

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my concern and opposition to the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024.

In particular :

- The proposed imposition of the Australian National Curriculum on home educating families.
- The proposed removal of provisional registration.
- The requirement for parents to prove that home education is in the best interests of the child.

During the recent EETS briefing to the committee Kathleen Forrester stated that currently 20% of home educating families are using the Australian Curriculum. Therefore 80% do not use the Australian Curriculum. I am one of those 80%.

I have been a home educating parent since 2019 when we removed our youngest child from school. Our son is neurodivergent - on the Autism Spectrum and as such he began displaying difficulties and anxiety with school as soon as he entered Prep. We liaised extensively with his former school, as he struggled with all aspects of schooling, we drew up IEP's, introduced a reduced timetable for school attendance and had frequent parent teacher meetings to try and help him. Ultimately none of these approaches worked, our son is bright and capable but we watched as his love of learning diminished and his anxiety increased. We removed our son from mainstream school in order to home educate him when in addition to his neurodiversity he developed a seizure disorder due to his extreme anxiety and complete overwhelm around the rigidity and expectations of the Australian Curriculum.

He is now thriving at home and learning following a program I have had approved by HEU as being of high quality, one without reference to the Australian Curriculum.

I wish to emphasise the invaluable flexibility that homeschooling provides in tailoring education to our son's unique needs and interests. As a home educating parent I am deeply committed to providing the best possible education for my son and I am concerned that reimposing the rigid Australian Curriculum will have detrimental effects on his mental and physical wellbeing.

In addition the Australian Curriculum is a specialist document, designed for teachers and schools, so that learning can be consistent in schools across the country. Its specialisation is evidenced by all teachers requiring a four year degree in teaching/ education in order to be able to implement the Australian Curriculum in their teaching practice. In schools there are teams of teachers, Heads of Department, and Subject Coordinators who all work with ACARA and the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) - (for senior syllabus) to develop and deliver the curriculum so that the schools meet the requirements as set out by ACARA. The fact that it is very unlikely that home educators will be given access to this level of support and will have to plan to and 'teach' the Australian Curriculum and then report on 8 different learning areas by themselves, shows this proposal as being extremely ill-considered. Further the extra burden on HEU of reviewing and approving these plans and reports will be immense and essentially unworkable without huge increases in staffing and funding.

Currently provisional registration is of enormous benefit to those parents who need to withdraw their child quickly from school. It allows everyone time to decompress from what is usually an extremely stressful and or dangerous situation. To think about the child's learning needs and style and their mental and physical health and then prepare a learning plan that fully encompasses all these needs and provides the best possible education for the child as an individual. Removal of this is a backward step and will again place unnecessary stress on Queensland parents and children already in distress.

I also have serious concerns around how "in the best interests of the child" as stated in the proposed legislation may be interpreted. Who will determine what their best interests are and how will they determine this? At present parents determine what is in their children's best interests, legislating this clause will take away that right from parents.

These proposed changes appear at least in part to be in response to the suicide death of one young person. This was not a failure of home education but rather of Child and Youth Mental Health Services and Child Safety. The justification that because of this single tragic event all home educating families will now require greater governmental oversight is deeply concerning. This is not a valid reason to force home educating families to adhere to the Australian Curriculum. The use or not of the Australian Curriculum did not help this young person. Further, to punish home educating families for the failure by Government/Welfare Services to protect this child clearly ignores the fact that suicide is complex and multifaceted, a single variable is never the reason for someone taking their own life, and does nothing to actually address the real, impactful risk factors that make up the statistics, therefore this is blame pushing at it's worst. Will schools also be held equally accountable for their students wellbeing?

In conclusion, I urge the Queensland Government to liaise directly with home educating families, the real stakeholders, before finalising these proposed amendments.

Thank you