

## Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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24<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Dear Committee members,

I am writing this open letter to you to explain my deep concerns with your proposed legislation, the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and its effect on the Home Educating families in Queensland.

I am the Chair of The Centre for Personalised Education, a charity concerned with all forms of education outside of the mainstream. In a personal capacity I have home educated my now grown children and been a campaigner and recognised expert in the field of home education for over 20 years. I have been involved in every consultation and piece of legislation regarding elective home education in the UK during that time and have consulted in other countries worldwide including Australia (NSW), Jamaica and Cyprus. I am also a serving member (UK rep) of the Global Home Education Exchange, Europe Chapter.

In principle, established good law worldwide does indeed look to protect a child's right to a good education that is suitable for them as an individual. It also seeks to safeguard children from harm. However, I think that the Bill as proposed does not allow for parents and children to design a unique education suitable for the child and their future and the assumptions upon which changes to safeguarding are proposed come from a confused narrative and false assumptions.

In preparing for this submission I have studied a number of documents which included the Child Death Review Board Queensland Family & Child Commission Annual Report 2022-23<sup>1</sup>. This report looked at 60 child deaths over the period, only one of which was the death of a home educated child. The report is very clear that this child was known to multiple agencies and was known to be at risk of suicide but those tasked with safeguarding the child (Child Safety) had not even commenced an assessment at the time of the child's death. Changes in legislation or duties would not have prevented this death. Agencies were already in place but simply failed to act in the way they should have and with the urgency they should have. Changes in legislation are not justified by one case (We say in the UK one case leads to bad law) especially when the changes would not have affected the outcome of this case. This situation is reflected in the UK where, on the basis of deaths of children who were home educated at some point in their lives, legislation to increase oversight of home educating families is unremittingly proposed despite the fact that all the children who died were known to be at risk and were all known by at least 5 agencies who all did not act appropriately. Indeed, in a number of cases the home educating period was the safest in the child's life and school was a risk factor.

Home education has been proven, time and time again, not to be a risk factor in and of itself. The enormous rise in home education in Western countries is often seen to be the result of schools not feeling safe for children, schools not meeting children's needs (especially learning difficulties, social, emotional and communication needs and mental health needs).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tp/2024/5724T347-DB90.pdf>

Moving on to the education specifications, I applaud the section of the Bill that states;

.....home education of a child or young person 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<sup>2</sup>

and also

(b) the educational program used for the child's home education must—  
(i) be suitable for the child having regard to the child's age, ability, aptitude and development; ...<sup>3</sup>

However, the removal of diversity of approaches and the insistence on the national school curriculum (the Australian Curriculum) is a grave mistake. Many children wish to study quite differently, both in style and content. Such a rigid system does not take account of differing learning styles, religious values or cultures meaning that some children will not have access to the type or style of education that suits them best and this concept appears to me to contravene the spirit and intention of clause 18(3).

As a side note, some home educated children attain university degrees in their mid-teens – will you require them to redo the curriculum?

Home Education is an extension of parenting and as such may be quite informal in appearance. This is not to say that it is a less effective form of education than school, and indeed studies worldwide have shown that the outcomes for home educated young people are often better than their schooled peers. This is because the education is personalised to the child and therefore fits them as an individual rather than being a programme that is identical for every child. Children and families in certain circumstances have voted with their feet – rejecting the one size fits all approach of state provision in favour of a bespoke curriculum and an environment that supports and protects children with mental health difficulties and social and communication difficulties.

Increased and onerous reporting requirements, greater than that in schools for individual pupils, will cause damage to family harmony and take families away from the job of home educating. Reporting based on outcomes defined by parents would be far better and looking to see a list of characteristics (from

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<sup>2</sup> Clause 18(3) <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/bill.first/bill-2022-052>

<sup>3</sup> Clause 68 1(b)(i)

Scottish home education guidance) such as the following would reassure that the home education is suitable:

- Consistent involvement of parents or other significant carers.
- Presence of a philosophy or ethos (not necessarily a recognised philosophy), with parents showing commitment, enthusiasm, and recognition of the child's needs, attitudes and aspirations.
- The opportunity for the child to be stimulated by their learning experiences.
- Involvement in a broad spectrum of activities appropriate to the child's stage of development.
- Access to appropriate resources and materials.
- The opportunity for an appropriate level of physical activity.
- The opportunity to interact with other children and adults.<sup>4</sup>

Queensland needs a flexible population in adulthood to meet the fast-changing needs of the world and diversity in education is a healthy thing for any country. Home education in particular produces competent, flexible and entrepreneurial adults who can drive forward the wellbeing and economy of a nation. I know that Jamaica recognises home education as being an important part of both its educational landscape and its socioeconomic development, contributing to the bold goals of The Queensland Plan<sup>5</sup>, and therefore protecting it is important to the future of the nation.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the issues raised above, I would be delighted to speak with you.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



Alison Sauer F. Inst. Pa.



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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/home-education-guidance/pages/6/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.queenslandplan.qld.gov.au/>