

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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As a homeschooling parent, my primary issue of concern is around the requirement to use the national curriculum (ACARA) in some way and then to report on ALL areas. This is in direct opposition to the current human rights act which ascertains that EVERY child has the right to have access to primary and secondary education *appropriate* to the child's needs. The scope of the national curriculum cannot cater fully to the education needs of ALL children, and as such a home education environment can provide a richer, more holistic education for the child. Under the national curriculum children are LIMITED in how and when they can explore topics of interest, as they are peg-holed into meeting arbitrary criteria. Topics, and skills/competencies are pre-determined by ACARA and would not allow any flexibility for families (including the children themselves) to choose the areas of focus that would be most meaningful for them. This is not a dynamic, or modern approach to learning for ANY child, let alone those who are working well above the level of their peers across all KLAs, neurodivergent students, and/or those whose attendance is impacted by health issues. The proposed bill is not only impractical, but discriminatory to those with a disability, Neurodivergence, gifted/asynchronous development, and other reasons of choice - health, religion, or personal choice.

As an educator in the state system, I hold unique insight into both the curriculum and its long term impact on students, their engagement and achievement levels. In my twelve years as a secondary teacher, I worked with a diverse range of students including gifted/asynchronous groups, severely disengaged/at risk teenagers, and general classes. I also spent some of those years as a Case Manager for the Special Education Unit. My experience and knowledge base is therefore broad and diverse, with a thorough understanding of how students learn. The most effective pedagogy for all aforementioned groups is interest or child led learning. Levels of engagement, performance, and overall well-being are directly related to the prescriptive nature of the curriculum. In my experience, disengaged/at risk students could not access ACARA – often times not catering for their literacy challenges, or using prescribed topics / focal points that they could connect with. On the other end of the spectrum, gifted/asynchronous students found the national curriculum tedious and restrictive, often becoming bored and not applying themselves fully to the tasks presented. These students expressed a hunger to take units in different directions and explore other possibilities, but were restricted by having to meet the standards of ACARA.

The education department boasts of their high quality teaching, backed by the latest science and research. The Teacher's Union itself has lashed out at homeschooling families, propounding that choice has been privileged over high-quality teaching. All the while, current education models used in our Australian classrooms have completely ignored scores of research that support a child led and play based learning framework as a highly effective mode for learning. I have seen first hand as an educator, that child led and inquiry based learning are not only effective, but produce engaged learners who feel a sense of wonder, enjoyment, and satisfaction from the learning journey. Under this model, the focus is not on the outcome – the assessment and the grade applied at the end – but the whole process of learning, and gathering information. Science agrees, that this is a framework that supports long term retention of knowledge and skills.

As a senior teacher I have seen many reforms on curriculum and pedagogy, and have had to undertake the arduous task of writing whole new units, assessments, and resources to satisfy ACARA. Being mandated to follow the national curriculum as a homeschooling parent will bind me with the same limitations I faced as a teacher – that I cannot opt out of whatever next version of the curriculum is released. There are infinite possibilities when it comes to curriculum and pedagogy; how we educate our children is based on their changing needs, interests, and abilities. To provide a rich and meaningful education it is imperative that we have autonomy over what we teach, and with what strategies.

I have further concerns about the lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding these changes. As a stakeholder in our education system, I believe it is critical that the voices of educators, parents, students, and community members are not only heard, but considered in any decision-making processes that impact our schools. Homeschool students have not been consulted in this process, nor has there been any analysis done on the outcomes of home education – gainful employment, or higher education enrolments. There is no consensus on the definition of a quality education. There has been no consultation with the Home Education Unit who have stated that they do not have the capacity to meet the proposed change, namely the mandate for families to report on ALL subjects. If families are made to follow the national curriculum, and report accordingly, the paperwork and labor required of both parents and the Home Education Unit will be unnecessary and excessive. This has the potential to cause a flow on effect, which may cause families to outsource and/or not focus on their children's individual needs as they attempt to fulfil the requirement of the national curriculum.

In summary, the national curriculum cannot cater fully to the education needs of ALL children. A focus on outcome, assessment and meeting the standards of ACARA is not only ineffective but directly impacts on student engagement and wellbeing. Furthermore, this proposed mandate would discriminate against individuals and families by taking away the child's right to an education *appropriate to their needs*. Therefore I urge you to carefully reconsider the proposed education legislation, and truly hear the voices of the people who will have to live with these changes - parents, children, educators, and community members.