

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

**Submission No:** 1718  
**Submitted by:** [REDACTED]  
**Publication:** Making the submission and your name public  
**Attachments:** See attachment  
**Submitter Comments:**

Dear Committee,

I am writing to express some concerns and considerations regarding the proposed requirements for home education programs, particularly how they do not fully accommodate the unique needs of children experiencing trauma or those with neurodivergent learning issues. These proposals include:

1. Prescribing the requirements for the educational program for a child registered for home education, including that it be consistent with an approved education and training program, and requiring a summary of the educational program to be provided at the time of application for registration, to ensure the child or young person has immediate access to a high-quality program of education.
2. Strengthening parent reporting requirements by clarifying the annual report must provide evidence of the educational progress of the registered child, and requiring that where an application for registration is made within 12 months of the child's previous registration ceasing for any reason – the application must be accompanied by a written report evidencing the educational progress for the child during the previous registration;
3. Removing the separate time-limited provisional registration application, to provide for a single and simplified home education registration process with the appropriate oversight.

While the intention behind prescribing a consistent and high-quality program of education for all children is commendable, it is crucial to recognize that children affected by trauma or those who are neurodivergent often require more specialised approaches to learning. These children face significant challenges in traditional learning environments, including those structured around standard home education programs aligned with approved education and training programs.

Children suffering from trauma experience difficulties in concentrating, remembering, and engaging in a conventional educational program. The stress and anxiety associated with trauma can severely impact their ability to learn. A trauma-informed approach to education recognizes these challenges and adapts teaching methods, content, and pacing to the child's emotional and psychological needs, ensuring a supportive and flexible learning environment.

Similarly, neurodivergent learners, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, Dyslexia, and other learning differences, often require tailored educational strategies that differ significantly from the conventional curriculum. These strategies include hands-on learning, visual aids, technology integration, and one-on-one support, which might not be adequately represented in a standard educational program summary.

A one-size-fits-all approach to education, even within the home education setting, does not suffice for these children. They often benefit from highly personalised educational programs that

consider their unique strengths, challenges, and interests. Such personalization ensures engagement, fosters a love for learning, and supports their overall well-being. Ensuring the availability of flexible learning schedules, breaks, and support services, including therapy and counselling, is essential for the success of trauma-affected and neurodivergent learners in a home education setting. The requirement for a summary of the educational program to be provided at the time of application should allow for modifications based on the child's changing needs and progress.

In light of these considerations, please bear with me while I share our story..

I am the paternal grandmother to [REDACTED], an 11-year-old boy, and served as his primary caregiver from when he was 4 months old until he turned 5. During these formative years, I played a crucial role in his life but did not seek legal guardianship, partly due to insufficient support and misguided advice from child services.

This situation was exacerbated by a social worker from Act For Kids, who prioritised the mother's demands over [REDACTED] best interests, despite clear evidence of her continued battle with drug addiction, mental health challenges, and a pattern of abusive behaviour towards both [REDACTED] and me, largely because of [REDACTED] deep attachment to me and his reluctance to live with her.

Long story short, the situation went from bad to worse and by the time [REDACTED] was returned to my full-time care at the age of 8 years and 9 months, he had experienced significant trauma and his personality had changed drastically from the joyful child he once was. Additionally, he was experiencing significant academic difficulties, as his mother had failed to address the concerns raised by his teachers at two different schools regarding his falling behind in school and the suspicion of ADHD.

Despite his fragile state of mind and emotional turmoil, I promptly adhered to the legal requirements placed upon us by enrolling [REDACTED] as a grade 4 student at the [REDACTED]. Unfortunately, I didn't anticipate the challenges that would arise from this decision. [REDACTED] struggled greatly with the transition to a new school environment, feeling isolated and overwhelmed by unfamiliar faces. He was overcome with confusion and severe trauma from what he'd gone through since leaving my care. While the teachers and management staff at the school were incredibly supportive and accommodating of [REDACTED] unique needs and learning difficulties, their efforts did little to alleviate his distress. Despite their best intentions, the pressure to assimilate, pretend everything was ok and please others only exacerbated [REDACTED] struggles. Instead of progressing, he regressed emotionally, and his suffering only intensified, leaving him in tears with no relief in sight.

As [REDACTED] entered year 5, he repeatedly voiced his wish to be homeschooled, but I hesitated, convinced that traditional schooling was the best option for him simply because the teachers involved were being so helpful. However, despite the caring and committed efforts of everyone involved, [REDACTED] continued to grapple with emotional challenges and learning difficulties. His severe state of distress was evident as he frequently sought refuge in the school toilets instead of attending class after I dropped him off, and his uncontrollable meltdowns persisted nearly every afternoon when I picked him up.

It's also important to highlight that throughout this challenging period, we actively sought support from various therapists outside school, hoping to alleviate [REDACTED] distress, but nothing eased the pain and turmoil he felt every time he left my side to attend school. This emotional turmoil, compounded by [REDACTED] ADHD, significantly interfered with his ability to focus and effectively engage in learning activities.

By June 2023, it became clear that [REDACTED] emotional well-being was deteriorating even further because of the time spent at school, away from me and everyone else he felt safe around. Although there were some academic improvements, the negative impact of this arrangement on his overall well-being outweighed the gains. Consequently, I made the difficult decision to withdraw him from school and homeschool him instead.

This decision was made after very careful consideration I might add, and I spared no expense or effort in ensuring [REDACTED] had everything I thought he needed to succeed. I invested a significant amount of time and money in purchasing resources and educating myself on homeschooling methods. I dedicated countless hours to crafting a personalised curriculum tailored to [REDACTED] unique needs and interests. Finally, I meticulously articulated my aspirations for [REDACTED] education in the plan I submitted to the home education department.

With the passing of time though, I can't help but laugh in a somewhat maniacal manner as I observe all the educational books and tools that have been slowly gathering dust on our very costly bookshelf. As with [REDACTED] school teachers, I had the very best of intentions starting out but simply didn't anticipate the extensive amount of pressure relief and healing [REDACTED] needed before he could even look sideways at a book without stressing out and becoming highly distressed.

Fortunately, our journey took a positive turn when we connected with a doctor at the Child and Youth Mental Health Service in Robina. Their wise counsel advised us to refrain from applying any further academic pressure on [REDACTED] until he reached a point where he could genuinely smile and express a desire to learn without feeling forced.

So that is what we did.

We made a conscious decision to set aside the textbooks and embrace a more relaxed approach to learning. Instead of confining ourselves to a classroom-like setting, we embarked on excursions to places like art galleries, museums, and the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary where he learned about animals by observing them in person, rather than just through pictures in a book. Sailing boats became both a mental and physical exercise, while also providing a soothing escape on the water. We challenge ourselves with family outings to "escape rooms" to exercise our minds and watch documentaries with subtitles to improve reading skills.

We also found solace and educational value in gaming programs, which has not only enhanced [REDACTED] fine motor skills and reading abilities but also supported his cognitive growth and bolstered his problem-solving and research skills.

Additionally, our frequent visits to various restaurants and cafes provide [REDACTED] with a chance to experience different cuisines and engage in conversations about their origins. We leverage these outings as hands-on learning opportunities, where [REDACTED] can work on calculating the final bill, gain an appreciation for the diversity of food options, and hone his social skills in a casual setting.

Since transitioning out of the traditional school environment, [REDACTED] self-confidence has significantly improved. The absence of pressure to partake in large group activities, which used to exacerbate his social anxiety, has been a key factor. Now, he's actively involved in sports like boxing and skateboarding, as well as educational activities with smaller groups of peers. These changes have enabled him to excel and grow in environments where he feels secure and supported.

This new approach to learning has been transformative. Empowering [REDACTED] to make choices about his activities and learning has not only deepened his educational experience beyond what traditional schooling could offer but has also markedly lowered stress levels in our household. His nervous system has stabilised, allowing us to enjoy public outings without the concern of potential meltdowns as we're no longer confined to selecting activities that avoid triggering these sensitivities, opening up a wider range of experiences for us to enjoy together.

Our next step involves carefully reintroducing [REDACTED] to a wider array of English and Maths subjects in a manner that he can grasp without becoming so frustrated that he shuts down and disengages completely. Thankfully, with the vast array of educational resources and teaching aids available now, I'm optimistic that we will find an approach that truly clicks with him fairly quickly.

In conclusion, I urge a revisitation of the current requirements for home education programs to include provisions that explicitly address the needs of trauma-affected and neurodivergent learners. Such an inclusive approach would not only align with our shared goal of providing a high-quality education to all children but also ensure that those with unique learning needs are not left behind.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]