

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

**Submission No:** 1656  
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**Submitter Comments:**

Dear [Educational General Provisions 2024 Review Committee],

### **Introduction:**

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the proposed changes to homeschooling regulations and how these conversations are being had. As a parent of a child with special needs, I believe these changes infringe upon our rights and responsibility to make the best decisions for our children's education and well-being. Potentially hinging into policing homeschooling families and adding unnecessary workload and stress. Specifically, I want to address how homeschooling is discussed, why this is important and requires changes and the support lacking in mainstream schooling in practice that makes it necessary for parents to seek alternative pathways.

### **Personal Homeschooling Success:**

My role as a parent of a child with special needs has heightened my awareness of the critical importance of personalised education. My daughter, diagnosed with ASD, ADHD, and Type 1 diabetes, faced significant challenges from an early age. At three years old, she struggled particularly with verbal communication, self-harm, and basic cognitive skills.

Upon receiving a professional diagnosis and recommendations, we enrolled our daughter in a mainstream school setting to facilitate socialisation. Despite assurances of additional support and inclusivity, it quickly became evident that the environment was unsuitable for her needs. She experienced profound distress and began to self-harm, unable to engage in activities or receive the necessary attention. Her efforts to adapt and tolerate her surroundings only led to isolation from her peers. It became clear that expecting her to model after neurotypical peers was unrealistic when they were not ready to accept her presence.

Acknowledging the limited benefits of a traditional school environment for her well-being, we opted for homeschooling, despite the lack of full professional support for it as a legitimate option. Our decision was rooted in prioritising her evolving needs and desires. Despite initial scepticism, we committed to providing personalised attention and tailored interventions. As a result, she defied expectations, blossoming into a fully verbal, literate, and capable individual. This journey underscores the profound impact of homeschooling on personal growth and development. Against professional predictions, my daughter's journey vividly demonstrates the transformative impact of parental advocacy and individualised support.

### **Misconceptions about Homeschooling:**

It is crucial to recognise that every child is unique, extending beyond diagnostic labels and predetermined prognoses. Contrary to stigmatized beliefs about homeschooling parents, those who choose this path do so with a profound commitment to their children's academic and personal growth. The decision is made to provide them with the best opportunities to flourish as individuals with diverse strengths, weaknesses, and talents, ensuring they have a

well-rounded and positive childhood experience while also prioritising their emotional well-being and mental health.

Many arguments against homeschooling are based on perpetuated myths, on the qualities they lack as compared to mainstream schooling. There is no reason for backhanded assumptions and negatively filtered political discourse on the matter:

- In Australia, mothers commonly manage homeschooling programs, mostly who have attained higher education. Parents choose homeschooling for various reasons, including philosophical beliefs, concerns about mainstream schools, and a desire to prioritise their children's social, emotional, academic, and personal development. Mostly at a financial cost to the family (Slater et al., 2020).
- In the US, there is substantial support that homeschoolers perform better academically, have more positive social and emotional development, and experience more success in adulthood than their mainstream schooled counterparts (Ray, 2017).
- Home-schooled adults also reported satisfaction in their socialisation abilities, the majority reporting having various social engagements throughout their homeschooling journey. Despite varying degrees of limited exposure to traditional school settings, there were no differences of note between university attendance, income, marital status or well-being between short-term or long-term home schoolers (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022).
- Studies suggest homeschooled students value the control they have over their learning and the respect for their individuality. This autonomy might contribute to increased self-esteem and emotional well-being. Additionally, homeschooled students often described having deeper connections with family and friends based on shared interests, compared to their traditionally schooled counterparts whose social interactions were primarily focused on peer groups (Jackson, 2016).
- In fact, in Australia, no research indicates that home-educated children are lacking in socialisation opportunities, rather they do so thoroughly through various avenues with various age groups, similar to socialisation in the adult world (Sonia Marie Allan & Jackson, 2010).

### **Issues within mainstream schooling:**

Homeschooling tends to be a second-line approach when the mainstream option is unattainable or perceived to be at a detriment to the child's needs. The challenges faced in mainstream schooling are not isolated incidents but are shared by many parents, including parents of special needs children. These challenges include difficulties in forming friendships, academic lagging, significant bullying, and exclusion by peers and the school itself. This reality highlights the long-existing systemic issues within the education system.

A cursory glance at mainstream schooling, as it is today, reveals a disturbing pattern of disconnect between inclusive policy ideals and in-school practice and feasibility:

- Bullying behaviour is not only highly prevalent but is more so prevalent for special needs children. This is despite challenges in defining, reporting, measuring and ongoing tracking. Particularly tricky concerning special needs students who may not understand how to recognise, address or self-advocate in these circumstances. (Queensland Government, 2016)
- Bullied children are more likely to feel excluded, making it harder to socialise and feel accepted. They may also skip school more often. Bullying can lead to depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. These impacts can be long-term, with victims experiencing poor social relationships and economic hardship as adults (Armitage, 2021).
- Children who are bullied report feeling less trusting of others, having lower self-confidence, and a decreased sense of purpose (Fullchange & Furlong, 2016).
- Exclusionary practices at the school level such as discouraging or limiting enrolment, low expectations from teachers toward children with disabilities -undermining their individual potential, lack of suitable assessment used to measure student needs and overreliance on support teachers who often lack sufficient training (Iacono et al., 2019).
- Among the disappointing stats found in Children and Young People with Disability Australia, surveys showed low inclusion and a lack of adequate support. Noting NAPLAN is of limited use in and exclusion of students with disabilities (CYDA's Submission to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System, 2023).
- Parents who ended up homeschooling children with special needs often reported that mainstream schools failed to implement professional recommendations for support. (Slater et al., 2020).

Given these pervasive issues, homeschooling emerges as a genuine and reasonable alternative for parents seeking to minimise or control these challenges. Despite the significant challenges faced in mainstream schooling, there appears to be a prevailing climate that discourages parents from considering alternative educational pathways like homeschooling. This discouragement isolates parents seeking alternatives and undermines the collaborative effort necessary to ensure the best interests of the child are met.

## **Overregulation Concerns:**

The proposed changes to homeschooling oversight appear redundant and seem to create additional barriers, potentially attempting to hinder parents from continuing to homeschool their children. Rigorous oversight on homeschooling progress is already in place, with yearly plans, work samples, and annotations submitted to the HEU to demonstrate parents' curriculum understanding. These submissions showcase overall work quality, curriculum coverage, and teaching processes. Queensland already maintains stricter homeschooling registration requirements compared to some other states.

The insinuations surrounding homeschooling, likening it to a social media trend, and the push to reduce homeschooling numbers are deeply concerning. As a parent of a child with special needs, the prospect of additional reporting requirements and invasive measures feels intrusive and unsettling, more akin to policing than oversight. The current system, like NDIS, already imposes significant hurdles and feels more focused on minimising support than truly assisting those in need. Introducing further burdens on families, especially those with special needs children, detracts from the freedom and flexibility that homeschooling offers and the real benefits that could be gained for children during a crucial point of development in their lives.

It's clear that these efforts are often driven by negative biases against homeschooling, ignoring the diverse needs and preferences of families. Such approaches not only undermine parental autonomy but also fail to acknowledge the challenges already faced by these families. We require a more supportive and inclusive approach that respects the rights and responsibilities of parents while ensuring that all children have access to quality education tailored to their needs.

Instead of imposing further restrictions on homeschooling, it would be more beneficial to streamline the application and reporting processes while enhancing resources and support. By doing so, we can ensure that parents have the necessary tools to provide the quality level of education sought after for children without unnecessary stress and strain. Additionally, homeschooling serves as a valuable alternative for families with special needs children, offering relief for an already overwhelmed mainstream school system. By alleviating some of this pressure, homeschooling contributes to a more sustainable and inclusive educational ecosystem that better supports the diverse needs of all students.

It's important to recognise and respect the education teachers have acquired, but it's also crucial to acknowledge the challenges they face in meeting the diverse needs of special needs children. Many teachers lack the necessary training, time, and resources to adequately support these students within the current educational framework. This observation is not meant to disparage educators but to highlight systemic challenges that often go unaddressed. The level of continuous support and emotional investment parents can provide for their own children is something that cannot always be fulfilled by teachers. Therefore, it's essential to foster a collaborative approach between parents and educators to ensure the best possible outcomes.

There seems to be an attempt to push people back toward mainstream schooling under the guise of the “best interest of children”. The language around this is incredibly vague and unnerving – potentially, under the context, appearing to purport mainstream schooling as the preferred default which homeschooling numbers are veering too far from. It’s critical to allow space and provide clear boundaries around this concept as it has the potential to step out of line too far onto the side of overhauling parental autonomy, which no other state currently pushes against.

What is the best interest if homeschooling is not? How is this decided? Who gets to decide this? Is it beneficial to isolate parents further when their input is necessary for a well-rounded education for their children?

My daughter's unique needs, as evidenced by my own planning and annotations, make it impractical to adequately cover the curriculum's breadth and depth within a traditional classroom setting. She requires additional time, support, scaffolding, and resources due to challenges stemming from her diagnoses, such as sensitivity to busy environments, loud sounds, slow processing speed, working memory issues, and distractibility. Moreover, she relies on assistance throughout the day to regulate and orient herself.

As her parent, I have gained invaluable experience in providing comprehensive support. It is unrealistic to expect a teacher to fulfil all of these roles adequately. Merely introducing a teacher's aide or dedicated support in the classroom is insufficient to address these complex needs. My experience working with many special needs-educated professionals has shown that even they often fail to understand my daughter's needs without the opportunity to develop a consistent relationship over the years.

In light of these considerations, I urge you to reconsider the proposed changes to homeschooling regulations. Preserving the flexibility and autonomy of homeschooling is crucial for ensuring that all children receive personalized support to thrive and reach their full potential. Casting homeschooling in a negative light overlooks valid reasons parents choose this path and perpetuates myths about its efficacy. Instead of enforcing a uniform approach, clear guidelines and resources should be provided to support parents in homeschooling. Legislation changes should involve input from all stakeholders to avoid undermining parental rights and creating unnecessary barriers. Both home education and mainstream schooling have areas for improvement, and addressing these issues requires a collaborative and inclusive approach. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Nikita Angeles

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