


Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Dear Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee

I am a home educating parent. Prior to becoming a parent, I was a Primary teacher working in New South Wales and Queensland. I love to teach. I chose to home educate because I could see great potential to create and deliver an individual program for each of my children regarding their unique strengths, I personally found this process – of creating a program to meet each child’s needs – is restricted in schools. I began home educating in 2018 when my eldest child was of school age. The freedom for me to choose and use programs that best suit my children and their learning needs has been effective in their education. Along with the ability to work at their own pace in the areas of their most pressing needs, not pressured by heavy reporting or exhaustive programming demands.

I am writing to express my concern with regards to the new bill introduced to Parliament proposing changes to the home education provisions under the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*. In particular, the requirement for Home Educators to use an educational program consistent with an **approved education and training program**, ie. meet the Australian Curriculum (Clause 68, Amendment of s 217); **to report on each subject** or learning areas that are part of the educational program used for the child’s home education (Clause 68, Amendment of s 217) and prove best interest (clause 18, section 7). We all care about the education of children in Queensland, and we have the common objective for all children to have access to a high quality education. **Yet let us not mistaken high quality education as meeting a curriculum’s demands.** Education, deep, meaningful, and retainable is NOT simply achieved through a curriculum, education is boundless – let’s not put it in a box –

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1. let’s not put unnecessary restraints on Home Educators in Queensland,
2. let’s not tie Home Educators hands to a system that was never designed to be implemented at home,
3. let’s not waste money or precious time in trying to meet hundreds of outcomes,
4. let’s continue to allow freedom and flexibility to pace our children’s learning according to their needs,
5. let’s not destroy a process that’s already working – the outcomes of a true education can be evidenced in our children and in the products that they create, home educated children already demonstrate this progress through current requirements by the Queensland Department of Education’s Home Education Unit.

The state is overstepping its responsibilities and trying to micromanage parents. **Parents** not the state are the ones that need to and **already do, make decisions of what is in the best interest of their children.** Parents currently determine what is in the best interest of each child, as an individual and within the family unit and their local community. And they act with deep love, concern, and understanding of their children. A stranger does not have the ability or right to determine 'best interest' of a child. Parents understand contextual factors and they are looking at the whole child and their needs not solely academics, they are looking at the child's development and learning needs. Parents should not have to justify their decision to home educate their child. Parents choose, not the state, whether their child needs to go to school, or they need to use the Australian Curriculum or they need to home educate in an alternative, unique way. **This is a clear right and choice of the parent.** The state's role is to govern not to dictate, control and push standards on how parents, parent. This would be a grave injustice of denying our rights as parents, children are parents' responsibility not the States. The best interests of the child are the sole responsibility of a loving parent or guardian.

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There are 9 learning areas (this is including work studies) outlined in the Australian Curriculum with some comprising of multiple subjects. For example, The Arts have 5 individual subjects and so does Humanities and Social Science, and Technology which is split into two subjects. These three learning areas alone have a total of 12 subjects. *There is too much content to cover and numerous outcomes to sift through for both parents and teachers too.* This overload is detrimental to true education and learning. **To report in relation to each subject or learning area would bog a parent down in unnecessary paperwork and detract precious time from the actual teaching and learning process.** Unfortunately, this is currently weighing down our teachers in schools, especially Primary and early childhood teachers, and for some of their students who need more time on developing basics. Home educators and teachers need to streamline and simply how to best meet the needs of their children. Home Educators currently plan high quality educational programs, carefully selecting curriculum and resources suitable for their children in the learning environment of their home. To add this unnecessary reporting requirement, which is burdensome for most teachers, would destroy the Home Educators current educational processes that are already working well, as parents will be forced to painstakingly explain how each of the quality resources they have selected meet the Australian Curriculum, explicit to subjects or learning areas outcomes, to then be able to report and may require Home Educators to discard a resource that is effective in teaching their children or worse still, to make our children busy in 'token' activities. **It would destroy the natural flow of learning and steal time from rich deep learning activities.** This would wreak havoc with our children's learning by enforcing Home Educators to either 'fail' our children in multiple subjects or deliver 'token' learning experiences in the attempt to report in each subject or learning area, which sadly is the current the process in Schools across the country. Some children need time to work on the basics, like Maths and English, and they need to drop other subjects to find the time for developing these essential basics. Other children need extra time to develop their social and emotional wellbeing this would be hampered for Home Educators by the demand of reporting in each subject or learning area.

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The Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 “recognises wellbeing as a foundation of educational engagement and outcomes for children and young people” (page 37) this foundation would be weakened by reporting on each subject or learning area, as we would either need to force some of our children to work at an unnatural pace to meet an overwhelming reporting demand or fail them in subjects, this would be detrimental to their wellbeing, this unfortunately is what happens in our schools, and needs to change for the sake of our hardworking teachers and students. How can we truly support and develop our children’s complex and individual needs if we are under pressure to report in a standardised way on multiple subjects. Not all things need to be measured to show progress.

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The curriculum is written for teachers and school systems, not designed to be implemented at home. The dynamics of a home and school environment are vastly different. Enforcing Home Educators to follow the curriculum is like trying to push a square peg into a round hole, it just doesn’t work. Our home consists of 4 children each approximately two years apart, teaching four separate grade levels and corresponding outcomes would be challenging, seemingly impossible. Being a Primary Teacher, who has taught in New South Wales and Queensland schools, I know how to implement curriculum and plan accordingly and have taught in classrooms with multiple ages and stages. I have implemented curriculum and taught in a class that had four grade levels in it, and I say, trying to transfer this method to home education is not a smart or efficient way to Home Educate the diverse needs of my children. This would rob my children of so many other deep and rich learning opportunities. There is a better way. We integrate our learning, use real life along with current interests as opposed to being led by a list of unconnected outcomes. We have routine and consistency, children progress there learning at their own pace not trying to compete or compare to others, or meet preset standards, rather the focus is about learning. I am driven by what our children know, what they need to know and progressing from there in a sequenced and logical way. I source a variety of resources that are helpful to my children and how they learn best. I educate myself in line with the needs of my children. Applying the Australian Curriculum as an overarching umbrella would complicate and inhibit a process that already is working well.

I have implemented curriculum and taught in a class that had four grade levels in it, and I say, trying to transfer this method to home education is not a smart or efficient way to Home Educate the diverse needs of my children. This would rob my children of so many other deep and rich learning opportunities.

Mandating Home Educators to follow the Australian curriculum will result in surface learning, parents trying to cover too many outcomes which does not allow time to delve deep into learning content or follow a child’s interest to its full extent. An advantage unique to home educators is to follow a child’s interest beyond curriculum outcomes. Following the Australian Curriculum will be killing the ignited passion of a child’s interest area for the sake of ticking a checklist of a variety outcomes. “Sorry Johnny, time to move onto another area of science now, I know you have an interest in... but we can’t pursue that now – or ever – because we now *need* to cover outcome 5.6.” Let’s not spread Home Educated children’s learning thin in a vain attempt to cover all the Australian Curriculum outcomes.

All children are different, some children need more time and support in some areas of learning, if the Australian Curriculum was enforced for all Home Educators these children would suffer.

Yes, I know, for some children, the Australian Curriculum may work well, but remember all children and their needs are different. Home Educators currently assess the needs of their children and may decide to spend more time in developing a particular skill (note I am not saying subject area or learning area, like the curriculum dictates) and where do they get that time from, they leave another area (or subject area that would be dictated by a curriculum) untouched for a while, and **they address the most pressing needs of their children first**. This need may be in social and emotional wellbeing or for another example, a child with a Developmental Language Disorder¹ extra time may be spent on developing their oral language skills both receptive and expressive – this is foundational to learning in all subjects but not covered enough in the Australian Curriculum *for the average child does not need extended time building their oral language skills*. This is just to name a couple examples, but there are so many more. A lot of families choose to home educate because

‘school’ isn’t working for their child. Tell me, where does the Home Educator find time for developing a child’s most pressing needs if they must align to all the outcomes in the Australian Curriculum? Especially when the child’s most pressing need may not even be adequately represented in the curriculum. If fundamental learning needs are not met, forget about pushing academic attainment, it will be like pushing a large boulder up a hill – not possible and foolish – the boulder will just roll back on you and leave you flattened. Believe me, I tried implementing a set curriculum to follow, like a teacher would have done in a classroom, this did not work for the Home Education of my children, instead I experienced the flattening of the large boulder.

Please note, I am not saying using a curriculum is bad, rather it should not be mandated as a standard all should follow as it does not suit all learners. I use a variety of curriculum resources, but they do not govern us, they are simply tools to use. For example, I use one Maths curriculum with two of my children, a different one for another child and one of my children no set curriculum exists that would work for this child, rather I innovate on a variety of resources to progress this child’s Mathematical abilities according to pressing needs.

Curriculum is only one means of articulation of education, in and of itself it, curriculum is lifeless. Life is something breathed from person to person, through the connection with the learning content, connection with teachers, coaches, parents, and others. Learning that connects and is relevant to the child, is more likely to be retained. And it is the communication of our understandings and discoveries that demonstrates attainment not a curriculum. True education is lifelong and not determined by curriculum. A child engaged will remember and will learn. Let’s not kill our Home Educated children’s love for learning by enforcing unnecessary requirements and overburdening them.

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Did you know there are many teachers that choose to home educate their children? You need to ask, why is that? Not just teachers but many other professional people are choosing to Home Educate their children. Let's not insult our intelligence, undermined our abilities to choose what is best for our children and deny our rights as parents by enforcing us to follow the National Curriculum. The Australian Curriculum is one tool, to be used or not used, by the Home Educator, not a standard to measure every child's education.

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Making and enforcing unnecessary requirements for Home Educators in Queensland is a waste of time and money. Time is precious, for those at the Home Education Unit in the Department of Education and those Home Educating, we do not need extra "to do's," more boxes to tick. My time would be better spent supporting and teaching my children, being present, planning and extending their learning, not on a computer tied up ensuring that we have covered the numerous specific outcomes in the Australian Curriculum. Implementing a mandate for Home Educators to follow the Australian Curriculum, would result in higher staffing costs for the Department of Education's Home Education Unit as they would need to redraft their entire process to align with the Australian Curriculum, more man hours, more wasted money on creating numerous new unnecessary documents. The Home Education Unit is already very busy dealing with the high influx of new Home Educators and could benefit with more staff just to keep up with this current influx, they don't need to be burdened further by implementing a change to a system that is currently working.

The State cannot know or fully understand ALL the diverse needs of each individual child in Queensland and enforcing Home Educators to use an "approved education and training program" would narrow Home Educators choices and hamper their ability to meet their children's needs and incur my children's unique Home Education Program.

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There is more that could be said in opposing The Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 and countless examples of how children would be negatively affected by its implementation. In short, its implementation would be **not** in the best interests of each of my children and numerous others.

Alternative RECOMMENDATIONS:

I suggest not to add to the current reporting and programming requirements for Queensland Home Educators. To remove the amendments that require extensive reporting (in each subject or learning area) and to not add additional requirements to align with an approved educational and training program. Also, there is no need for Home Educators to justify their choice to Home Educate. While the wellbeing of children is foundational to educational engagement it needs to remain unhampered by restrictive reporting and programming demands, there needs to be flexibility to create individual programs that meet the unique needs of each child.

Perhaps that flexibility could look like, reporting on the growth and learning of a child in current areas of need. For example, "Johnny has planned and organised his time to... He excelled in pacing his own learning... researching ... to solve the problem..." "Johnny has progressed in Maths and English, focusing on learning to..." "Some of Johnnys most pressing needs were.... And he has created.... Demonstrating his understanding of..." the report stating what he has done, progressed, or achieved and **not** what he couldn't do or achieve as he needed more time to develop his oral language skills or he was a slow learner, or he was having trouble regularly his emotions, let us focus on his progress and his most pressing needs that have developed, and not put negative comments in his report, **let's not fail Johnny**. (The fact that there is not a grade for The Arts may be that Johnny was able to apply himself and excel in Technology.). If we keep and agree on the basics and make other learning optional, we can reduce the demands on our children, teachers, and Home Educators, I realise this may not be a current possibility for schools (but I hope it could be one day) but this is a current reality for Home Educators, this is what we currently do, and it is how we excel our children. Please reconsider the current new bill.

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There needs to be a streamlined and simplified approach to Education, in Schools and for Home Education. A reduction of the demands on Educators, both teachers and Home Educators. The key to demonstrating a quality education is the children's progress, their ability to communicate what they know and can do, are they learning and developing their skills. The timeframe, methods and the content used to demonstrate the process of education needs to be flexible too, it shouldn't be restricted because each child learns and develops at a different pace. When we instil a love for learning to drive our children's education, when learning is relevant and a child is free to learn in areas of interest and given time to develop their unique talents and abilities this will benefit society, children will grow in their ability to learn and solve problems in creative and innovative ways and the future will be bright for our children, our State, and our country.

Yours sincerely

A passionate teacher, home educator and loving parent

footnotes

1. "Developmental Language Disorder, is a **common**, but **hidden**, disorder. About 7% of people have DLD (this is 1 in 14 people)."
<https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/CommunicationHub/Fact-Sheets/Development%20Language%20Disorder%20FINAL.pdf>