

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1396
Submitted by: [REDACTED]
Publication: Making the submission public but withholding your name
Attachments: See attachment
Submitter Comments:

To the committee,

I am writing due to concerns about the proposed changes to home education regulations in Queensland. For the most part Queensland has an education system to be proud of. I recognise the hard work that teachers and administrative staff put into providing a quality education to the majority of students. Nonetheless school age children are an extremely diverse group and in the absence of unlimited funding, a limitless capacity to recruit the ideal staff, and an enormous amount of flexibility, it is not possible for every school to meet the needs of all local children. Homeschooling is one of the options available for parents whose kids don't fit well within the mainstream school system. It is also a very valid option for families where the children would do ok in school

but the parents believe their children would benefit from a more personalised education.

I would also like to note that the consultation process with the homeschooling community has been extremely inadequate. The preliminary consultation was minimal, poorly advertised and seems to have been largely disregarded. The current opportunity to respond to the proposed changes is brief and was poorly advertised. As far as I am aware, no advocacy groups run by homeschooling families were consulted. My child is registered for home education with the QLD HEU. Like a large number of others, I did not receive the email that some were sent to notify us of the proposed changes to the education legislation and the opportunity to make a

submission. I only found out about it via social media and that is not an acceptable approach towards consulting stakeholders in significant changes to legislation.

Regarding the proposal for for homeschooling families to plan and report in line with ACARA:

The single greatest educational strength of homeschooling is its flexibility and the ability to customise the program according to the child's needs and interests. Many of us, myself included started with distance education and moved to HEU registration because the standard curriculum did not meet the child's needs. For some this is because the child is ahead in some or all subject areas. For others it is because the child needs to work at a slower pace or cannot function with the demands of a busy curriculum.

We live in rapidly changing and in many ways uncertain times. Between the unpredictable nature of climate change and ongoing rapid technological change, not one of us can say for certain which skills individual school children of this generation will need in adult life. This is why we need to retain and expand diversity in education. Different approaches to education invariably result in different strengths and weaknesses. One of the strengths that I have seen in many homeschooled children is the ability to look at a problem from a different perspective and come up with unique solutions. In many cases it is the flexible nature of homeschooling that fosters this problem solving creativity. These skills will become even more vital in our communities and workplaces as we

navigate the changes Queensland will face in the coming years. Flexibility in the educational program is vital for many of our neurodiverse students and those with other disabilities and severe health conditions. A quality education as required in the current home education legislation involves teaching a child in keeping to their current needs and knowledge rather than merely pushing them through a standardised curriculum. We can build on existing knowledge rather than skipping over vital steps in order to 'keep pace'. My own child is autistic and also has a couple of diagnosed specific learning difficulties. Whenever I have tried to teach too much content too fast, my child has shut down and it has been some time before we could return to effective learning. A high degree of flexibility has been vital to achieving optimal learning. My child has

also learnt a great deal from having time to explore their own interests in an informal way, which has been enormously beneficial to their educational and personal development. Attempting to follow ACARA across all key learning areas would have resulted in less learning and a great deal of stress for both of us. Requiring homeschoolers to show progress in all key learning areas would also hold us to a much higher standard than schools. Schools can only hold a child back a grade for one year. After that, children are moved through the grades regardless of educational progress. Whilst there are excellent psychosocial reasons for this policy in a school setting, it isn't always ideal educationally. As long as the child attends school, the legal requirement for education is met even if no learning takes place. A substantial number of

children with various disabilities that can impact education are homeschooled. In many cases the family began homeschooling because the child was not thriving in a school environment. I believe it would be discriminatory to replace the existing expectation for a high quality customised educational program with an expectation to follow ACARA, complete with proof of improvement in all key learning areas.

With regard to the proposed removal of the 60 day provisional registration period:
There are situations where urgent removal from the existing school environment is necessary for health and safety reasons due to severe bullying or other reasons. The provisional registration period allows parents time to transition to a distance education enrolment without the burden of

writing a plan that won't be needed. It also allows parents time to write a quality educational plan in what is already a stressful time.

It is also common for families to have a certain amount of back and forth between homeschooling and school as they find what works best for the child. Sometimes this is when the family chose homeschooling in response to a situation where the child wasn't thriving at school and they want to retry school once things have stabilised. Sometimes a child has been homeschooled for a long time and the family is interested in giving school a try. Often in these situations the parents are uncertain if school will be sustainable in the long run. It would be very beneficial if the paperwork to do so could be minimised. For example there could be an

option to pause homeschooling registration for up to two or three months, to enroll in school. If the family decides to resume homeschooling in that time period they can continue homeschooling using the plan that has already been submitted to the HEU and write the annual report at the usual time. If the child remains enrolled in school for longer than the permitted period for pausing registration, the normal process for transitioning back to homeschooling would apply. During our years of homeschooling, my own child occasionally expressed mild to moderate curiosity about trying school. Because of the high paperwork burden, my response was always you can certainly do that but I need you to commit to giving it a fair trial for at least two months. My child never agreed to that condition. The reality was that both of us suspected my child

wouldn't be happy or do well in school. If it was easier to resume homeschooling after a potentially brief attempt to try out school, we would have done so. I believe this has been a barrier to exploring education options for other families as well and a number of those children would have thrived in school. If the provisional registration period is removed, the barriers for attempting or reattempting school will be even higher.

Regarding the proposed requirement to show homeschooling is in the best interests of the child:

Of course pretty much everyone wants all children to have the form of education that is in their best interests. We also have to consider that a significant number of school going children fall behind academically. Some are severely bullied

and a number of suicides have been linked to bullying that took place in schools. There have been assaults that have resulted in hospitalisation in schools. Since schools can not guarantee either a safe environment or adequate educational progress, I object to the idea that homeschooling parents need to provide a greater burden of proof than schools with regard to whether or not that particular educational context is in the best interest of each individual child.

There are some indications that the intent of this proposal may be so that where there are significant and substantiated welfare concerns about a specific child there is a mechanism for directing the child to attend to school if that is in the child's best interest. If that is the case, those limitations need to be clearly and

tightly defined in the legislation to prevent future overreach. Along with clarification of the overarching principle being that of parental choice in education under all normal circumstances.

Other notes and summary:

As noted in the Queensland 2003 home schooling review, when the regulations make registered homeschooling inaccessible to parents, many will choose to home educate outside of the legal framework. I was one one of those children in the late 1980's to 1990's. I initially attended a private school in early primary school. I developed a serious health condition that caused me to miss many days of school and I was eventually unable to attend at all for a long period of time. Nor was I well enough to complete a full distance education program.

Homeschooling was the only viable option for my education. At the time the Queensland education legislation required a homeschooling program to be taught by a registered teacher. I did not have a registered teacher as a parent and my parents could not afford to employ one, which meant that educating outside the legal framework was the only practical option for my family. This caused a significant amount of unnecessary stress but it was by far the best available option for me. I was able to rest and recover. Reading was less exhausting than producing traditional school work and as I improved I read a lot on a wide range of topics. In my later teens and early 20's I experienced a partial remission that allowed me to reenter formal education. I completed an advanced diploma qualification and began a university

degree. I adapted to higher education easily and I attained high marks in both settings. Unfortunately I didn't complete my degree due to a health relapse, however I was well prepared from an educational perspective. My positive personal experience with home education strongly influenced my decision to home educate my own child and I have been thankful to have an attainable legal option to do so.

If the regulations tighten again to the point where many homeschooling families do not feel that the requirements are practicably attainable in their circumstances, there will be a sharp increase in the number of families who home educate outside the legal framework. I believe the current legislation strikes a reasonable balance between

providing adequate oversight to ensure children are provided with access to a high quality education and having a level of documentation that is attainable for most families. I am concerned that the proposed changes will push more families outside the system with no oversight at all. When parents acting in the best interests of their children are pushed outside the law it creates anxiety and resentment. If measures to identify unregistered homeschoolers are significantly increased, that anxiety and resentment will increase exponentially. In such an adversarial climate, people unfortunately become much more susceptible to being radicalised into increasingly anti authority viewpoints. As necessary as some of them may have been, covid19 restrictions provided a good example of how rules that an individual experiences or perceives as

harmful can make some people vulnerable to purveyors of extreme viewpoints. It will take time and trauma informed deradicalisation approaches to restore those people's trust in government systems. With regards to homeschooling legislation, this unfortunate process is completely avoidable as the existing legislation strikes a fair balance of providing oversight to ensure children can access a high quality education and having requirements that are attainable to the average homeschooling family.