

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong objection to the proposed legislation regarding homeschooling. I urge you to reconsider and abandon all proposed changes that will have detrimental effects on homeschooling.

I turned to homeschooling out of sheer necessity when the mainstream school system failed my son miserably. It couldn't accommodate his neurodivergent learning needs and, in turn, eroded his confidence, self-esteem, and sense of self.

The toxic stress experienced by my son within the mainstream school system stemmed from its shortcomings in providing adequate support for students with disabilities, particularly the essential intervention required for ADHD. The education mainstream's failure led to my son internalising the belief that he was a naughty child and this left him feeling intellectually inadequate. Consequently, his overall development suffered significantly, as he found himself caught in a perpetual cycle of survival and heightened stress levels.

Allowing my son to continue within this mainstream school environment while expecting academic success was an impossible feat without substantial changes in how the school accommodated my son's needs. It became increasingly clear that persisting on this trajectory would only exacerbate the situation, causing irreparable damage to his developing brain. Such trauma inflicted by the failures of the mainstream educational system had the high potential to leave a lasting negative imprint on his identity, impacting learning, behaviour, and his overall well-being.

The homeschooling system enables me to tailor education to my son's specific needs, meeting him precisely where he is in each area of learning. Unlike the rigid curriculum of mainstream schooling, homeschooling offers flexibility that is vital for addressing individual learning requirements. The decision to remove him from the mainstream school system aimed to prevent a permanent imprint of stress on his brain architecture, ensuring a positive impact on his life well beyond the completion of his formal schooling years.

Now, he thrives in a nurturing environment that supports his learning style and promotes healthy brain development. Homeschooling has brought my son back to me, allowing him to flourish authentically and securely while pursuing his full potential.

I urge you to listen to all the homeschooling families and understand that there are critically important reasons for why we homeschool our children. The proposed changes to homeschooling will undoubtedly harm the learning and overall well-being of homeschooled children.

I object to all the proposed homeschooling changes and in particular I am opposed to the following:

Requirement to adhere to the national curriculum

The national curriculum, as experienced by my son during his initial two years in mainstream schooling, failed to cater to his individual learning needs and severely lacked sufficient support for his progress, particularly in literacy. This deficiency not only damaged his academic advancement but also significantly impacted his self-esteem across all subjects. The rigidity of the curriculum, especially for neurodivergent students, creates a substantial disadvantage, as it does not accommodate diverse learning styles or needs.

In contrast, the homeschooling system offers a more personalised approach, allowing tailored instruction to meet the specific requirements of each child. By accommodating individual learning styles, homeschooling fosters a sense of value, safety, and security, thereby facilitating higher standards of learning. Enforcing a standardised curriculum upon these children, as observed in my son's case and countless others, does not adequately address their diverse needs nor uphold their right to equal and quality education.

The lack of flexibility within the curriculum fails to support neurodivergent learning styles effectively. In homeschooling currently, children's individual needs can be addressed precisely where they are in each subject. For instance, a child struggling in literacy but excelling in mathematics can receive targeted support without being confined to a standardised curriculum year level.

Proposed changes to the curriculum lack clarity and leave room for inconsistent interpretations by education authorities. Ambiguities such as "be consistent with" raise concerns about the fairness and uniformity of educational standards for different students.

Additionally, there's the pressing matter of reporting. The Home Education Unit (HEU) currently struggles to provide timely responses to plans and reports. It's not uncommon for several months to pass before a plan or report is approved, causing significant delays, especially considering that half of the academic year may have transpired in the meantime. This concern is compounded by the fact that this sluggish response time applies only to three subjects per student. How can they manage to handle reports for eight subjects per student if they already struggle with just three? This discrepancy raises questions about the system's ability to maintain consistency as promised.

English and maths serve as the cornerstone for all other subjects, providing the essential foundation upon which further learning is built. Proficiency in English and literacy is indispensable across all disciplines. Without a solid grasp of these subjects, the proficiency in other areas of study inevitably suffers. Current homeschooling enables the establishment of robust foundations and the development of knowledge bases in these core subjects, laying the groundwork for future academic pursuits.

Homeschooling's focus on core subjects like English and maths allows for deeper learning and stronger foundational knowledge, essential for lifelong learning. Mandating eight subjects under the curriculum detracts from the emphasis on these fundamental subjects and overextends both students and caregivers in terms of reporting requirements.

Expecting parents or caregivers to comprehend, implement, and report on a complex curriculum is unrealistic without proper support and training. Qualified teachers undergo extensive training and experience to fulfill these tasks, highlighting the need for accessible support mechanisms for homeschooling families to navigate the enforced national curriculum effectively. This administrative burden placed on parents and caregivers detracts from valuable learning time and compromises the quality of education for each child.

Moreover, mandating the national curriculum would compel homeschooled children to adopt the same reading methods as those used in mainstream

schools. My son struggled significantly with reading while enrolled in mainstream education. Consequently, I abandoned the mainstream learning system and instead taught him to read using phonics and decodable readers, which proved to be highly effective.

Reading proficiency and comprehension are crucial for a child's overall learning, as emphasised in the recently published report titled "The Reading Guarantee: How to give every child the best chance of success" by Jordana Hunter, Anika Stobart, and Amy Haywood, released in February 2024 by the Grattan Institute. This damning report reveals the significant failures of the education system, with one-third of children lagging behind in reading skills. It underscores the urgent need for reform to address these deficiencies.

The report highlights the importance of phonics-based decoding skills in the early years and advocates for a knowledge-rich curriculum to enhance vocabulary and comprehension. It also emphasises the necessity for schools to monitor student progress and intervene promptly to support struggling learners. However, the report also criticises the lack of expertise among teachers in teaching reading effectively.

It is concerning that the same education department proposing legislative changes to homeschooling is unable to ensure proficiency in basic reading skills within mainstream schools. As quoted in the report, *"teachers lack the knowledge and skills to teach reading well."* Rather than imposing barriers on homeschooling families, the focus should be on addressing these systemic failures within the education system.

My son's progress in reading, achieved through phonics-based decoding instruction recommended by SPELD, demonstrates the effectiveness of tailored approaches to education. It is imperative that the education department rectifies its own shortcomings before imposing its curriculum on homeschooling families who understand their children's needs best. Reading proficiency should be a top priority, and the education department must prioritise implementing evidence-informed practices to ensure that every child receives a quality education and be able to achieve the acceptable standard of reading.

I implore the committee members to take the time and read this report before allowing the education department to make damaging changes to the homeschool system.

<https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Reading-Guarantee-Grattan-Institute-Report.pdf>

Quote from this report:

“The evidence is clear: there should be a strong focus on phonics-based decoding skills in the early years. Students also need a knowledge-rich curriculum to build the vocabulary and background knowledge that are critical for successful reading comprehension all through school. And schools need to track student progress, so they can intervene early to help struggling students to catch-up. But governments can’t leave schools to figure out on their own how to implement these evidence-informed practices. Australia’s governments need to get serious about ensuring best practices are used in all schools, so no student falls through the cracks”

Cessation of the 60-day provisional registration.

The 60-day provisional registration plays a crucial role in swiftly addressing the needs of students requiring immediate removal from mainstream schools due to safety and well-being concerns. Waiting for full registration approval can stretch on for weeks or even months, leaving vulnerable children in precarious situations. This prolonged uncertainty only perpetuates the risk to their well-being, forcing them to endure damaging environments and potentially harmful situations. It erodes their self-worth and esteem, subjecting them to constant stress and triggering survival responses. Such conditions are detrimental to their overall development and inflict unnecessary trauma. Immediate full registration is imperative to ensure the safety and welfare of these children.

In conclusion, I intensely oppose the proposed legislation for homeschooling and urge the abandonment of all changes that threaten to undermine homeschooling.

The proposed changes, particularly the requirement to adhere to the national curriculum and the cessation of the 60-day provisional registration, pose significant threats to the well-being and educational outcomes of homeschooled children. The rigid curriculum fails to accommodate diverse learning styles and needs, while delays in registration approval jeopardise the safety and welfare of vulnerable students.

Rather than imposing further constraints on homeschooling, efforts should be directed towards reforming the mainstream school system to address the underlying issues that drive families to homeschool in the first place. It is imperative that policymakers listen to the voices of homeschooling families and consider the critically important reasons behind our choice. Only through collaboration and understanding can we ensure that every child has access to a quality education that meets their individual needs and supports their overall well-being.

Yours faithfully,

Charlee Walker