

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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To the Queensland Parliament Committee on Education,

As part of a homeschooling family that has been home educating for 10 years, I strongly oppose the proposed changes to the Education (General Provisions) Act (EGPA)!

The proposed changes would mean a number of concerning things, but the main concerning factors I see are:

- 1) home educators would now have to follow the Australian Curriculum rather than having to focus on providing a "high quality education",
- 2) proposals are not based on Australian research or evidence, there is no evidence to show that the Australian Curriculum produces better outcomes than the high quality, individual learning plans developed for each home educated student and approved by the HEU,
- 3) home educators would have to prove that home education is "in the best interests" of the child, without any explanation as to what exactly "in the best interests" means or who determines this,
- 4) provisional homeschool registrations would be removed,
- 5) changes appear to be in light of a failure of child safety to do their job, NOT the failure of homeschooling families,
- 6) consultation has been flawed, with the homeschooling community not properly represented.

Homeschooling four children has involved much research and planning to ensure each of them have an individualised, specifically tailored to them, learning plan. As all four of my children have Autism Spectrum Disorder, DSM 5 (ranging from level 2 to 3), and two of my children have pragmatic language delays and dyslexia, when putting together their learning plans, I do so in consultation with the children's allied health and disability support practitioners, to ensure that every need is covered; academic, social, physical, emotional, disability, etc. The reality is, this takes hours, upon hours, upon hours of work to develop a plan for each child, but ultimately, results in the absolute best program that my children could be taught and ensures they're not only academically learning and making progress, at their own pace, but also achieving life skills, improving in their social skills, making friends, etc and thriving at home, with their mental health and well-being and neurodivergent needs treated as a priority and not a hindrance (something that most certainly was not experienced at school, a place where my oldest child fell behind academically, experienced severe anxiety and depression, had no friends and was bullied so severely that he came home on numerous occasions covered in bruises and was so terrified of being "beat up" that he would refuse to use the toilet at school in case he was cornered in there again and instead would have accidents and be covered in urine when I arrived to pick him up from school... and the school, knowing full well what was happening, did NOTHING... this was just one of the schools... we tried THREE...

ALL FAILED MISERABLY, with his occupational therapist actually attending the final school to observe and requesting that we remove him immediately and return to homeschooling, and his psychologist, after speaking to the school, also requesting he return to home education immediately for fears of his safety).

In our case, homeschooling was not an option or a choice, it was a necessity. Under these proposed new laws we would have to prove it was in the best interests of our children, I can only imagine the additional injuries and trauma that would have caused if we had have had to prove this before our son was removed from mainstream education. How can the danger this poses to at risk children be overlooked?! It is such an overreach of political power! How is someone from within the HEU or the minister for education or a politician or whoever else is supposed to make such an important decision (which is not outlined in any of the documentation currently available relating to the proposed changes) going to be able to make a decision regarding my (or anyone else's) children's "best interests"? Surely, as a parent, I am much more equipped to make this decision, surely their allied health and disability support practitioners are also more equipped to make such a decision, and yet, the power would be handed over to someone who knows nothing about my children and most certainly does not understand their diverse needs. At absolute best, the proposed changes toe the line of disability discrimination!

The proposed changes to homeschooling appear to be in light of a report involving the suicide of a child who was home educated... An event that, while devastating, was a situation where the family and child were known to child safety and the appropriate services did not intervene or react as they should have. This is a clear child safety failure, not a homeschooling issue. Many more children have committed suicide due to mental health issues that have developed as a result of issues within mainstream education, bullying at school, etc, if the changes proposed come into effect and families are no longer able to be approved provisionally for homeschooling, how are we to protect the students needing to be removed from school immediately for their own safety, who will take responsibility for the mental health issues that arise from the continued trauma exposure, who covers the cost of therapy required as a result and who is to blame for the additional deaths we will no doubt see because of it?

Mainstream school does not work for every child. In the same way, the Australian curriculum does not work for every child. We see it clearly when there are students skipping school because they are not engaged... We see it clearly when there are children who cannot read and write adequately by the time they hit high school, or even at the end of their high school education, and there are children who have huge gaps in their learning because they've been moved forward in a curriculum that they cannot keep up with... We see it clearly when there are now over 10,000 registered home educating students (a 195% increase) in Queensland... Reportedly, 20% of home educating families already

use the Australian curriculum, this means 80% DO NOT, because the Australian Curriculum has not worked for our children and/or we have found something that works better for our children! The mainstream system is clearly failing our children, why are we looking at changing home education, when that is clearly not the system that is flawed or broken?!

The Australian curriculum did not work for my children, so I, like thousands of other parents who take on the immense, challenging, yet very rewarding task of educating their children at home, have worked my backside off and sought support from appropriate avenues, to provide one that does, something mainstream schools were unable to do for my oldest child. As home educators, we have access to such a wide array of resources. Over the last 10 years my kids have used and thoroughly enjoyed programs and resources such as:

- Toe by Toe (<https://www.booktopia.com.au/toe-by-toe-keda-cowling/book/9780952256403.html>)
- Fitzroy Reader's (<https://www.fitzroyreaders.com>)
- Successful spelling (<https://blake.com.au/successful-spelling-book-4>)
- Touch Type Read Spell (<https://www.readandspell.com/the-ttrs-method>)
- Night Zookeeper (<https://www.nightzookeeper.com/en-au/parents>)
- KiwiCo (<https://www.kiwico.com/about-us>)
- UGears (<https://ugearsaustralia.com.au/>)
- ArtVenture and Art Eye Deer (<https://www.artventure.com.au/about>)
- MathsOnline (<https://www.mathsonline.com.au>)
- Mathletics (<https://www.mathletics.com/au/>)
- Education Perfect (<https://www.educationperfect.com/>)
- Skoolbo (<https://www.skoolbo.com.au/>)
- Khan Academy (<https://www.khanacademy.org/>)
- Reading Eggs (<https://readingeggs.com.au>)
- MathSeeds (<https://mathseeds.com.au/>)
- Targeting Math (<https://www.officeworks.com.au/shop/officeworks/p/targeting-maths-australian-curriculum-edition-year-3-lec2152226>)
- Lego Mindstorms (<https://www.lego.com/en-us/product/lego-mindstorms-ev3-31313>)
- Lego Boost (<https://www.lego.com/en-au/product/boost-creative-toolbox-17101>)
- And many, many more.

On top of that, they have engaged with tutors and participated in group learning for things such as:

- Languages (Auslan and Italian)
- Science (engineering, robotics, science experiments, etc)
- Arts (drawing, painting, calligraphy, mosaics, music, etc)
- Sports (PE classes, horse riding, taekwondo, swimming, sports carnivals, etc)
- Incursions (visits from the SES, police, paramedics, seeing eye dogs, reptile handlers, etc)
- Excursions (museums, art galleries, zoos, rainforests, beaches, reefs, camping trips, etc)
- Social interaction
- And so many other wonderful experiences.

Our children definitely do not miss out on a high quality education!

Consultation regarding the proposed changes has been extremely limited and flawed. Why do we have MP's actively avoiding home educating families, refusing to listen to or advocate for their constituents, who, as a whole, are a collective of passionate educators who want and provide nothing but the best for our children to ensure a high standard of education, a better standard than the one size fits all curriculum being proposed? Why has there been active exclusion of the two main people representing Queensland homeschoolers directly, Amanda Bartle and Patricia Fitzgerald, both home educators well known to the EGPA review team and directors? As a result of this, I certainly do not feel that I or my family were represented, no one asked me who I wanted as a consultation representative in light of there being no official state homeschooling association, and I can assure you, there are thousands of other home educators and home educated students who feel the same! Supportive, collaborative regulation results in better and increased compliance, and a better experience for both home educating families and regulators. I fully support the recommendations from the Home Education Network and urge that you reconsider this Bill and take into account the recommendations made by the Home Education Network as outlined below.

The Home Education Network's recommendations for the legislation review are:

- 1) That reference to the Australian Curriculum be removed from the draft legislation, and replaced with covering the eight key learning areas, which

will bring the legislation in line with the majority of other Australian jurisdictions;

- 2) That reference to a 'high quality education' be removed from the draft legislation;
- 3) That provisional registration is maintained, and that the time frames unchanged from current regulations;
- 4) That reference to 'best interests of the child' be removed from the draft legislation;
- 5) That a parent representative body similar to VHEAC in Victoria be formed so that Queensland home educators are able to collaborate with the HEU and Department of Education to formulate a workable and realistic legislative and regulatory framework.

I implore you to take the time to listen to the homeschooling community, to allow us to be properly represented. We all want what's best for our children, that is not a one size fits all curriculum and it is certainly not political overreach where someone, someone who doesn't even know our children, their needs, wants, challenges or desires, gets to dictate if homeschooling is what is best for our children or how it is done. Homeschooling families do not take the education of our students, our children, lightly. We want to see them develop a passion for learning, see them thrive, see them succeed, and we sacrifice time, money and so much effort, to ensure that they do. We taught our kids to walk and talk without the Australian curriculum, just like we can teach them other life skills and academics without it's interference. As the old saying goes

"If it ain't broken, why fix it?"

Sincerely,
Blair Plonsker.