

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Ms. Margaret Telford, Acting Committee Secretary
Education, Employment, Training & Skills Committee
Parliament House
George Street
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Dear Ms. Telford,

It is with great interest that I watched Public Briefing – Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, aired online on the 18th March 2024. As a current Home Schooling Family I found a few points quite valid however; there were also many points in regards to the proposed changes for Home Schooling that I did find quite concerning. Before I go into detail I would like to tell you why we chose to Home School as unfortunately, I do not feel that this point was adequately covered during the Public Briefing. I would also like to request that my personal information such as my name, address and any details that may refer to where my children have been to school/home schooled, not be made public or published online please.

In 2020, we moved back to Queensland from a time living in Maitland, New South Wales. There, both my children were attending a Steiner School and thrived. On moving back to Rural Queensland, my husband and I enrolled both children into our local Public School as my son in particular still had friends going to school there from prior to our move to New South Wales and; there is absolutely no access to Steiner Schooling within our rural area. It is here that I saw a huge change in both my children as they began to disengage, lose confidence and for the first time in their lives persistently and consistently not want to go to school.

Both of our children had fantastic teachers and after a few meetings with both, it became clear that the current schooling system is failing. My son at this point in time was in Grade 5, his teacher had quite a large class of anywhere between 25-30 students at any given time throughout the year. Many of these students had high functioning issues where the teacher needed to spend most of her time dealing with their learning issues and behaviours while, quieter students such as my son, slipped through the cracks as she had minimal help within the class.

This teacher openly admitted that with the level of paperwork that is now required, class plans and students with behavioural and learning issues within the class; made it impossible to effectively ensure all students were thriving. From our perspective, it was obvious she cared greatly about her students performance and outcome and it clearly bothered her that there were such great shortfalls within our public schooling system which really brought to our attention how the preferred ACARA as a premium form of education, is in reality quite inadequate. While attending the public school, he also dealt with regular instances where he witnessed bullying occur and where teachers were powerless to do more than say, don't do it again. My son would often step in and protect the child being bullied however; in no way should this be the case as teachers should have the appropriate measures, authority and power to adequately deal with these situations. It's my opinion that they do not. In fact, I feel that this very public briefing of education legislation changes erodes that issue even more through the suspension amendments.

In our daughters case slowly, at the public school we saw her disengage and become angry in general at everything. When we met her teacher and expressed our concerns for her, she was fantastic. It turns out, our daughter while being six months behind the class at the start of the year (Steiner Education starts younger childrens learning slower than public school), had in 6 months of schooling, surpassed her classmates and had completed 12 months of school work by halfway through the year. Being six months ahead of her classmates, we identified that she was putting extreme pressure on herself to perform and do more, heading towards unhealthy anxiety for such a young age.

Our daughter also experienced bullying from an older child where she had her head smacked against metal poles, was punched and threatened most days. Being such a physically active child, alarms bells rang for us when we learnt that she wasn't playing in the school grounds with her friends but rather hiding in the library. Again, we discovered that while the teachers were aware of what was going on, they were unable to do anything about it due to currently standing rules, procedures, regulations and legislation. My daughter was

even told by one teacher to just stay away from this boy however, it's a bit hard to do when you're a small child and this older child is leaving his designated playground for older children, coming into the smaller childrens playground and seeking her out specifically. Again, a clear instance where the teacher's hands are tied and their ability to adequately deal with these situations are steadily being eroded.

Considering that we only had our children within the public school system for 12 months, it was shockingly obvious to see our once confident, positive and engaged children were no longer there. This was what motivated our decision to Home School and unfortunately; certainly not social media or any of the other stated hypothetical reasons that were stated during the Public Hearing on the 18th March 2024. Some other areas I have concerns for are as below:

- These legislation changes are quite vague in regards to Home Schooling, especially the specifics involving home visits. A review of these would be recommended and details of how these visits would be conducted and the process involved. Detailing this may serve to allay any misgivings within the Home Schooling Community.
- The lack of consultation of the Home Schooling Community, specifically when they only had fewer than 10% of the Home Schoolers respond to their survey. Many current Home Schooling Families of whom I've spoken to, never actually received the survey that had apparently been emailed out.
- The best interests of the child statement within the legislation changes I find also to be extremely vague and I fear that this may be a potential knee jerk reaction. My reasons for this are that there is only the one instance stated where a child's death occurred where Home Schooling was mentioned and that child had pre-existing mental health issues (Please refer to Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-2023). Here, it also states that there was suspected child abuse and neglect of which had not been acted upon by Child Protective Services, despite them being aware of the issue for some time prior to the child's death. I find myself questioning this, as wouldn't this be more of a failure within the Child Protective Services procedures and legislation rather than an Education issue?
- The removal of Provisional Registration - Personally, I know survivors of domestic abuse households and without the Provisional Registration they would not have been able to get themselves and their children to safe place within a timely and effective manner. My fear is that by removing the Provisional Registration, this will actually cause more harm than good for anyone trying to leave abusive situations and effectively put more children at risk.

Overall, I feel that these proposed changes outlined in the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, aired online on the 18th March 2024 is in general quite vague. In conclusion, I would love to see a recommendation of further investigation, discussion and research into some of these abovementioned areas of this legislation to occur and feel that both the Public Schooling System and Home Schooling could both benefit and improve greatly if this were to occur.

Yours sincerely,

