

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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From: [REDACTED]
To: [Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee](#)
Subject: NO TO PROPOSED CHANGES TO HOMESCHOOLING LEGISLATION - Education (General Provisions) Act 2006
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Attachments: [No to Homeschool Changes - Education bill review 2024 - C Patrick.pdf](#)
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Dear Committee Members

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposed changes to homeschooling legislation. Please find attached my submission document.

It is important that you understand that homeschooling is chosen by families for a variety of reasons, including dissatisfaction with the traditional schooling system, concerns about safety and bullying, religious or philosophical beliefs, or a desire for more personalised and flexible learning experiences tailored to individual student needs. In my family's case, it was to meet the complex needs of my son's learning differences which unfortunately could not be met in a traditional school setting. In my submission, I share our story.

I urge the committee to prioritise understanding and addressing the root causes of homeschooling trends. Listen to and understand our stories. They are essential to shaping effective policies that support the diverse needs of families while ensuring the well-being and educational success of all children.

Please reconsider the proposed changes to homeschooling legislation and instead engage in a collaborative discussion with homeschooling stakeholders to identify and address the real issues driving this educational choice. Together, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and innovative educational system that offers diversity and flexibility and respects the choices of all families.

Thank you for taking the time to read my family's story.

Kind regards

Clare Patrick

Education (General Provisions) Act 2006

No to Proposed Changes to Homeschooling Legislation

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My Story as a Home Educator

To understand why *I am against the proposed changes to homeschooling* outlined in the Queensland government's review of the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006, you need to understand how and why I chose to homeschool. Below are two posts I wrote for my blog, "The Bumpy Road Way".

Becoming a Homeschooler – Part 1 (excerpt)

"Twelve months ago, when Sam started school, he had very little expressive language. He could understand a lot more than most people realised, but he was not able to verbalise his feelings and needs very well. This led to frustration and behavioural problems. He would cry, and physically try to avoid situations he found difficult. Today, he can tell me how he is feeling, and I can help him with my words and actions. I tell him that I know it may seem difficult at first, but I am here to help him, and we will do it together... and we do."

I wrote this in 2015. Sam's first 'official' year as a homeschooler. It is from one of my very first blog posts. The Bumpy Road Way blog 1.0 began as a way for me to document our home school journey for family and friends. It eventually evolved into a private Facebook group as I became increasingly time-poor. Uploading pictures and short texts were much easier to manage on a daily basis. As I write this, I want to confirm the timeline of events, so I hunt around on my computer and find drafts of my old blog posts. It's interesting to compare the thoughts of the person I was then with the person I am now. Homeschooling was still so new to me. All I had in my toolbox really was passion, determination, and a belief that there had to be a better way to help my son learn.

Becoming a Homeschooler – Part 2

In my last blog post, "Becoming a Homeschooler – Part 1", I ended on Sam's first day of 'big' school. He was so excited. I was anxious, but hopeful. He had a lovely teacher and the school had assigned two teacher aides to share the role of providing Sam with additional learning support. The school welcomed parent volunteers, so I helped in Sam's classroom several mornings a week. I really enjoyed doing this. It gave me the opportunity to see how Sam was settling in, but I also learnt a great deal about how a classroom runs. In the mornings, the class would be broken up into small groups, each doing different activities,

such as guided reading, in rotation. The teacher, teacher aide, and parent volunteers would each run an activity. I really loved working with the kids.

The first term went well, and Sam was happy. He had seventeen hours of teacher aide time allocated to him during the week. The teacher aides focused on literacy and numeracy concepts, helping Sam to adapt to the school routine and structure, social skills, and organisation. By the end of the term, Sam's teacher reported that he had made significant improvements since the start of the school year.

In term two, however, it all changed.

Sam was waiting to be verified by the Queensland Department of Education as part of their Education Adjustment Program (EAP). The EAP provides additional support for students with impairments in specific areas. These areas are Autism Spectrum Disorder, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Physical Impairment, Speech-Language Impairment, and Vision Impairment. Sam's verification process, which had been initiated by the Mater Children's Hospital when they referred him to the Early Childhood Development Program (ECDP), was still pending when he started primary school. His application for the EAP was under the Intellectual Impairment category.

At the beginning of term two, the school's special needs action committee recommended investigating Sam's cognitive capacity. The Guidance Counsellor conducted a Weschler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI-III) test. Sam's results were either low average or borderline across all sub-tests except Performance IQ, which is designed to measure fluid reasoning, spatial processing, perceptual-organisation, and visual-motor integration. He scored in the 100th percentile. This actually made sense. He excelled (and still does) at pattern recognition and puzzles. Unfortunately, the new assessment results meant that he no longer met the criteria for an Intellectual Impairment verification, and without that, there would be no further funding under the EAP.

At that time, we did not have an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis and Sam's 22q 11.2 distal deletion syndrome diagnosis was not recognised by the Queensland Department of Education. The only other option was to apply for verification under the Speech-Language Impairment category, but as the school's visiting speech therapist explained to me, Sam would need to be observed in the classroom over a prolonged period, assessed, and reported on by an Education Queensland speech therapist. This process could take up to twelve months. The three years of private speech therapy, assessments, and reports confirming Sam's severely delayed receptive and expressive speech could not be used. The therapist also told me that it was likely Sam would not meet the EAP's Speech-Language Impairment criteria. I looked at her, dumbfounded.

"How can a child who is practically non-verbal and struggling to learn how to read not be eligible for support?" I asked her. "I don't understand."

"I'm sorry," she replied quietly, looking uncomfortable.

That day, the reality of our situation hit me. The system is just not designed for kids like Sam. It doesn't know what to do with them. Although the school tried to help us, without funding from the education department, Sam's support hours had to be reduced to only six hours per week. That is when things started to fall apart.

We returned to school in term three with less energy and enthusiasm. Sam came out of school each afternoon looking like he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. Gone was my happy, smiling boy. Sam looked tired, anxious, and depressed. I would never have thought a five-year-old child could be depressed, but my beautiful boy most definitely was. He struggled to engage with his peers during break times and would often wander up to the school office looking for his favourite teacher aides. He was looking for a safe place. Then he received a detention for going into an area of the playground that was out-of-bounds. It was a huge pile of sand set aside for the school's major annual fundraising event. It appeared that he had followed other children when they began playing in the sand and they were caught by a teacher aide on playground duty. Looking back now, I really don't think Sam understood what he had done wrong. He was not the type of child to intentionally break the rules. In fact, he was, and still is, a stickler for adhering to the rules. I think he simply followed his 'friends'.

Then came the day when I made the decision to take Sam out of school. The memory of it still upsets me. Sam was not fully toilet trained until he was six years old. When he started school, he was still wearing pull-up nappy pants. He always let us know when he needed to go to the toilet, but in the school environment, if Sam were distracted, or had trouble communicating, an accident could occur. I always had a spare set of clothes and pull-ups in Sam's school bag, just in case, and he was able to change himself should that happen.

One day, I received a phone call from the school. Could I come to collect Sam? He'd had a toileting accident and was upset. When I walked into the reception area of the administration building, a teacher (not Sam's regular teacher) met me. He did not look happy. Sam was sat on a chair with his big school bag next to him. I realised that he was still in his wet clothes! His trousers were soaking wet. I couldn't believe it. Why on earth hadn't this teacher given Sam his spare clothes to change into? I gently took Sam's hand, picked up his school bag, and we walked out of the office. I was so angry I barely said a word to the teacher.

I wasn't happy with that one teacher's actions, but I must say that all the other teachers and staff I dealt with at the school during that time were supportive and understanding. Sadly, the education system does not work for all children. Mainstream schooling was never going to be the right fit for Sam. Homeschooling was our only option. Discovering this was a painful process, but it taught me a lot and not once have I regretted my decision.

Why change something that isn't broken?

I do not believe the government has the right to determine how home educators design and facilitate their children's learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw homeschool application numbers skyrocket. Homeschooling numbers will likely continue to grow, so it is only natural for the government to be concerned and to look at the situation. But instead of investigating and addressing the key reasons people are *leaving* the education system, it seems the government has opted to make our wonderful homeschool community the “fall guy”. Instead of looking at how to make the education system better, more flexible, and inclusive, i.e. employing more staff with experience supporting children with complex needs, increasing funding to enable better support for these children, and reviewing the current curriculum, the government has seemingly chosen to punish the homeschool community by “making homeschoolers follow the Australian curriculum”. (The Education Minister, Di Farmer’s own words in her social media post announcing the proposed changes to the education bill.) Since this announcement, numerous comments on social media, in news articles, and during the recent meeting of parliament to present the proposed changes to the bill, only further demonstrate the government’s lack of understanding regarding home education philosophies and methods, and how homeschoolers are already successfully developing learning programs and reporting on their children’s progress to the Home Education Unit (HEU). Homeschooling in Queensland is not the “Wild West”. We already deliver high-quality learning programs for our children, which are approved by the HEU and reported on *every year*.

“If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn.”

Ignacio Estrada, Director Grants Administration, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

What is a high-quality education?

I do not support any alterations that would force me to change how I design and plan my children's learning program.

The Australian Curriculum (ACARA) and mainstream teaching strategies *do not work for every child*. Homeschooling is an essential and successful alternative for many children and teenagers, and it ensures that Queensland has a *strong, effective and diverse education system*.

Home educators are passionate about learning and invest a great deal of time and energy into creating the best possible learning programs for their children. We want our children to succeed and love learning. We take our responsibility very seriously.

The Australian Curriculum (ACARA) is just one educational tool. It was designed for teachers and schools that operate within the Australian education system. Its purpose is to provide a

learning framework for teachers and schools. It enables schools to teach and assess large numbers of students consistently. It is *not the only way a young person can learn*, and it was not intended to be used by home educators.

I find it useful as a guide for content related to numeracy and literacy, and I use resources for Math and English that are linked to the Australian Curriculum, but I have never used ACARA as a *full* curriculum. Many educators working within the Australian school system find it unwieldy, bloated, and outdated. Numerous reports in recent years have called for the current system to be reviewed and overhauled.

If you want to understand how high-quality education is delivered within the context of home education, then I suggest you actually meet with and talk to the people doing it. Learn from the many successful home school families currently registered with the HEU—those whose children have followed tertiary education pathways, including university. Young people who are pursuing their passions, finding what makes them happy, and making a difference.

How do I measure the success of my children's learning programs?

My daughter, 18, applied for a part-time job in October 2021. She was successful. It was the first and only job application she submitted. Today, she is still a casual Front End Team Member at our local Woolworths. She has shifts every week and regularly picks up extra shifts. In addition to her homeschool learning program, she enrolled in the TAFE at School program in 2022. She completed a Certificate III in Visual Arts at the Southbank campus and was nominated by one of her teachers for the "TAFE at School Graduate of the Year" award. Although she did not win overall, out of 2,597 students, she was shortlisted to the top 20! Below are the supporting comments made by her teacher on her nomination form:

"Z is a very responsible and polite student. She consistently completed tasks on time and with enthusiasm. Z displayed motivation and inspiration towards future projects within the arts. A mature and kind student, she was always the first one to help others in times of need. Z excelled in grasping the tasks' content and displayed new skills every week through her willingness to experiment new techniques and explore new ideas. I have no doubt she will excel in her future endeavours. GO Z!"

My daughter is a talented artist. Having completed her homeschool journey, she is taking a gap year, but she will enrol in a diploma of animation in 2025, leading to a degree course. We have also started a business together, creating artwork and graphic designs, which we then sell on various print-on-demand platforms such as Redbubble and Zazzle. This involved writing a business plan, developing a budget, and meeting with our bank to open up a business account.

My son, 15, has a more complex learning journey. He was born with a genetic condition called 22q 11.2 distal deletion syndrome, and as a result, he has delayed gross and fine motor skills, hypotonia (low muscle tone), severely delayed speech and language skills, and

learning difficulties. In October 2018, he was also diagnosed as autistic (Level 2). This means my son has very complex learning needs that must be accommodated when designing and delivering his learning program.

So, in addition to my son's tailored homeschool learning program, we work with a fantastic team of therapists – speech, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychology, and a music therapist. He participates in the Brisbane Paralympic Football Program and attends a weekly tech social group for children and teens with autism and/or ADHD. My son loves technology and wants to design his own gaming apps, so a large part of his learning program is focused on developing these skills. This year he started online learning with Zenva Academy, which is actually used in many schools as part of their technology curriculum.

Below is from my son's 2023 progress report to the HEU:

Over the past year, S has made tremendous progress both academically and personally. He has become a more confident and self-assured individual. S's understanding of core concepts in math and coding has significantly improved, and he has also gained confidence in expressing his thoughts and ideas, both verbally and in written form. His inquisitive nature and enthusiasm for learning have led him to explore beyond our regular learning program, which shows his genuine passion for knowledge.

As S continues his homeschooling journey, I am optimistic about his continued growth, and I am excited to see him further explore his interests and continue thriving in 2024.

My son is a warm, friendly, outgoing young man with an insatiable curiosity. He would not be where he is today had I not made the decision to homeschool.

Conclusion

Many parents and carers choose to home educate their children because the mainstream education system did not work for them. Home education through the HEU allows parents and carers to create flexible, individualised learning programs that support their children's interests and career aspirations. If we wanted our children to learn at home within the framework of ACARA, we would have chosen Distance Education. We wanted more flexible learning.