

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submitter Comments:

Dear members of the Committee,

I would like to raise the following concerns with respect to the proposed changes to the Education (General Provisions) Act (EGPA):

ACARA

With regards the proposed necessity to follow ACARA, in order to provide access to "high quality education". I do not believe that, for many children, following the Australian Curriculum actually does constitute a high quality education, especially the vast majority of home-schooled children who are not in school due to disability and/or neurodiversity. It is designed to be taught, in large classrooms, by over-stretched teachers and must therefore cater to the majority, leaving those who are above or below that line bored to the point of destructiveness (self or external) or struggling. The limitations of our curriculum are also apparent in our steadily falling PISA scores. The fact that we have risen in the rankings is solely because others have got worse slightly faster than we have, it is not something to be proud of.

The assertion in the briefing regarding the 20% of families who follow ACARA is also likely to be a significant overstatement as the provided/suggested template is for an ACARA style plan, which many families fill in but then do not follow. For us, with three highly intelligent, neurodiverse children, the curriculum is incredibly limiting. It is better in some instances to skip some lower level information and go straight to the versions taught at higher grades. For example this year, my three have been learning about biological systems with the human body. Rather than teach them as per their ages, common English names for bones and organs, they have learnt (and comfortably use) the proper names for them (for example clavicle as opposed to collarbone, radius and ulna rather than "arm bones"). They have learnt about oxygenated and de-oxygenated blood, and the pathways it takes throughout the body in a scientifically accurate way, rather than the fuzzy simplified suggested diagrams commonly used at their ages. All of this they have taken in, learnt, and been interested in. My 8yo is the first to comment when things are over-simplified and she dislikes and resents it, which causes refusal to learn. Why, therefore, should I limit her? My son, at 7, was able to have a serious conversation with his anaesthetist, regarding the anaesthetics and the tools in the pre-op room. The anaesthetist was highly impressed and very good with him, explaining everything at a much higher level than he would usually to a child of that age (according to him himself). He was then invited to choose his method of anaesthesia for himself, unusual for a child of his age. Again, had he been limited to the National Curriculum, he would not have been able to have such a conversation, nor would he have faced the prospect of his operation as well as he did.

The wellbeing of the child

Additionally, as the children approach high-school, we would like to do as many homeschoolers do, and allow our children to follow their interests and study Open University subjects as and when they would like to and is appropriate. This is not ACARA approved so again shows how limiting the changes to the legislation will be to homeschoolers. It also goes against Human Rights legislation by not allowing the children to gain access to appropriate education for them. I defy any school to be able to provide such individualised learning plans, to be able to modify and adapt on the fly as per

the children's natural aptitudes and their abilities - which can change day on day - as a homeschooling family can and does. An example would be the typical anxiety that ASD children show. All of our children are highly anxious, when faced with a topic they are not yet ready to assimilate, they become extremely anxious and are completely unable to learn. We have the option, at home, to modify that topic, to completely change how we approach it, even to simply dump it. We will come back and revisit it periodically, but only when the child is ready will we actually teach it. With many issues, it is impossible to know what will trigger this response until it is too late, and the child has already become completely overwhelmed and incapable. At this point, we need to back off schooling entirely and focus on emotional regulation, in a calm secluded area. Forcing such children into a school scenario would be harmful to them, and disruptive to their peers.

There is a plethora of evidence to support in-depth, interest based learning over superficial learning of many subjects. Why force the latter over the former onto children with the capacity to do better?

In the homeschooling community, the children spend time with many other children and families, of all ages and from all walks of life. They learn how to socialise broadly, not just with their peers, in a gently regulated environment whilst doing activities of their choosing, facilitating social contact. By comparison, the forced socialisation of peers in the fishbowl of the school environment promulgates bullying and other anti-social behaviours which are especially harmful to neurodiverse children who are often the targets of such behaviour due to their perceived differences.

Other matters

Other matters I find concerning with regards the proposed changes are the lack of consultation with primary stakeholders i.e. parents and the homeschooling community itself rather than with curriculum providers with a vested interest in selling products.

The proposed removal of provisional registration. I feel this will drive far more people so simply "fly under the radar" and as there are estimates that there are more unregistered than registered families already; surely the goal would be to make registration MORE attractive not less. Gaining oversight of the currently unregistered children must be a better thing, given the purported purpose of these changes, than losing sight of a greater proportion?

Statements that the proposed changes would bring QLD in line with the other states are misleading at best, and lead me to doubt other statements made in the same vein. Most of the other states do NOT require homeschoolers to follow ACARA approved curricula, even NSW, currently the most regulated state.