

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the recent education legislation changes that have been proposed in our state. As a constituent and a member of the community, I believe it is crucial to voice my objections about the potential impact of these changes on our education system.

My concerns are specifically in regard to:

- mandating the use of the national curriculum for homeschooling families
- removing the probationary period for homeschool registrations, and
- the proposed requirement for families to justify to the government their decision to homeschool their own child/ren.

Moreover, I am perturbed by the obvious lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding these changes, as the many voices and objections from homeschooling families in the state make clear that the overwhelming majority are not in agreement (in fact I have not seen one that is.) Being a stakeholder in our education system, and in a system of democracy, I believe it is imperative for decisions to be evidence-based and the voices of educators, parents, students, and community members to be heard and respected fully in any decision-making process that impacts our children's education and wellbeing.

Firstly, mandating the national curriculum for home-educating families undermines the fundamental purpose of homeschooling, which includes the detailed customisation of

education to suit the individual needs and learning styles of children. These proposed changes would be extremely detrimental for the many thousands of Queensland children who cannot thrive in the mainstream schooling system, yet are flourishing because they *already* receive a high quality, flexible and individually delivered education at home. Many home-educated children are gifted, neurodivergent, suffer from mental health issues or have disabilities, and the flexibility of homeschooling is vital for their success. For these children, the rigid structure of the national curriculum can be deeply limiting. The demanding schedules, environmental overwhelm, generalised pedagogy, pace and standardised assessments of traditional schooling, while fine for many average children, can also exacerbate anxiety and stress for children with unique needs, leading to disengagement and underachievement.

It should be noted that a structured regulatory requirement is *already* in place that the Home Education Unit (HEU) approves homeschooling plans and reports, requiring parent-teachers to show that they are delivering a high quality education and it appears to be successful in doing so; I am aware of families who have had their plans and reports rejected and had to alter them before approval. Any overregulation would place a significant burden on taxpayer resources and hinder, rather than improve outcomes, forcing parents, not to mention the HEU, to spend unnecessary time doing paperwork, writing and checking reports and recording superfluous work examples, leaving less time to engage their children in rich educational experiences.

Homeschooling families also generally don't receive any direct remuneration or government support for their valuable full-time work in this field, despite giving up their careers and superannuation, expending great amounts of their own time, energy, money and resources, while saving the government thousands of taxpayer dollars each year. Our efforts take strain off a heavily-laden government school system by removing high-needs learners from the classroom and freeing up teacher time. Unnecessary restrictions would make my time, as the primary homeschooling parent, laden with arbitrary paperwork that would take me away from being able to deliver the layered and meticulously planned homeschool experience that my gifted child currently receives. The current, similar pressures on teachers with its red tape are resulting in so many leaving the profession in droves (often to homeschool their own children.)

Homeschooling in its current form is able to accommodate extension programs, tutors, mentors, social engagements, clubs, sports, travel, family time, therapies, medical appointments, and other enrichment activities or necessary interventions in concert with a child's education, also ensuring valuable family time that scaffolds each child's emotional wellbeing. In a youth mental health pandemic, this significant benefit should not be undervalued. Another extremely positive side-effect of such a closely tailored

home-based education is the opportunity to discover their interests and passions early and with fervour, allowing content compacting and therefore *circumventing* the need for one broad, standardised curriculum.

*Despite the challenges faced, homeschooling parent-teachers are able to achieve what mainstream schools and teachers would deliver if only they were able to: an education tailored **completely** to the individual, delivered one-on-one, making the best use of precious time and resources. In truth, it is the apex of educational goals.*

Education CANNOT and SHOULD NOT be a one-size fits all offering, if we are to ensure to have a future generation of great minds, creative thinkers, problem-solvers and ground-breakers. In a world of diverse human beings, we desperately need flexibility in education if we are to benefit from a future of professionals with diverse skills and knowledge, to solve upcoming crises in a quickly changing world and the grave challenges that the future presents.

Our Story

Before becoming a homeschooling parent, I had a growing career as a Project Manager after many years as a manager in corporate entertainment and multimedia. I gave up this career to educate my son. He is eight years old, in Grade 4 and confirmed highly gifted via a WISC-V cognitive test by a neuropsychologist. He is curious, inventive, loves learning and aspires to become a mechatronics engineer, or an astrophysicist. (Maybe both, according to him.) Being highly asynchronous, his learning ranges from Year 4 to Year 9 content, with some science concepts already at university level understanding.

After an extremely enriching time learning at home and preschool, he attended Prep and much of Year 1 in a QLD government independent school. Despite our happy, endlessly curious boy initially being incredibly excited to start “big” school and eager to dive even more into learning, what quickly appeared as confusion and boredom turned to frustration, which then gradually spiralled into anxiety and rage, which then transformed, to our dismay, into deep-set “school can’t”. On the days he was able to go, he would have meltdowns that would last increasingly longer each time. He would scream at kids and teachers. He would refuse to come back inside after lunch breaks. He loved his friends and sports days, but was learning almost nothing and becoming more and more anxious and depressed. The school struggled to respond to his asynchronous abilities, high-school level understanding, interests in advanced STEM, his need for intellectual peers and his fast-paced learning. His Year 1 teacher had no idea how to give him feedback on written work about subatomic particles or offer him coding or robotics, and

in-class differentiation was simply not possible. No amount of meetings, parent advocating or good intent by the school to support his specific neurodiversity helped.

When he finally had his biggest explosive meltdown on an afternoon late in 2022, the head of Junior School openly admitted they could not cater for his cognitive abilities. They were not trained in giftedness, his extension teacher was too stretched, they had no program to place him in and with a lack of nearby schools with gifted programs, we faced no option but to remove him immediately and homeschool instead.

The HEU provisional registration period offered was *vital* in being able to immediately remove him from a traumatic situation, to follow state requirements and assure his well-being in a calm and supportive home environment, while we focussed on helping him gain back his confidence and emotional health. I simultaneously worked tirelessly for weeks to research, plan and create (as his neuropsychologist described it) an “incredibly rich, diverse and intellectually stimulating,” many pages-long homeschool plan that perfectly matched his individual learning style, cognitive and emotional abilities, interests and needs. (As I sit writing this on the weekend, he is next to me explaining particle physics and nano-transistors.)

The depth and breadth of our son’s knowledge, skills and emotional stability has sky-rocketed monumentally since we began homeschooling and his love of learning has returned. He ranked extremely highly in NAPLAN last year compared to his Grade 3 peers who possessed a year more of schooling than him (he completed NAPLAN a year early due to a grade skip) and despite some normal giftedness anxiety and perfectionism, he is absolutely thriving more each day.

We know our son’s abilities, struggles and passions intimately and his plan reflects this. If forced to follow the ACARA curriculum, as a standard set of learning objectives aimed at a wide cohort, utilising a pedagogy aimed to give options and general knowledge to “average” students, we could no longer describe his educational plan as “rich”, “diverse” or “intellectually stimulating”. It would be much more difficult to adapt to his needs over time and manage his emotional health. He would struggle to stay engaged, inspired and invested in his own education, instead of seeing the whole world as his classroom and his life as a continual educational journey, as he now does and as most homeschooled children do. We appreciate access to the ACARA curriculum as *inspiration* when planning and sometimes use the accompanying resources, if the content is aligned with his interests, abilities and future goals. However, to tailor a suitable individual learning plan for him, we **must** be free to deviate from and often **surpass** the offered curricula in order to ensure he is getting a high quality education that is perfectly suited to him as an individual with unique needs. To deny him that opportunity would be to send him backwards.

In an individual learning plan for a unique student, **flexibility** is the cornerstone. We frequently incorporate alternative curricula that is designed for children with giftedness, university-style courses, mentors, online programs, clubs and classes, take him travelling to other cities, on weekly excursions, to events, exhibitions and festivals and offer experiential learning experiences and opportunities that may not be within the rigid boundaries of the very few, limited “approved” structures the government is proposing. It is imperative that we spend each educational moment and resource (that we provide at our own cost) as wisely as possible and allow plenty of *time* between core subjects for deep-diving into literature, history, science, coding, mathematics and critical life skills to ensure a well-rounded, successful child and future adult/engineer/scientist/change-maker.

Just in February this year alone, because of the flexibility that homeschool offers, we were able to travel around Australia. We toured huge underground dolomite crystal caves, stood against Australia’s giant eucalypt trees in ancient forests and investigated the devastating history of Tasmania’s Black War. We participated in Chinese Lunar New Year Festivities and admired art from the masters in Melbourne’s NGV. We learned about the First Fleet while wandering around Sydney Harbour, imagining the tall ships and hulks coming in. We studied ancient Egyptian artefacts at the Ramses II exhibition and tried to interpret the hieroglyphs. We rang 15th century bells in the Perth bell tower, visited the WA Aquarium, panned for gold at Sovereign Hill’s gold rush and walked the ruins of the colonial historical sites of Port Arthur. We just spent three days in Brisbane participating in incredible science events at the World Science Festival and we’ve been to the museums and science centres of five Australian capital cities in the last two months. At home, we engage in incredibly diverse and engaging activities and investigations from all aspects of life and learning, while responding to our child’s development stages.

The foundation of our education style is evidence-based pedagogy, supported by research, best practice gifted education principles and backed by our son’s neuropsychologist. The proposed restrictions would make these kinds of immersive experiential opportunities extremely difficult to enact as we would be too focussed on what the format says we “should” be doing, completing worksheets and ticking boxes. The proposed legislation would put the brakes on the education of so many children and rob them of these extraordinary opportunities.

Homeschooling parents know their children best. Who specifically would get to decide whether home educating is in a child’s best interest, especially for diverse learners with unique challenges, as most homeschooling families are? What metrics would they use? This should not be a government decision, except in extreme cases of neglect. Who

could possibly make that decision better than an intelligent, dedicated, committed parent, especially when mainstream school was tried and was not suitable?

The homeschooling parents I have met are (by and large) intelligent, professional, extremely devoted individuals who don't make the choice to homeschool lightly. Increasingly many are ex-teachers; I met another homeschooling mother recently who is an ex-lawyer. These are not people who take on the task without deep consideration, awareness or great sacrifice.

Furthermore, in both my previous career working with teenagers at TAFE and in my time as a homeschooling parent, I have found the overwhelming majority of homeschooling children to be well-rounded, intelligent, curious, socially aware, inventive, extraordinarily mature for their age and equal to, or far beyond their chronological mainstream peers academically. They have confidence, enthusiasm and self-knowledge in droves. There needs to be a desire by the decision-makers to meet, talk with and truly understand what homeschooling families are motivated by, how they operate, and witness the incredible outcomes that they and their children experience. It is not uncommon for homeschooled children to complete university courses while still in high school or complete high school early to fast-track to tertiary education, access robust and specialised international curriculums or to pursue interests and skills that go beyond the scope of traditional education. Many go on to impressive careers in medicine, law and science.

To force the "systemisation" of the education of children who do not fit neatly into the "system" is nothing short of discrimination, to be candid.

In addition, If parents are to be experts in all areas of the curriculum across all year levels (far beyond the professional requirement of paid teachers), it would be only pertinent for parents to be offered reasonable funding for training, school supplies and classes, income support, superannuation, professional development in understanding and delivering the various "approved" curricula (which many teachers also claim to struggle to understand) and access to comprehensive suites of teaching resources for free, that government teachers and schools currently have. If not, this policy would create a vast inequality among educational providers, with similar expectations to mainstream teachers but working for free, with vastly inequitable support.

Admittedly, a small percentage of families may not be delivering a satisfactory education and this should certainly be corrected, but only on a *case-by-case basis*. It is groundless to enact broad, restrictive changes based on isolated instances of wrongdoing and create unnecessary hurdles for the conscientious homeschooling population, who should in fact be applauded and supported for their efforts and

excellent outcomes. I urge decision-makers to act with logic and fairness, to seek more equitable solutions that address specific issues without unfairly impacting an entire community.

There is also concerningly little information offered as to how these proposed changes will be able to be implemented. My questions are as follows:

- Many homeschooled children are ahead of the ACARA curriculum, yet tertiary courses are not included in the list of “approved” curriculum. What provisions are there for flexibility based on the proposed changes, provided that all students would be “required” to follow the ACARA curriculum up to Year 12 (18 Years), when many may have completed their Year 12 schooling well before then?
- What evidence/data is being used to justify the changes to strictly regulate home education and make it more similar to mainstream schooling, in regard to both student wellbeing and academic outcomes, in comparison to the outcomes of mainstream school students? Where is the evidence of a data comparison between mainstream and home educated school students in terms of self-harm and mental health, showing a need for intervention for home-educated families, as opposed to protecting the mental health of mainstream students and teachers (which would arguably be more urgent?)
- How does the Queensland Government intend to front the glaring excess costs that will be incurred by taxpayers when significant extra staffing will be needed to read, approve and quickly process thousands of homeschool plans and reports that would be significantly longer and more detailed, without creating substantial bottlenecks in the system (especially when families will then also be denied provisional registrations and need urgent approvals?) How are Queenslanders being made aware of these extra costs?
- Is the government willing to execute this plan with equity and fairness if these changes are rolled out, by providing homeschooling families with sufficient training, funding and resources to meet their increase in demands?

If representatives were to talk to homeschooling families and gain awareness of the current goings on, it would be clearly apparent how deleterious the proposed changes would be and how valuable the current system is. Parents will not have their children forced back to school if it is not in their best interests.

I strongly ask you to instead, support policies that respect the autonomy of homeschooling families and rather than imposing restrictive mandates, the government should focus on providing resources and support to facilitate homeschooling success,

provide evidence-based inclusivity in mainstream schooling (such as full-time gifted programs, more teaching and support staff and professional development for teachers to closely support students with unique needs) for better schooling options and promote true educational diversity and innovation, so that ALL students can have access to a high quality education.

Thank you for considering my concerns on this important issue. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this matter further and to work together toward solutions that benefit all stakeholders involved.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Please remove all contact details before publishing, thank you

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