


Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1615
Submitted by: 
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Submitter Comments:

Monday, 25 March 2024

Dear Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee,

Re: Home Education concerns to Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

I am writing to you with my concerns regarding the proposed amendments to the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 with regards to home education.

As a current home educating parent, I do not support many of the changes that have been tabled, and I am concerned that they will negatively impact both the ongoing education of my child, as well as detrimentally impact the broader Queensland home education community.

Our Story:

Our youngest child was diagnosed at age 5 with ASD Level 2 and ADHD. They now also present with social and school anxiety, sensory sensitivities, attention difficulties, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and tics, and Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA). Their mental health is supported by both a psychologist and psychiatrist, as well as medication. Our child has always struggled within the school system with engagement, social interaction and academic success. Upon reflection, poor peer social behaviour, including bullying, and authoritarian teaching styles have been a recurring theme in their mainstream schooling life, and have been a significant contributing factor to their school anxiety and subsequent school disengagement.

Weeks into the commencement of Grade 4 in 2019, aged 9, my child experienced what can best be described as severe autistic burnout, including school refusal, massive anxiety and OCD symptoms. They stopped talking, stopped eating and stopped swallowing, and developed suicide ideation related to intrusive thoughts. It was an incredibly stressful and overwhelming period for our family. With support and medication, they were able to return to school for Grades 5 and 6, however it was never a fun and engaging place for them to be.

We were fearful that the transition to High School and placing them in an environment with peers who have little empathy or tolerance for 'different' would further undermine their self-confidence and self-worth, and would have significant ongoing negative impact on their precarious mental health. Instead, we relocated our family from Regional Queensland to Metropolitan Brisbane for the start of Grade 7, enrolling in an independent private school with a more neurodiverse learning focus.

However, by the commencement of Grade 8 in 2023, it became clear that my child's mental health was of much more immediate importance than any future academic success, and we took the necessary steps to register our child for home education.

After our first 12 months of home educating, we have witnessed significant improvement to their mental health and functional capacity. They are much happier and their general level of anxiety has considerably diminished. They have started to develop a sustained engagement with self-directed interest-based learning activities. They have begun to set themselves small goals, and have also started looking ahead to what their own future might entail.

My child's participation in the formal school environment has left them with PTSD, with considerable anxiety associated with academic learning, participating in routine repetitive class activities, and testing. Just the thought of being in a formal school learning environment elicits a strong anxiety response. Any activity that requires them to demonstrate academic achievement is met with defiance and refusal.

We anticipate that continuing in a caring and supportive home education environment that meets their needs, they will continue to thrive and will surpass expectations.

Objections:

I am particularly concerned about:

Clause 18

- Section 7 (a) for choosing a suitable education environment
Will there be some form of punitive punishment for choosing the wrong education environment for your child? Who has the right to define what is a suitable education environment for my child? Is bullying part of a suitable education environment?
- Section 7 (da) (ii) ensure that the (home educated) child or young person receives a high-quality education.

Why does a home education parent need to be singled out to prove that they are providing a high-quality education for their child? Should bullying be a part of a high-quality education? Should my child's previous schools have to prove that they have provided a high-quality education for my child? After all, I have entrusted these schools with the education and the mental health of my child, and to be fair, they didn't do a very good job!

As parents who both have tertiary education, we highly value education and are passionate and engaged in our child's learning. As a home educating parent, I have made great sacrifices including loss of career and income, in order to provide the quality education that my child deserves, and that far surpasses what they would receive within the school system. Home education has not been a choice made because it is an easy or lazy option. If we didn't care about our child's education or their mental health, then they would still be enrolled in the State education system.

Clause 68

- Section 217 (1) (b) – the educational program used for the child's home education must -

As part of our current reporting process, we already have access to the Australian curriculum, and undergo accountability with reports and planning procedures. My child's education has been tailored to meet their individual learning style, interests and needs. Whilst ACARA agrees that 'Students with disability are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning opportunities drawn from age equivalent Australian Curriculum content on the same basis as students without disability' (www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/student-diversity), it does not exemplify how to offer this equality to diverse learners such as my child, who thrive with self-directed interest-based learning activities. As a consequence, the reporting criteria required under the amended bill will not be suitable or achievable for my child.

Given that diverse learners are self-paced, interest driven and learn best on topics of interest to themselves, providing reporting with evidence demonstrating educational progress on all subjects from the Home Education plan will not only be inappropriate within the home education setting, but

will also result in excessive reporting for myself as the reporting parent, as well as for HEU to rigorously review.

Insufficient Consultation with Homeschool Community

I am concerned that the legislation changes in relation to home education are ill considered, inappropriate and have been introduced without proper consultation with the home education community, many of whom are very willing to discuss and offer their experience and expertise. The bill amendments will have a disproportionate impact on families who are challenged by a range of personal and health issues that have contributed to their decision to home educate. It is important to understand and comprehend the reasoning behind the education decisions families make. Families like ourselves, who have struggled to find a fit for our child in mainstream education. The home education community is populated with intelligent, educated, articulate and well organised individuals. I implore you to engage with, listen and consider their concerns and suggestions, in order to make Queensland education inclusive for all students.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my concerns. It is my hope that, going forward, this legislation can be updated to better suit the education needs of all Queensland students. I look forward to seeing your considered response to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.