

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1934
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Publication: Making the submission public but withholding your name
Attachments: See attachment
Submitter Comments:

EDUCATION BILL (2024)

March 21, 2024

Dear Committee,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the proposed changes to the Home Education component of the Education Bill (2024) in Queensland. This concern comes from both my perspective as a home educating parent of children aged 7, 12 and 13, but also with the experience of a teacher of twenty years. I want it to be very clearly stated that I **object to the proposed changes to the Home Education component of the Education Bill (2024), with the exception of the expansion of registration age from 17 to 18.**

“Best Interest”

Fundamentally, parents have a right to decide which school their child attends, whether it be the local public school, a snazzy private school, a school with religious affiliations, or an alternative school setting such as Steiner or Montessori. Home Educating is also a valid and legal option. Having been a part of the home education community for a few years now, my family have made a conscious decision, financial and personal sacrifices, and a sincere commitment to home educate. It is the decision that we have made that we feel is in the best interests of our children. This is in fact one of the most concerning aspects of the proposed legislation change – the term “best interest”. Who is it who passes judgement of what is in the best interest of our children? We know our children better than anyone – that makes us the best people to decide. Parents who decide to enrol their children in schools do not need to justify their decisions, it seems beyond comprehension that home educating parents may need to do so. I am hugely concerned about what the practical implications are with this wording – who is it who gets to decide? Is it the parents? Is it the government? An externally appointed panel? And will this change over time? What does “best interest” even mean? Does it mean that only children with diagnosed disabilities can home educate? Does it mean that only kids who are academically advanced can home educate? Does it mean that only kids who are travelling can home educate? Does it mean that only kids who have been suspended a certain number of times can home educate? Does it mean that children who ‘could’ learn at school, must only learn at school? How would this judgement be passed, and will this be left open to have the definition changed in the future?

With very few exceptions, every parent has their child’s best interests at heart, and for this legislation to suggest otherwise is downright offensive. I understand that there are occasional exceptions to this (interestingly I’ve never seen this in the home education community, only in schools) and for those cases there are non education based Departments who are to follow up on this. Child Protection is vitally important, yet a completely separate issue to Education. The two must remain separate. “Best interest” must be removed from this legislation.

Australian Curriculum

Secondly, the Australian Curriculum.

Since I completed my teacher training in 2003, I have taught under countless curriculums. As in, I have literally lost count of all of the curriculums I have had to comply with, along with all the hours of professional development, staff meetings, team meetings, personal exploration of what these changes mean, and tweaking of or even creating new resources to better reflect updated curriculum obligations. Not once have I ever felt a curriculum change correlate to the upward academic outcomes of my students. Not once. A shiny new curriculum, despite it's best intentions, does not magically make a student learn 'more', nor 'better'. I dare predict, that implementing this change on the home education community will be no different. Teachers are given years long transitions and multiple opportunities for professional development through curriculum changes, and they are paid to do so. Will the same resources be offered to home educating families? And honestly - is their time better spent on creating learning opportunities for their children, or digging into the intricacies of yet another school curriculum?

To this day I have seen no evidence that the current, nor any upcoming Australian Curriculum versions, are best practice and are the ultimate school curriculum producing the 'smartest' kids. What is it that makes the Queensland Australian Curriculum the best curriculum and therefore the single curriculum that must be followed? Is it a better curriculum than the curriculum in New Zealand? In America? In Singapore? In Finland? What is it that sets this curriculum apart? I have seen no evidence that it is in fact superior - it's just a different option. Even anecdotal evidence of the academic performance of students who are currently bound by the curriculum are not painting a pretty picture. I first hand teach students who are not benefitting from this curriculum.

When I was at University, it was drummed into us to teach to the individual as much as you can within the classroom environment. Yes, we were bound to follow the curriculum, but we were duty bound to do our best to cater for our students' current needs including stretching those who were academically advanced, and providing intervention for those struggling. Sadly, I see this less and less in reality in the classroom and the school environment. I see increasing monotony between different classrooms and different schools, and growing gaps within the classroom of student academic achievement. Quite simply, the curriculum is not, and can not, cater for all students at all times. Sadly, some students are not successfully catered to at all. Many of these students have strengths that are not truly reflected within the curriculum nor the school environment. I have seen this destroy souls. I have seen beautiful, clever children come to believe that they are stupid and that something must be wrong with them. They then shut down, emotionally tarnished, and then the cycle continues in a downward spiral that is incredibly difficult to break.

We were taught this right back in psychology at Uni – it's Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. If children are not feeling safe, if they aren't belonging, if they aren't experiencing success, their cognition potential can not be met. Almost always, the only way to try to heal these children is for something to change – for many of these students it's to leave the very environment that caused them to feel so broken in the first place. The home education community is full of such kids who fell through the cracks of school – academically, emotionally, disability wise, etc. I know many families who choose to home educate, but I also know many families who did so out of pure desperation for the welfare of their child. Every child is an individual, and their educational choices should reflect this reality.

At university we were taught to be flexible – adapt to your students as they progress. Adjust and cater to their learning styles. This is the pinnacle of what classroom teachers are trained to achieve, but are so hampered in doing so by the reality of the classroom and curriculum constraints. This is one of the key reasons we decided to home educate and why our children are performing so well. Every child is an individual, and their education should reflect this, no matter the original reasons for choosing to home educate.

-Is your child an academic and loves bookwork? Then replicate the classroom and go for it. Get the text books and study your heart out.

- Is your child into discus? Great. Get out the measuring tape – how far did the discus fly? How close to your PB is it? What is your average? What percentage of attempts surpassed ten metres?

-Does your child learn best with hands on? Head to a blacksmithing class or a welding class like my own children have done these past two days. These aren't even in the Australian Curriculum, but these experiences are no less worthy than others.

Personally, our kids are talented readers and writers – they literally choose to read and write for hours and hours every single day (including the weekend as we learn 24/7 and don't treat these as days 'off'). Our 12 and 13 year olds are writing novels. Why would I restrict this to make the time to cover the curriculum mandated writing tasks? That doesn't make sense to me on a personal, nor professional, level. We are teaching our kids to follow their passions, and find their flow. Dictating tasks removes these. There is sound science that speaks to intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. We lean into this. We nurture learning, and encourage our kids to be curious. Constant dictation of tasks destroys the intrinsic motivation and would no doubt quickly put an end to their choice to write their novels. Our kids' English and Maths achievement are important to us (and all our children would be well exceeding the curriculum in both areas), but this strong intrinsic motivation is even more important to me to nurture – this is exactly the reason why they are so far ahead in the first place.

Home education has really opened my eyes to what learning can really look like, leaning into exploring how learning can surpass 'grade levels'. Home educated students are often participating in multi-age opportunities. My youngest and eldest can both participate in the same activity. They both learn from them. They may take different perspectives, different points of growth from it, perhaps a leadership or a peer-learning experience. The Australian Curriculum simply does not cater for this and doesn't appreciate the complexity that a primary and a secondary aged student can be learning simultaneously, and on a topic that isn't explicitly stated in the curriculum.

Home education really allows me to embody flexibility – we have used various resources, from various curriculums, from various counties, from various 'curriculum' areas, and beyond. I do not want my children's learning opportunities dictated and restricted to meeting the academic outcomes that the Australian Curriculum of the day states.

The demand to adhere to and report to the Australian Curriculum is an unnecessary step to generate further academic advancement. Home education parents already submit plans and reports about their child's schooling, which need to be approved. They already need to prove that their child is learning and making gains. In fact, I have lost count of the number of home educated kids whose learning has dramatically increased since leaving the school environment. Part of the huge success of home educated students is that they get focussed adult attention and can learn much more quickly than students in the classroom environment where they are not able to get the undivided attention of an adult. I had heard this over and over again, but it was not until I myself become a home educating parent that I really understood that this wasn't an exaggeration. The learning advantages they have is astounding. I have yet to see any evidence that home educated kids are less academically capable than those leaving schools, or even more importantly that they aren't thriving in their chosen paths beyond schooling. In fact, I already predict that my children will be destined for university, of which there are many pathways with 60% of university entrants entering university via pathways that are different than a high school score. This also includes the possibility of an early pathway, where home educated children can access university from the age of 13. This lack of acknowledgement of university as a component of some children's home education learning is yet another area which will negatively effect home educated students, taking away that incredible access to knowledge. Home educated students are well received in these institutions and often graduate before their same aged peers who complete traditional schooling.

I again state, that I oppose the requirement for families to plan and report on all subjects consistent with the National Curriculum and demonstrate academic progress across them all.

Provisional Registration

I oppose the changes to provisional registration for Home Education which allows parents time to research, compose and submit a learning plan. Some parents have always been drawn to home educating and spend many years preparing to do so. Other parents do so out of unexpected obligations to keep their child well and safe. I have heard many stories of suspensions, bullying, disability, health conditions etc which have left parents with no choice but to make a quick decision to switch to home education. Provisional registration allows time for these parents to find their feet, generate support, and explore and gain clarity on what resources and opportunities are to be put in place to support their child. It is not practical, nor reasonable, to expect this to be done immediately as would be the case with the removal of provisional registration.

I wish to sum up by again stating my strong opposition to the proposed changes to the Home Education aspects of the Education Bill (2024) with the exception of the expansion of registration age from 17 to 18.

I thank you for taking the time to read my submission and to listen with an open heart and mind. I wish you were able to meet my children and see how well adjusted, social and academically capable they are.

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