

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1375
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Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing this submission in response to the proposed amendments to the education bill recently tabled in parliament, specifically the changes which relate to home education. I am writing this submission both a home-schooling mother and a current PhD student researching home education. In addition, I have been a teacher in QLD for the past fifteen years, only leaving my position last year to fully devote myself to my children and my studies. As a qualified teacher, I have worked in state school education as well as virtually through distance education. I am a mother of five children and have used both distance education and homeschooling for my own children over the past six years. I am proud of the fact that in Queensland we offer a diversity of education models so parents can choose the education which best suits the needs of their family as this helps to ensure access to a high quality of education for all students.

As a PhD candidate, I have been researching home education since 2020. I would like to use this submission to share with you the results of the research I have completed and how the current legislative changes will actually inhibit families from providing their children with a quality education.

In 2021, I began the research collection phase of my PhD program. I conducted an Australian-wide mixed methods research project to understand how home educating parents teach their children to read. The first phase was a quantitative survey which was completed by 185 Australian parents with 25.6% of respondents being from Queensland. Reading is a fundamental skill; it is one of the most important building blocks of a quality education. Thus, understanding how home educators approach this skill is vital in better understanding the unique paradigm of home education. In the second qualitative phase of my research, I took 7 volunteers out of the 86 parents who had willingly given their details to participate in this phase of research. I spoke with 7 parents who each used a different primary methods of teaching reading. From this I gathered data about their experiences teaching reading and aimed to determine whether the beliefs of the parent influenced the way in which reading was taught. I would like to share with you the preliminary findings of this research which will be published towards the end of 2024.

To begin with, my research found that parental choice was a key factor in reading education. Parents chose methods that reflected the beliefs of themselves (as a reader and an educational facilitator), but also methods that were in the best interest of their whole family. One interesting finding was that parents often started in a very structured way, reflecting a more traditional schooling approach, but found that it didn't work well and subsequently had to pivot to use an approach that suited the individual child and the family unit as a whole. One of the key distinguishing factors of home education from school education is that it is a family centric approach. In my opinion as a teacher, home educator and researcher, you *can not* apply a singular year level curriculum to home schooling families with multiple children and achieve high quality results. Unfortunately, it just results in stress and difficulty. Instead, home educating parents take into consideration the needs of the whole family, the dynamics between the siblings, the levels that the children are at, the diverse needs of their learners and they then devise a curriculum and a method of teaching reading that is responsive to these needs. This would not be possible or advisable if the Australian curriculum was enforced in full the way it is currently taught in classrooms, which is designed for a singular age-centric classroom. In my career as an educator, I have taught ACARA in multi-age classrooms. This includes teaching grades 8-10 in one classroom, as well as grades 3/4 and Prep, 1,2. In my experience, the Australian curriculum is inadequate for meeting the needs of multiple ages of students simultaneously and still retaining a high-quality education. The educators who currently do this put in hours and hours beyond their colleagues of single classrooms and should be given high praise for

the outcomes they achieve in the difficulty of using a stepped curriculum, rather than a spiral approach.

The next finding of my research was that it did not matter the type of reading method parents chose. Let me explain, while the Australian curriculum prescribes a phonics-based approach, my research investigated seven different approaches to reading education; synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, a simple alphabet approach, whole language, environmental and unschooling. What the research found in interviewing parents who used each style is that no parent actually used only one style. It revealed that most homeschooling parents used a balanced literacy approach which was dependent upon the child's needs. One mother talked about starting with a phonics-based approach but found that her son actually needed more environmental opportunities and needed supplementation with a variety of different techniques. In fact, the research showed 100% of Australian parents surveyed use a multi-method approach to reading education (also known as a balanced approach to reading).

Thus, prescribing ACARA in full to home educating is very concerning to me, as a PhD student and someone who has spent the past five years reading the research literature ad nauseum and conducting Australian research. Please see the following concerns based on my research and as a home educating parent:

- Prescribing the ACARA curriculum is limiting to parents and is not in the best interests of children. It will inhibit parents from providing high-quality education because home education does not reflect the classroom. To be successful it can't emulate a classroom of thirty children, it needs to be responsive to the needs to the individual child and the whole family dynamic.
- Enforcing the year 11 and 12 senior curriculum (which I have taught for the past four years to DE students) without the opportunity for students to get a QCE is pointless and stress inducing to parents. Parents currently have the opportunity to enrol their children in Distance Education if they would like them to receive a QCE. In fact, my own daughter who is eleven has indicated to me she would like to eventually enrol in Distance Education for grade 10 to get a QCE and I am so grateful that we will have that opportunity. But, it is pointless to make homeschoolers cook the cake and not let them eat the benefits too. Either you must provide a pathway for home educating families to receive a QCE through HEU or you need to remove that as a standard requirement for parents so year 11 and 12 homeschoolers in Queensland can continue to use the myriad of pathways currently available to achieve vocational and educational success.
- The next area of concern is the new guiding principle that home education must be in the best interest of the child. This addition feels vague as to whether the parents will be required to prove this, or whether this will be a requirement placed after parents are deemed not to be doing an adequate job. However, this is unnecessary, parents in Queensland are choosing home education out of the buffet of educational options. Parents have the right to choose what educational model is best for their children and this results in higher educational outcomes and attainment.
- Another issue of concern is the removal of provisional registration. The literature shows that parents come to home education for two broad reasons, push and pull factors (Croft, 2012). Pull factors are the positive attributes of home education, while push factors are the

negative impacts of mainstream schooling, such as bullying. There are those parents, like many I have spoken to in my research, who have chosen home education because it is the best fit for their family. Perhaps they travel, they do shift work, or they want a family lifestyle that incorporates education into daily life. There are many reasons why parents actively choose home education, however sadly there are just as many, if not more, cases where parents have been forced into home education due to circumstances beyond their control. This could be the illness of a child, such as I have experienced in my family, making it impossible for a child to attend mainstream schooling. Further, it could be the behavioural or additional needs of a child which makes the school options in their area undesirable, or it could be bullying or mental health reasons. There are many social reasons that also force families into home education. The removal of provisional registration will put children in unsafe situations by requiring they stay in school longer than what is deemed necessary and beneficial by their parents. Provisional registration provides a buffer for parents to remove their children from an unsafe situation and construct a high-quality education plan. In contrast to what you're trying to achieve, removing the provisional registration forces parents to produce a lower quality program and plan due to time constraint.

As a researcher, I have thoroughly enjoyed understanding home education better and getting to virtually walk into the homes of the many parents providing a high-quality, loving education to their children. Through this submission process, my hope is that you also get the opportunity to see the amazing community of home educators we have here in Queensland. Together, we have an opportunity to continue to support parents to deliver high-quality learning to children that is individualised and supports the educational goals of each child.

As a parent, I appreciate the opportunity to provide my multi-age family with communal learning that is differentiated to meet the needs of each child. I have two special needs children who are thriving under the current model. At a recent psychology review my daughter received updated results of her cognitive assessments and we were told the psychologist had never seen a child make such significant gains. We owe that all to homeschooling and having the opportunity for my child to have an individualised curriculum and the freedom to be herself and learn at her own pace. These are benefits I fear will be diminished under the proposed changes.

Finally, as an educator with fifteen years of experience in the education system, I implore you to talk to the real stakeholders here. Just as teachers know best what a classroom needs, so do homeschooling parents know what is in the best interests of their families. What works in a classroom of thirty students, does not work in the home education environment.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing the committee's recommendations after the submissions have been received.

Kind regards,

Krystal Cathcart

Croft, K. (2012). *So you're a teacher, and you home educate? Why would you, and how does that work for you? Exploring motivations for, and implementation of, home education by qualified teachers in Australia* [Master's thesis, Avondale College]. Theses Masters Coursework.
https://research.avondale.edu.au/theses_masters_coursework/