

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1865
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Publication:
Attachments: No attachment
Submitter Comments:

Subject: Submission Regarding Proposed Amendments to the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006: Objections from a Home Educating Family

To the Esteemed Members of the Education, Employment, Training, and Skills Committee,

I am writing to you as a parent and a second-generation home educator, deeply concerned about the proposed amendments to the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006. These changes, specifically the requirement for home educators to strictly adhere to the Australian Curriculum (ACARA) and the mandate for comprehensive reporting on all subjects, present significant challenges to my family's approach to education. Below, I outline my primary concerns and the detrimental effects these amendments would have on my family and our educational journey.

1. The Requirement to Use the Australian Curriculum Does Not Suit My Family and My Learners

- **Lack of Flexibility:** The Australian Curriculum, while comprehensive, does not offer the flexibility needed to tailor learning experiences to my children's unique interests, pace, and learning styles. Home education's strength lies in its ability to adapt to the learner, something a standardized curriculum cannot fully support.
- **Inhibits Personalised Learning:** My children have thrived on a curriculum that is eclectic and customised to their needs, which has fostered a love for learning and in-depth exploration of subjects that particularly interest them. The imposition of the Australian Curriculum restricts this exploration, potentially stifling their engagement and enthusiasm for learning.
- **Cultural and Philosophical Misalignment:** Our family's educational philosophy and cultural values are not fully represented within the confines of the Australian Curriculum. Education, from our perspective, encompasses more than just academic achievement; it's about cultivating values, critical thinking, and a connection to our community and environment. The mandatory use of ACARA does not allow us to fully integrate these elements into our curriculum.

2. Reporting on All Subjects is Onerous and Unnecessary

- **Administrative Burden:** The requirement to report on all subjects adds a significant administrative burden to home educators. This requirement diverts time and energy away from teaching and learning, impacting the quality of education we can provide.
- **Does Not Reflect Educational Quality:** Comprehensive reporting does not necessarily equate to a higher quality of education. Our goal is to ensure our children are learning effectively and enthusiastically. Continuous, detailed reporting on every subject does not enhance this process but rather detracts from it.

3. Detriment to My Family

- **Increased Stress and Reduced Flexibility:** These changes would significantly increase the stress levels within our household, reducing the flexibility that is inherent and valued in home education. Our family's ability to travel, spend time together, and explore spontaneous educational opportunities would be severely limited.
- **Financial Strain:** The administrative requirements could potentially necessitate additional resources, whether it's purchasing specific curriculum materials aligned

with ACARA or software for reporting purposes. This financial strain is not trivial for many families, including my own.

- **Impact on Children's Well-being and Education:** Ultimately, the proposed amendments threaten the well-being and educational progression of my children. By forcing our educational journey into a rigid framework, my children risk losing the joy of learning and the opportunity to develop into well-rounded, thoughtful individuals.

4. "In the Child's Best Interests" Is Subjective

- **Parental Understanding vs. Professional Opinion:** The notion of what is "in the child's best interests" can be highly subjective and is often used to unfairly dismiss a parent's deep understanding of their own child in favour of professionals' opinions. While educational professionals undoubtedly offer valuable insights, parents have an unparalleled knowledge of their child's needs, capabilities, and well-being. It is crucial that any legislation recognises and respects this intrinsic understanding that parents hold, rather than undermining it with a one-size-fits-all approach to education.

Personal Anecdote:

Throughout my children's educational journeys, I have navigated various schooling options, including alternative, homeschooling, distance education, Montessori-style, Steiner-style, private, public, religious, or secular schooling. Each decision was made thoughtfully, considering the individual needs of my children and our family's circumstances, with the overarching goal of ensuring their well-being.

Given that all my children present as neurodiverse individuals with diverse needs, I have come to appreciate the flexibility provided by the current home education model. This flexibility has allowed me to tailor their education to address their specific strengths and weaknesses effectively.

For example, my child, aged 8 and in Year 4, faced challenges in learning to listen to their body's signals and use the toilet before accidents occur. Unfortunately, traditional schooling environments struggled to provide the necessary support. Consequently, my child endured undue stress and anxiety, leading to a suboptimal learning experience.

However, at home, my child can focus on developing this crucial skill while simultaneously advancing academically. Here, they have the opportunity to work towards a Grade 12 level in English and Grade 6 in Mathematics, a level of academic rigour that may not have been feasible within the constraints of a traditional classroom setting.

Furthermore, the flexibility of home education allows us to address my child's needs holistically, encompassing both academic and non-academic aspects of their development. This integrated approach ensures that my child's educational journey remains tailored to their individual requirements, fostering a supportive and conducive learning environment.

I am deeply disheartened by the lack of consultation with the home education community regarding these proposed amendments. To date, there has been a marked lack of interest in any input from experts in alternative education. No effort has been made to disguise clear bias and lack of democratic process. Policymakers must seek input from those directly

affected by educational policies to ensure that any changes reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of home educating families.

In conclusion, while I understand the intention behind standardising educational experiences, I strongly believe that the proposed amendments to the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 would be detrimental to all home-educating families both now and in the future. I urge the committee to consider the unique benefits and contributions of home education to the diversity of the educational landscape. A more flexible approach, acknowledging the value of personalised learning and the professional judgment of home educators, would better serve the interests of all children, recognising that parents are indeed experts when it comes to their own children.

Thank you for considering my submission. I am hopeful that through dialogue and collaboration, we can find a path forward that honours the diversity of educational choices and upholds the best interests of all learners.

Sincerely,

Rachel Devitt

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