

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submission

EDUCATION (GENERAL PROVISIONS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2024

To the Committee,

I am making a submission due to grave concerns over changes to the Bill regarding home education.

My home education background:

I am a home educating parent of one child now in our 5th year of home education, having started prior to the Covid school closures and online schooling from home. Like many other families we came to home education after our child's traumatic attempt at mainstream education and ensuing mental health breakdown. After attempting various ways to make my child fit into schooling and consulting with various health professionals, it was clear to all of us that no part of my child, from their learning style to their neurology to their innate being, was compatible with mainstream education.

Bringing my child home to learn in comfort and safety, with individualised support from their loving family and being free to learn in their own ways and own time is undoubtedly serving their best interest in ways that standardised education never could.

My concerns over the proposed changes to the Bill include:

-Requiring parents to prove home education is in the child's best interest

The very reason my child is home educated is because it is in their best interest. With these changes who gets to decide best interest? How is that evaluated and how could anyone who does not know my child have any concept of their best interest? Will parents who choose State schooling, independent schooling or Distance Education also be required to prove those options are in the child's best interest? If not, how is it not discriminatory that home educators must prove that? Home education is a legitimate and legal educational choice, however this change demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of what has motivated parents to home educate and bias toward viewing mainstream schooling as the standard to which all children's learning must be compared.

- Requiring adherence to the Australian curriculum

One of the best parts of home education is the freedom and flexibility it provides. Home education is tailored, responsive, active learning, it takes the child as who they are and works with them to allow their strengths to shine and allows time and support for areas of challenge. It allows children to deep dive into interests and work years ahead of age level or years below if needed and allows parents to choose what and how their children learn. Home educators have world class educational options readily available, a myriad of curricula (including the Australian curriculum) and the world itself to provide learning from. How is

restricting that choice to one curriculum, which is designed to be used in school settings by tertiary trained teachers, ensuring my child gets a high quality education and in my child's best interest? To answer my own question, it is not.

My child cannot work to grade level and cannot show standard progress in standard subject areas across standard timelines. If we are made to adhere to the Australian curriculum, I do not know how I could continue to use the Diverse Learner's plan that I currently use through HEU that I believe provides an excellent framework for guiding my child's learning and demonstrating their development without the pressure to learn certain things by certain times. I already know the Australian curriculum is not a high quality education for my child and not in my child's best interest, that is why we home educate and do not use it.

Furthermore, home educated children often begin TAFE or University studies while still registered with HEU, much younger than their schooled contemporaries, because they do not need to work through arbitrary and superfluous curriculum requirements before moving on to the next phase of their education. When children are unbound from grade levels they can move in all directions for learning, which provides far greater possibilities and opportunities. Why limit children who are ready and able to go beyond the confines of a single curriculum?

The proposed changes to require adhering to the Australian curriculum come with no logical or justifiable explanation of what has prompted this, why it is needed and how it will benefit home educated children and their families. In the committee briefing on 18/03/2024 it was put forth that the changes would bring Qld in line with other states, but this also is not factual in the way it was presented and needs further exploration and explanation. Additionally, it was argued that requiring adherence to the Australian curriculum would provide continuity if a child was to move back to mainstream schooling after a period of home education. While this seems like a logical argument with minor interrogation also falls apart.

Firstly, is this actually an issue, do we have any evidence or research to prove home educators moving back into mainstream schooling are struggling, and would benefit if they had been using the Australian curriculum? Or is it the school and teachers this consideration is made for? Also curriculum is only one part of education, what about the school culture and every other aspect of starting at a new school; will children suddenly just be able to slip straight in because they have been using the Australian curriculum at home? The continuity argument sacrifices the freedom of educational choice for ALL home educators right now, for a hypothetical future of some. Which is obviously unfair and an overcorrection to a problem that has not actually been identified.

- Onerous and arbitrary administrative burden due to increased reporting requirements

As it stands I already provide the HEU with a yearly plan and report that demonstrates I am providing my child with a high quality education. Due to my child's various learning differences, neurodivergences and disabilities this is highly customised and takes account of their widely varying educational profile. While I try to keep things concise, the plan and report are over 10000 words and I also make a powerpoint showcasing various educational samples and photographic evidence of the myriad of my child's learning opportunities,

including social gatherings, community participation and self-care. It is known among home educators that the Qld requirements are more onerous than many other states and if the changes are brought in, they would add additional administrative burden to parents, children and the HEU for no obvious benefit. They will save no one time and add more paperwork with no additional support for parents, which will undoubtedly drive more parents to consider not registering. Which, in light of concerns over child protection in home education (which in itself has conflated child safety, CYMHS and hospital failures with home education concerns) seems extremely nonsensical.

- A continuation of no actual, practical support provided for home educators within a context of confusing and increased compliance workload

When a family leaves the education system and registers with the HEU there is effectively no support. We are on our own and we are left to work it all out, often with children who are school damaged and need time to recover and heal. In the committee briefing it was mentioned our community get our information largely from “social media”, as if we have been influenced by a fad. More factually, many of us turn to online groups for support and information because we are provided with nothing by the education system that has damaged our children, that instead often blames the child and their parents for their child not being able to fit into their system, and then ceases any support if we choose to home educate.

We are not merely home educating due to some fad on Instagram, we are home educating because it is in the best interest of our children who, for the vast majority, are disabled or have health issues and mainstream education does not suit them. These proposed changes add administrative burden, remove flexibility and choice, but add no additional support to do so. We turn to our community for help because they are walking this path with us and, despite our many significant differences, the home education community are united in our support of each other because we know that at the end of it all, we do this for our children and what is best for them.

-The Home Education community has not been properly consulted and survey results have been disregarded

Our community are not only extremely worried about these proposed changes, but we are also very angry, feeling that our voices, expertise and insights have been intentionally ignored or outright excluded in favour of carefully curated stakeholders. In 2022 I, along with 564 other home educating parents, participated in a survey conducted by the Department of Education to gain insight into the growth of home education for reasons of future considerations on departmental resourcing for registration.

Having read through the insight report on the survey results it is clear that the Department of Education know that the majority of families did not set out to home educate but came to it later after mainstream education was not working for their child/ren, the majority of home educating families have a child/ren with disabilities or health issues and that the majority of families choose home education because their child/ren can learn at their own pace with a flexible curriculum that meets their needs. It is clear from this report that most families left schools using the Australian curriculum and chose to discontinue using it because it did not serve our children and we could provide them with a higher quality education at home.

Within the survey there was no mention of the proposal to mandate the Australian curriculum and we have never been asked our opinion on this. This proposal has come as a huge shock to our entire community and leaves us with so many questions. The main one being, why? Limiting the educational choices for such diverse learners as the home education community is not in our children's best interests and does not guarantee them a high quality education. Increased administrative burden does not equal better educational outcomes.

- Removal of 60 day provisional registration.

While this change does not impact me as a long term home educator, I have seen within my community the importance of provisional registration for various situations where children or their parents need time and space to transition into home education. Additionally, home educators most often do not stick to the same schedule as schools for learning, we are not bound by Monday to Friday, 6 hour a day, 40 weeks a year blocks of learning. So why is it not fair to allow a break in education for provisional registration, just as mainstream schools have breaks in education for holiday periods?

- Reduction in the time to 'show cause', when further information is needed.

If parents have had issues with reporting they need more support, information and guidance from the department rather than more stress to help in learning what is required for reporting and what records need to be kept.

- Removal of Certificate

When we first began home educating I was very relieved and excited to get our Certificate as it made it feel more official for myself and gave me confidence knowing I had something tangible and clear that I can demonstrate my child's registration with. A notice of registration does not have the same impact and could cause issues for some parents with requirements for Centrelink.

This concludes the main points of my concerns over the changes to the Bill. I would like to end my submission with a quote by the highly renowned educator and youth rights pioneer John Holt -

“What is most important and valuable about the home as a base for children's growth into the world is not that it is a better school than the schools, but that it isn't a school at all.”

Please listen to my concerns and the concerns of all other home educating families, but most especially listen to the children themselves, for it is them we are speaking for and who these changes impact the most. We home educating parents listened to our kids and that is why we brought them home.