

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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25th March 2024

Committee Secretary
Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee
Parliament House
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Dear Committee,

I, a parent of children in mainstream school and a resident of the Electoral District of Keppel, am writing to express my opposition to the proposed changes in the homeschooling legislation, particularly the requirement to follow the national curriculum, provisional registration timeframes and my right as a parent to choose what education is best for my children.

Currently, my children (9-year-old fraternal twin girls) are enrolled in a Central Queensland mainstream school, however as of this Thursday they will be homeschooled for the remainder of their primary school years, and beyond if necessary. They are currently in Grade 4.

Why have we chosen to homeschool? For a few reasons.

1. Because the mainstream education system has already failed my children – academically and emotionally. They are in Grade 4 however they are NOT at grade 4 level. They would be Grade 2 level at best in literacy and mathematics. They were both diagnosed with dyslexia late last year and have both been involved in literacy intervention programs at school since Grade 1 and have had outside of school tutoring for a good part of 18 months, however they are getting left further and further behind. They need intensive 1on1 assistance to get them “up to speed”.

Socially my children are amazing, but this hasn’t been taught to them by school. It has been taught to them by the experiences my husband and I have given them in their short lives so far, but the school system is breaking their spirit.

Because they are behind academically, and because the school puts such emphasis on succeeding academically, they call themselves the worst names possible – they say they are dumb, stupid, not smart – at one point one of my girls said she didn’t want to be on this planet anymore! Things no 9-year-old (or at that time, an 8-year-old) should say about themselves. As a mother, and a human being, it breaks my heart to hear these things from my children. This isn’t them. They ARE smart, just not how we gauge that at school – through literacy and numeracy – but they are street smart, social smart, people smart, logic smart.

Our school is apparently taking away the Positive Behaviour Learning framework because, quote - unquote – the children who do not behave in a positive manner were being excluded, so it was unfair – but what about my children who do not perform high academically but are awesome

little humans to other humans and do engage in school in positive manner? Shouldn't they be rewarded for their good behaviour just for being a good person? That is their superpower – empathy and kindness – something we're losing more of in our community. And yet these attributes are not enough. They watch their peers receive awards (mid and end of year academic awards), knowing no matter how much they try and no matter how much effort they put in, it will probably never be them.

I don't expect everyone to get an award, that's not how life works, but to be solely awarding on one specific element of school is not a good way to promote a positive culture. If we are to be inclusive, we should be inclusive of every element.

2. Curriculum – my children have actively said they either do not understand what they are being taught, find it boring (likely because they don't understand), or because the class moves too fast, they're unable to absorb what they're being taught, so they zone out, ultimately learning nothing. By homeschooling they will be able to learn what interests them at their own pace, ensuring their spirit and love for learning is kept alive. Right now, however, that spirit is slowly being diminished.
3. Safety – They are being physically and emotionally assaulted at school. The emotional bullying and physical violence occurring at their school is out of control. I am not going to put my children in harms way because the Government thinks that's the best place for them.

In 2023, I emailed the principal of my children's school regarding physical incidents that had occurred in my child's classroom that were affecting my daughter mentally and emotionally. These emails were ignored. I then escalated my issues to the regional office who then referred me BACK to the principal as the principal had advised the regional office all issues had been dealt with – they had not. I then escalated this to the Integrity office who then referred me BACK to the principal. After meeting with the principal in person (who dismissed most of my concerns and wouldn't accept that anything was an issue), my child was removed from that class and reallocated to another Grade 3 class in the middle of Term 3, along with 5 other students where their parents had also vocalised their concerns. That isn't addressing the concerns, that's removing us from the problem.

The system is absolutely broken. In my view, there is a systematic failure to the teachers, the students, and ultimately their families, and is designed to protect those at the top.

My daughter has had her head slammed into a port rack resulting in an extended headache, with the principal emailing me at 5:20pm on a Friday afternoon to advise that she had "forgot" to hit the send button at 1:17pm on her email regarding the injury, ignoring her own policy of advising/reporting to parents of head injuries via phone call. My daughter has been aggressively tackled and then dragged by her hair into a large patch of prickles during her lunch break (resulting in a phone call from the Acting Principal at the time). They have had books thrown at them in class. They have been evacuated from their classroom repeatedly due to violent outbursts of other children. They have witnessed a young boy be spear tackled, head stomped and choked by two others boys and they have witnessed their teachers CRY every single day because their teachers are at a loss and are not supported by the schools leadership team.

Why do you think good teachers are leaving education permanently? They are broken. The system has broken them. The mental health of teachers is suffering greatly, and this is because of the workload of the current curriculum, the lack of support from their school's leadership team and upper Government

management. This would not be acceptable in any other workplace. Behaviour at my children's school is out of control, and disappointingly, its reported that in our town, no other state school is performing any better either.

My husband and I are homeschooling at a great financial expense to my family. I have left a \$100k + 17.5% superannuation job, plus future investment earnings to home educate our children. We don't qualify for any government funding. We are making a financial sacrifice to home school so we can give our children the utmost best education possible to ensure they succeed later in life. The current national curriculum cannot provide that for my children.

I understand there has likely been incidents where only a small minority of people have perhaps committed the wrong thing, but completely changing a system that appears to be working (based on the numerous testimonials of successful home-schooled students) with inadequate consultation is not the answer.

Your attention needs to be focused on the current mainstream education system and its curriculum because it IS broken, severely. The standardised education approach does not fit every student. It is designed for a small group of students that "fit the box", and not those who need the extra time to absorb what they have learnt or those that do not learn through the current teaching pedagogy. There is absolutely no equality with the mainstream education system, and my children alone are great examples of that.

I strongly urge you to reconsider this bill and speak to the homeschooling community directly. Speak to past homeschooled students and their families, ask WHY parents are removing their students from mainstream school and choosing to homeschool. We are also your constituents – we are not tin foil hat wearing conspiracy theorists – we just want what's best for our children. The world is changing rapidly, and we just want to make sure our children will thrive and succeed in the unknown future world.

I hope, for the sake of my family and other homeschool families, you make an informed decision.

Kind regards,

Cassandra Whitehead
Concerned Parent and Resident of the Keppel Electoral District