

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Committee Secretary
Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

Dear Committee

Re: Opposition to Proposed Changes to Homeschooling Legislation

I am writing to express to the committee my strong opposition to the proposed changes in homeschooling legislation. My primary reasons are outlined below.

1. The national curriculum restrains many learners including highly gifted and other neurodivergent learners (see clause 68 section 217)

Being restricted to teaching only the national curriculum (or other curricula approved by ACARA) in our homes would hinder our ability to provide the high quality education that my children need and deserve. Under student diversity, ACARA states:

All students are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning programs drawn from a challenging curriculum that addresses their individual learning needs.

My children were identified early in their school education as being highly gifted, and it soon became apparent that their needs could not be met in the classroom setting. We persisted with school for some time but the trauma they were experiencing meant that we had no choice but to look for an alternative. The Australian Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented, in its 2021 submission to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review points out that there is an omission of gifted education training from national documents governing education, initial teacher education and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Consequently, hardly any universities in the country include a compulsory gifted education unit. The result is that our teachers have little to no ability to provide for the complex needs of gifted children.

The ability to investigate and explore numerous areas of interest widely, deeply and at a time of relevance to them allows my children to flourish in a way they never would be able to if left in a classroom. I only wish that more personalised education could be granted to children in classroom settings. My children are well beyond the content scope outlined in the national curriculum for their age level, and they deep dive into topics when relevant to them rather than slowly spiralling in each learning area each year as is found in the national curriculum. How will I offer the high quality education we all agree they deserve if I am constrained by this curriculum for my planning and teaching? Additionally, many home educated children begin university subjects far earlier than their peers in the school system. The proposed changes have not included these tertiary options as approved learning, an oversight in the proposed legislation.

Very few home educators utilise the national curriculum at present. Our children are unique and benefit from different learning approaches, and therefore curriculum, for different learning areas. It would be an enormous restraint to have to follow one program for the various areas learnt. There is no evidence that the national curriculum provides good outcomes for children, and similarly no

evidence that requiring home educated children to follow it would improve their educational outcomes. An evidence-based approach to our educational legislation would be advantageous for all.

2. The removal of the 60-day provisional registration is harmful to children (see clause 60 removal of s207 from chapter 9, part 5, division 2)

I am very concerned that the 60-day provisional registration is being withdrawn completely. Many families, like ours, do not plan to homeschool, but are suddenly forced to search for alternative education when our children suffer consequences from negative, harmful school environments. The removal of the 60-day provisional registration means that legally those families would be required to continue to send their child into a toxic environment until a parent has developed a twelve-month plan for their child's education. Continuity of learning is provided as the reason for the removal of this provisional registration time. I would argue that it is absurd to think that children in a toxic school environment have the capacity to learn anything. Instead, students are likely only to be more traumatised by the requirement to continue attending school.

3. Many aspects of the proposed guiding principles are unclear and ambiguous and should not be passed without clarification (see clause 18 section 7)
 - (a): parents have the responsibility for choosing a **suitable education environment**
 - (b): (iv) that education should be provided in a way that recognises **wellbeing** as a foundation of educational engagement and outcomes
 - insertion of (d) home education should be provided in a way that:
 - (i) is in the **best interests** of the child or young person taking into account their safety and wellbeing; and
 - (ii) ensures the child or young person receives a **high-quality education**

The proposed guiding principles place the onus on parents to meet requirements that are ill-defined, if at all. One must ask the questions: what is deemed a "suitable" education environment; how can we demonstrate "best interests of the child"; who decides and by what criteria that an education is of "high quality"? Without proper guidelines these requirements of home educators are entirely unreasonable.

Furthermore, although I support the acknowledgement of the whole child in education, it is unclear what recognition of wellbeing as a foundation of educational engagement and outcomes means and how it will be interpreted and assessed. Wellbeing means different things in different populations. For example, is there any awareness of the nature of wellbeing in highly gifted individuals?

4. The requirement to show learning progress in our reports on each learning area is cumbersome and far exceeds the requirements on teachers in the school system (see clause 68 section 217)

I oppose the requirement that we report on and provide evidence showing educational progress in all areas of the national curriculum. This is requiring us to provide more evidence than school teachers and will greatly hinder our time to actually support our children's learning. Given the HEU struggle to read all that is currently submitted, they are even less likely to read longer reports. Consequently, this increased demand in paperwork will be a fruitless task for home educating parents. At present, we provide evidence of educational progress in three areas of study. Is this not more than is required of our school teachers? I am aware of high school maths teachers who have children in their classes

that are at grade two level ability. Home educating parents already provide evidence of educational progress in the primary learning areas of English and Maths, as well as one other area. Is this same educational progress being shown for each child in the state education system?

In the public hearing on March 18, a question was raised about the increase in home educated children after COVID lockdowns. Our family began home educating two years prior, and home schooling was already on the rise before we adopted this way of learning. I would submit, however, that this forced time in the home setting allowed many parents to reevaluate the role of traditional schooling for their children. This window of time demonstrated to many parents how much more productive, engaged and mentally well their children were in the home learning environment. It also revealed that, with the growing ease of access to learning resources, many parents did not need teachers anymore but could instead guide their children through their learning. Please support the parents right to know what benefits their child most and consider supporting them in the education of their child, rather than applying unhelpful restrictions like enforcing a one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum.

The public hearing concluded with the suggestion of more investigation and interrogation into whether there should be more monitoring of home educated families. It is perhaps obvious to note that most parents are incredibly invested in their children succeeding in their educational years and beyond into adulthood. Indeed, far more invested in nurturing their own child than their classroom teacher would be. It is true that within our schools there still can be found some very committed, passionate teachers. However, current assessment and reporting expectations placed on them is causing many to become disillusioned with the profession. Children are exiting the school system for a multitude of reasons whilst children in the homeschooling community continue to flourish. I urge the committee to ask the question: where is the evidence that an increase in legislative demands on home educating parents will improve outcomes for their children? There is none, and your support in withdrawing these changes in this bill will go a long way to protecting our children's rights to a high quality education.

Thank you for your time in reading this submission.

Kind regards

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