

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the recent education legislation changes that have been proposed in our state. As a highly experienced Teacher and homeschooling mother I believe it is crucial to voice my objections to the potential impact the Education General Provisions and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 will have on our education system.

I am a Teacher with decades of experience. I have three children who are homeschooled and are diagnosed with Autism, ADHD and specific learning disorders. All but my youngest started their formal schooling journey in local state school, while I continued my own teaching career. At the time they had not yet been formally diagnosed, however their disabilities were beginning to become apparent, particularly in their classroom environments. I was heavily involved in my children's school, assisting in the establishment of a 'Makers Space', facilitated and volunteered in school fundraising and was a member of the P&C. I was an involved parent who was active and interested in my children's school. After several years of advocating for my children and continuous conversations with teachers and administration, it was clear the highly structured ACARA based 'curriculum to classroom' planning materials (C2C) that was delivered in my child's school was not suited to their disabilities. They were bored, disengaged and uninterested in the content of their lessons at school and as a result were excluded from rewards, activities and lunchbreaks. They learnt to hate learning rather than see it as a gateway to future possibilities, the state school system failed them. After my son was physically assaulted in the playground by another child with a tree branch, the last of a string of physical assaults and bullying incidents, my children were removed from their school. I did not return to teaching and instead began homeschooling my two school-aged children and my then toddler nearly 6 years ago.

The proposed legislation raises several pressing concerns that I believe need to be addressed. Firstly, currently each year the Home Education Unit approve the plans for students registered with them (a legal requirement in Queensland if not enrolled in an approved Distance Education provider) and approve or deny continued registration based on this plan and a detailed yearly report. In my experience a vast majority of homeschooling families plan for and provide extraordinarily rich and engaging learning opportunities every single day. The types of opportunities that classroom teachers wish they could provide within the school environment. The proposed changes to legislation not only limit the ability for families to learn in the ways suited to their particular circumstances and dilute the wonderful learning opportunities we give our children, it also suggests that homeschooling is inferior to formal schooling undertaken in an institution, when in reality nothing could be further from the truth. I would love to know of a public school in my electorate who can provide one teacher for every three students, that is the ratio in my home. A one-size-fits-all approach will never recognise the appropriate and diverse needs of our children. Additionally, limiting homeschoolers to be educated in only the Australian National Curriculum is near sighted. As a trained educator I have many years of

experience planning for and delivering high quality educational programs using ACARA as a guide. I am trained to use the current Australian Curriculum, just as I was also trained to use the many approved state curriculums of the past. ACARA is a highly complex and multi-layered professional document. It is made for curriculum developers, heads of department, syllabus writers, heads of curriculum and teachers to use when developing their plans for students in a school environment. Forcing families to take time away from their children's approved learning plan to decipher ACARA to continue home education is exclusionary. It will substantially increase the workload and reporting requirements for home educators and the Home Education Unit (HEU) who have in the past taken up to four months to approve a new plan and the previous year's report under current legislation.

Is there additional funding available to increase the staffing for the HEU in order to process the additional documentation that will be required if the legislation is amended?

What support will be given to homeschooling parents who are not teachers to navigate ACARA?

Will funding for equipment and resources be provided to homeschoolers to implement ACARA as schools are?

There is also no provision for university short courses, Tafe certificates, alternative learning styles or international curriculum programs to be included for homeschooling planning. It seems that even the ACARA accredited Montessori and Steiner curriculums are excluded as an alternative for home educators by the proposed changes to legislation.

How does limiting the range of educational opportunities given to homeschooled students give them access to high quality education?

How does increasing the amount of administration required to homeschool help the safety of children?

What is the aim of increasing the planning and reporting requirements?

How will HEU be able to support registered students and their parents?

Given HEU historically are unable to answer their phonedlines nor respond to emails within several days, how will increasing demand on their obviously already stretched resources lead to better educational or child safety outcomes?

I would like to make clear, I decided what was in the best interests of my children, not the school, nor the government. As their parent I am absolutely the most invested in my children having a successful life. I want to see them learn the skills they require to have a fulfilling career, be able to cook, clean and take care of their personal needs as well as develop the skills to maintain social connections and have safe and nurturing relationships. I as their parent make these decisions, I as their parent determine what is in their best interest – no one else. I strongly disagree with leaving ‘in the best interests of the child’ in the legislation. Education legislation does not determine what is in my child’s best interest, **I DO**.

Moreover, I am worried about the lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding these changes, I do not believe adequate consultation has occurred in this instance. As a stakeholder in our education system, I believe it is imperative for the diverse voices of educators, parents, students, and community members to be heard and considered in any decision-making process that impacts our ability to educate our children to the highest standard. It appears there has been limited, biased consultation and lack of understanding of the homeschooling community by Di Farmer and the EGPA. I was not given adequate notice of the changes to legislation that affect me and my children, the groups stated as being consulted do not speak for me. There is no strong homeschool association in Queensland as far as I am aware, in fact several homeschooling advocates were actively excluded from the process of consultation. Something which is deeply concerning given Di Farmer and the EGPA have stated that adequate consultation of the homeschooling community was taken prior to the drafting of the legislation.

Lastly, I am concerned about students who are unsupported in school environments while waiting for assessment by psychologists or pediatricians, or those who are mercilessly bullied by their peers in the playground or who have developed anxiety disorders because of another student’s behavior in their classroom. Students exactly like my own, who were enrolled in mainstream schooling in the good faith that they would be safe... and weren’t. These students make up the majority of homeschoolers, unintentional homeschoolers. Unintentional because they never planned to homeschool their children, they planned to send them to school and continue in the workforce. These are the students that provisional registration support, they are given time to ‘get their ducks in a row’ so to speak, make important and considered decisions regarding their child’s needs, sixty short days. In fact schools, who have the taxpayer funded role of delivering appropriate educational outcomes, are given more time to demonstrate their accountability (90 days to request transfer of documents when changing schools) than homeschooling families are to demonstrate their compliance when changing from school to homeschooling (currently 60 days, under the proposed legislation change there will be no provisional period, exactly zero days). The sixty days given to decide on the appropriate course when homeschooling, draft a considered plan for homeschooling and seek any medical or psychological support for students who have suffered trauma at school is

vital. Taking this away from parents deciding to homeschool will lead to parents and children making hasty decisions that could harm their children further, resulting in multiple changes to distance ed providers or using overpriced homeschooling resources instead of looking for the best fit before investing time and money in something suitable for their child.

How does forcing hasty decisions on already stressed and traumatised students and families lead to better educational and child safety outcomes?

Surely by making the transition from school to homeschool more difficult there will be less traceability of student transitions. More students will be considered truant, and they will then remain unregistered. Is this a better outcome than sixty days of provisional registration?

Exactly what is the reasoning behind removing provisional registration, what purpose does this serve?

In light of these concerns, I urge you to carefully reconsider the proposed education legislation and to prioritize the best interests of our rapidly growing and proactive home educating community. I implore you to advocate for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to policymaking that values input from all stakeholders and ensures the integrity and quality of our education system. I strongly oppose the proposed changes to legislation concerning home education as detailed above.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission and for considering my concerns.