to the school experience. However, I was not prepared for the unsafe and unhealthy environment we found ourselves in at our local state school. This was primarily due to the mental and physical bullying that my child was subjected to from the very first day of Prep through to her last days in Year One. In addition to this, my child became frustrated with sitting in a classroom environment for the majority of the day and not being allowed the creative freedom to pursue their own interests and ideas. They also became quite disheartened and upset with the highly competitive nature of the school environment.

As a result, my child became very unhappy, did not enjoy attending school and started refusing to go. I tried to support them in the best that I was able, whilst also liaising with the local state school. Unfortunately the situation remained unsafe, unsuitable and unsustainable. This was a very stressful situation for the whole family. We researched and considered a number of different options, including Home Education. The best fit for our family was Home Education. So we have subsequently become accidental home educators (homeschoolers).

Since entering home education we have found many benefits in having the flexibility to tailor my child's education according to their unique, individual needs and learning style/s. My child is safe, happy and enjoys pursuing their interests, engaging with their local homeschool community and also the wider community. Moving forward, I now plan to register my younger child and continue home educating both of them.

Primary concerns

The primary concerns I have with the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 are:

- New guiding principles
- Consistent with an approved curriculum
- Planning and reporting requirements
- Stakeholder engagement with the home education sector.

New guiding principles

Families are the fundamental group unit of society. As a family unit we make decisions on a daily basis on what is suitable and in the best interests of our children. This includes their safety, wellbeing and education. I spend considerable time discussing and researching our parenting and learning styles, interests and options for education. As a parent I take responsibility for my children's safety, wellbeing and education. As a Home Educating Parent, I currently show evidence of this by providing a comprehensive twelve month, high-quality educational plan and report to the Home Education Unit (HEU), Department of Education.

I have a right to home educate my children and to choose a suitable educational environment for them and their individual needs. The proposed guiding principles seem open to interpretation about who will define what is suitable for, and in, the best interests of the child. I find this very worrying as it leads me to think that the HEU will be left to decide.

I also do not understand why these additional guiding principles are potentially being imposed upon only home educating parents and children. This does not provide for equality for all school-aged children.

Consistent with an approved curriculum

Firstly, being consistent with an approved curriculum allows for interpretation, which is concerning. Assuming that being consistent with an approved curriculum means the

Australian Curriculum (currently Version 9.0). The Australian Curriculum is complex and designed to be taught by tertiary qualified Teachers in a large school environment. The very nature of this means that it has to be delivered in a standardised manner with one Teacher looking after 25 - 28 students in a confined, classroom setting.

This is not the case with home education. The environment is completely different as is the relationship between the Teacher (Parent) and Student (Child). I am able to facilitate learning in the home or community (for example: libraries, museums, botanic gardens) and am able to do so one-to-one or one-to-two. It goes without saying that my relationship with my children is completely different, just by its very nature, to that of a Teacher and school student. Thus, as a Home Educating Parent I do not wish for my relationship with my children to be potentially changed by being required and restricted to impose just the Australian Curriculum upon them. As a Home Educating Parent I also want and need the flexibility to tailor my children's education according to their unique, individual needs and learning style/s.

Planning and reporting requirements

As it stands, I already provide an individualised comprehensive, twelve month, high-quality educational plan and report (as per the current requirements and processes) to the Home Education Unit (HEU), Department of Education. If I was required to provide a plan to cover all areas of the Australian Curriculum and then also report on each of these areas it would greatly increase my workload and place extra burden upon me as a Home Educating Parent.

Firstly, I would need to spend valuable time researching and learning all about the Australian Curriculum and for my children who would be at different year levels. Secondly, I would need to spend extra time completing the associated paperwork for Australian Curriculum-based plans and reports. This takes away valuable time that I would normally be spending teaching and facilitating interest-led learning with my children.

In addition, it would also greatly increase the workload of the HEU, Department of Education. Therefore, extra funding and staffing may be required to provide the necessary support to Home Educating Parents.

Stakeholder engagement with the Home Education sector

My understanding is that whilst stakeholder engagement was undertaken as part of developing the proposed amendments to the Bill it did not include representatives from

the home educating community. It may have included certain organisations and/or businesses but not home educating parents. So I am concerned about the lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding the proposed changes to the Bill. As a stakeholder in our education system I believe it is imperative that the voices of Home Educating Parents are heard and considered in any decision-making processes that directly affect them.

Recommendations

I recommend that a Home Education Advisory Board be set up. This would include Home Educating Parents as Members. The Home Education Advisory Board would liaise directly with the Home Education Unit and the Department of Education.

Conclusion

In light of my concerns, I urge the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee to carefully reconsider the proposed changes to Home Education within the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. In doing so, I implore you to:

- Keep in mind the right of an individual parent to choose the educational environment that best suits the individual needs of their own child/ren
- Consider that the Australian Curriculum has been specifically developed for use by Teachers in classroom settings and not for Home Educating Parents in homeschooling environments
- Reflect on the extra burden in planning and reporting that adherence to the Australian Curriculum would place upon Home Educating Parents
- Set up a Home Education Advisory Board and work directly with representatives from the home educating community.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and for considering my concerns.

Yours sincerely

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