

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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I am the parent of three children, one is currently in school in year 11, one is below school age, and the third is home educated. Whilst my eldest has navigated school with reasonable ease, the middle child has struggles that would make it very difficult for him to cope effectively in a mainstream classroom. Myself, my partner, who has a teaching degree, and a number of his allied health specialists all feel strongly that it is in his best interests to be educated outside of the mainstream schooling system. Should the proposed Bill pass, I am confident that we would be able to meet any requirements necessary to demonstrate that homeschooling is indeed the best option for our child. However, if our middle child were attending school, I doubt that a principal or teacher could convincingly argue that school is truly in his best interest.

Which brings me to why I disagree with the proposal to require homeschooling parents to justify how home schooling is in their child's best interests. This is not something we ever stop to consider asking of schools. This requirement seems to be a reactionary measure that the government is introducing to take pressure off the failures of multiple child safeguarding agencies to keep one homeschooled student in a neglectful and possibly abusive situation safe. Schools however are full of students for whom school is the neglectful and abusive situation. Students who are bullied by classmates or staff, who are physically or sexually assaulted on school grounds, who are being harassed at all hours by their classmates via cyber bullying. Students for whom the pressure of the behavioural or academic expectations is too high and they feel suffocated, developing anxiety and depression disorders as a result. My eldest is in year 11, and there will be students in her grade who are doing the collection of subjects known as "the suicide six", there will be students in her classes who are self-harming from the pressure of school or bullying. One of her friends suffers with School Can't, many will drop out before graduation due to the pressure, especially since the introduction of the ATAR system and its reliance on externally marked exams. A year 7 child from Beaudesert committed suicide in 2023 due to intense bullying at school. The Courier Mail reported that 3 other students from the same school were on suicide watch due to bullying. Given there were only 5 deaths by suicide in the 2022-23 Qld Child Death Review the homeschooler and the school child each represent 20% of the total youth suicide death rate, however the Child Death Review Board has not recommended any changes to the Education Act that would improve student safety in schools. They have not recommended that school principals be required to justify a child's enrolment in their school as being in that child's best interests. The EGPA amendment is silent on the issue of child welfare in schools, which makes the focus on changing homeschool legislation to "improve oversight" and "address welfare concerns" seem both performative, and discriminatory.

I would also like to lodge my disagreement with the following changes: Removal of provisional registration, removal of homeschooling registration certificates, and the limitation of an "Approved Educational Program" to ACARA, QCAA and VET.

Provisional registration is used by many families to ensure the safety of their child when it becomes obvious that continuing to send them to school would be harmful. The Department of Education's concern seems to be that the provisional registration period allows children to be without education at all for 60 days. The view this as a problem. However 60 days is approximately the same length as the Christmas school holidays. A period during which all schooled children go without formal education. Homeschool families however do not

necessarily limit their education to school days, school terms or formal education, and the removal of provisional registration seems to make incorrect assumptions about the way home education works, the impact that 60 days without a learning plan could have and the reasons why families take this option in the first place. That 60 days gives families whose children are leaving school traumatised breathing room. It allows them the ability to immediately register for home education and unenroll their child from school legally, with the knowledge that they have 60 days to figure out what to do from here. To get their heads around how home educating works, to understand the legislation and requirements, to give their child time to begin to recover, trust and engage with allied health supports. It gives them time to work out what kind of approach they want to take to delivering education, and to assess where their child's mental and physical health is at, so those decisions can be informed ones. Taking away the option for provisional registration risks children's well-being. It is a safeguarding backstep, for it would mean that children are required to stay enrolled in and attending schools where they feel actively unsafe, until their parent has the ability to develop an educational plan for the year, that plan will likely be rushed, and probably a cut and paste job that is not relevant or appropriate to their child's needs and best interests.

Removal of Certificates:

This risks cutting families off from vital Centrelink funding. Centrelink requires submission of a certificate of homeschooling registration for both AIC and Parenting Payment. These are required to be updated yearly. The removal of the certificate therefore would require the Department of Education to have to work with Centrelink to determine a new proof of enrolment system. The Bill proposal suggest that this will be a letter that will also include any conditions placed on the parent's application. That means Centrelink will likely make decisions such as only keeping the family registered for AIC/Parenting Payment until the date of review.

Requirement to follow an Approved Educational Program - defined as ACARA, QCAA Syllabus, VET:

Queensland homeschoolers already follow an approved educational program. Reports and Plans are required yearly for every child, these are read and signed off on or denied by the Department of Education's Home Education Unit. However, we currently are able to make a completely individualised plan tailored to the learning needs, interests and capabilities of each child, and the context of our families. That means we can choose to use curriculums or to design our own, we can choose to use the Australian curriculum or use international and alternative curriculums, which are often better quality e.g., Singapore Maths. We can choose to incorporate VET and University courses into our children's learning program from age 13. We are not limited to following one interpretation of what has been deemed essential knowledge for students in Australian schools. Schools are not even required to only deliver the Australian Curriculum. Multiple states in Australia still have independent state curriculums. Many schools use the International Baccalaureate, the Montessori or Steiner Curriculums. Clearly there is not a one size fits all answer to curriculum even for schools. Homeschoolers in QLD currently enjoy best practice curriculum development - individualised, personalised, and pitched at just the right level of challenge with the ability to pick and choose from the world's best resources and curriculums, the ability to progress as fast or slow as necessary and to choose to extend well

beyond the Australian curriculums content. No student in a state school has that. No student at an elite private school has that. Home education offers unparalleled opportunities because it is not tied to any one particular curriculum document. Whilst research on the outcomes of homeschooled children is limited, everyone in the community knows a 13, 14, 15 year old studying at tertiary level. Limiting that would be regressive.

Finally I have significant concerns about the lack of community and stakeholder consultation on this bill. My partner was one of the 300 people who put in a submission in round 1 of community consultation, and I am well aware that what was proposed and consulted on then, and what has been tabled in this bill are very different things.

I therefore encourage the Committee to reject the bill as it stands, and insist that proper community consultation processes are followed before any changes are made to the existing legislation on home education.