

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024.

Dear Committee members:

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed changes to home education in the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024.

I am a mother of five and currently homeschooling my youngest daughter. My other children have finished school and completed a combination of school, home school, and distance education (DE). I have a background in Social Science (Psychology) and youth work. I agree that the finishing age for homeschooling should be 18. I disagree with the other changes to home education discussed below.

Overview of concerns about the changes to home education are as follows:

1. Removing a parent's right and responsibility to choose what education environment and program is in their child's best interest. Who will get to choose?
2. I oppose the inclusion of the Australian Curriculum as the only way to gain a 'high-quality education'. What about the children for whom it has failed?
3. I disagree with the increased reporting requirements included in the legislation.

THE PARENTS RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Clause 18 is ambiguous about who has the right to choose the best educational pathway 'in the child's best interest'. Who will choose? The government? A court? A medical professional? The government should not decide what is in the best interest of my child. **How does this align with a parent's right to choose?** The legislation should clearly state this right.

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM AS THE ONLY HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM

What evidence do you have that the Australian Curriculum is the only curriculum that will provide a 'high-quality education'? In my experience, the Australian Curriculum is too broad and cluttered, leaving many gaps in children's learning. Too many children are reaching the end of their schooling, illiterate and lost in the system. Our school system is feeding a mental health crisis in our teenage population. My nephew got lost in the system and finished school without the literacy skills to function well in life.

School and the Australian Curriculum made my oldest two children anxious and constantly exhausted, and my oldest child (whose grade one teacher classed as very bright) had to be dragged to school each day. We tried medication and

health professionals to try and help him settle in at school. He was smart and popular with his peers, but the environment did not suit his personality. I strongly felt that to medicate a child to sit in a classroom was child abuse when you could take the child out of the environment and relieve the anxiety.

Having studied psychology, I knew that prolonged stress and anxiety can have a major effect on neurological development and function. This is particularly important when our children's brains are making connections, especially in the teenage years when the neurons are thinning and strengthening connections. **A child needs to feel safe, engaged and calm to learn well.**

Neurological function is increased through experiences the child has through play and exploration, as well as time in nature. These experiences are much decreased in schools and are limited by the Australian Curriculum. So we made the decision to homeschool for a year and see if giving the children a rest from school could help heal the issues they suffered. Taking the stress away allowed my children to relax and learn in a calm and relaxed environment. It allowed them to learn in many ways and in many different social groups and to connect more with the multiple generations of our family. It also allowed me to focus on their writing, grammar, and math fundamentals, which were often overlooked at school due to the busy curriculum. The change in them and their ability to soak in the learning at home made us decide to continue to home school, and my fourth child joined with the home learning.

THERE IS NO NEED FOR AN AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM FOR CHILDREN RETURNING TO SCHOOL

When my oldest two children reached high school age, we decided to send them back to school for all the extra subjects and experiences they could have in high school. This is a decision I will always regret. They started high school about a year ahead of their peers. **Homeschooling without the Australian Curriculum had filled the gaps created at school and advanced them past their peers.** They were streamed into the advanced Maths, English and Science classes. However, the environment and the inability of the school to prevent bullying and support mental health saw them deteriorate mentally. It is well documented that our society has a mental health crisis in our teenagers. The school system and the Australian Curriculum are a large part of the problem. By the time they had finished five years of school, they had done with study and were struggling with their mental health.

Having watched the decline in my older children, my third daughter continued to homeschool through to year ten and completed a QCE with distance education in years 11 and 12. She was able to do OP Maths and English along with a Cert. III in Business, followed by a Diploma of Business and two Head Start Uni courses. This child, although very clever, suffered from dysgraphia. Through homeschooling, I could scaffold her with technology and extra work where she needed it without overloading her. I had DE teachers in year 11 tell me she wouldn't cope with uni. I found that many (not all) DE teachers suffered the same narrow perimeters of thought as many (not all) teachers at school. **The Australian Curriculum restricts children from thriving and using their**

strengths to succeed. Their imagination needs to be free to learn how they were made to learn. I insisted that she do the first Head Start subject. I encouraged her to get to know her tutor, network with other students, and use the tools universities put in place to help students. My daughter, at 16, received a distinction for that subject and a commendation from her tutor for how well she could communicate and get along with a wide variety of students of all ages and from all walks of life. She received a second Head Start course scholarship and an early offer for her first preference degree. My daughter completed her degree at nineteen with a high GPA and is happily employed as a supervisor in a regional library – running the library. She could do this by learning to work with her disabilities while homeschooling without the Australian Curriculum. **Some children need to be set free from the school system in order to thrive.**

My fourth daughter homeschooled through primary school and found learning easy. She picked up so much from her older siblings that she read well at four and wrote well beyond her years. Homeschooling allowed her to write, dance, and follow her dreams. It also allowed her to navigate COVID by looking outside the box, and she now has a job she loves with Moreton Bay Libraries.

My fifth child threw a spanner in my works. She was a sickly child from the age of three. Having developed severe asthma, she was on a lot of medication that contributed to making learning harder for her. She spent a lot of time in hospital. When she was four, she struggled to write her name or learn her phonics. After having five avid readers, I tried many ways to determine how she learnt best. I would try to pull back as I know different children progress at different ages, and I didn't want her to develop a hatred of learning. I encouraged free physical play and activities to encourage learning, but she struggled to pick things up. We worked with a behavioural optometrist for a year and then a dyslexic tutor who said she was behind for her age but had no gaps as we had progressed at her own pace. If she were at school, she would have been left behind and lost in the classroom and not had the time to learn at her own pace in a very hands-on, creative way.

When she was in grade three, I put her in DE as her sister was doing DE. It would save me writing plans, and even with my past experience, I had a crazy idea that teachers would have more interesting ways of working with her learning issues. However, DE and **the Australian Curriculum pushed her beyond the pace at which she could learn and overcrowded her learning.** Within two years, she was sick, exhausted, feeling like a failure, and now she had learning gaps. She had been diagnosed with executive functioning problems, which made learning slow for her. She struggled in noisy group classes. She struggled to keep up with what the teachers said in online lessons, and then she would zone out and learn nothing. The adjustments made for her learning issues were not enough. Projects and assignments were getting past her, and she didn't want to learn any more.

Four years ago, we returned to learning at her own pace and with her own interest. **We went back to where she could cope and focused on her strengths.** We took the subjects she was interested in and scoped a program

around her interests. It took a good while for her to settle and enjoy learning again. Finding a good lung specialist has also helped where the public health system did not. She is in grade eight now, and she is starting to pick up and now we are filling the gaps. She has always loved audiobooks and being read to but has always struggled with the written words. Only when we have worked at her own pace and with her interests has she progressed. I love to see her reading now. **The Australian Curriculum did her no favours and, in fact, killed all her joy in learning and created stress. I have learned that a concerned mother is way more educated on a child's needs and ways of learning than teachers ticking boxes. A concerned mother will leave no stone unturned. How does the committee feel they can sit in a room and make these laws without walking a mile with my child?** My child needs to continue at her own pace and follow her interests to find her path after school and work toward a career where she can excel. She does not need to waste the next five years ticking boxes and developing mental health issues and then needing to fill gaps she did not need to have. As she matures, she may choose to attend Uni later as a mature student. Many school failures have topped their Uni degree when they have had a few years of life experience to let the brain develop at its own pace. **How much easier would neurological development have been if they hadn't been fed the school 'you aren't good enough' rhetoric because they were overloaded by the Australian Curriculum and could not keep up?**

INCREASED REPORTING

HEU already struggles with approving plans and reports in a timely manner. How will they cope with the extra pressure of full-subject reporting? The reporting requirements already exceed the reporting of teachers at school, who produce cut-and-paste reports that don't tell a parent much. The requirement for providing progression for eight subjects is unacceptable. We already produce documents for 'high-quality education' and reports on maths, English, and one other subject each year. Increasing our reporting time will reduce our time spent educating our children. I believe the current reporting is sufficient.

It is my hope that the committee will take the time to make choices for the bill that give children the right to learn and thrive in their own way and on their own time. Leave homeschooling alone. Fix the school system. Do not force a system that has failed my child to be their only option for learning.

Kind regards,

Carmel Collins BSocSc(Psych)