

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Submission to the Queensland Parliament's 'Education, Employment, Skills and Training' Committee

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1 My background from which I have perspectives:

- My 53 years work till recent retirement included 23 years in the NSW & Comm' Public Services at senior levels on salaries often equal to that of an MP, now circa \$240k/yr
- I gained Engineering Degree, 1st class Hons & University Medal in 1972.
- I had an unfair advantage over fellow pupils in NSW schools from age 14 to 18 (1964-1968) in that I was in 'old-style' British boarding schools (1958-1963), whereas NSW education had been weakened by the "Wyndham scheme", and Australian education systems have continued to become worse due to silly trendy leftwing ideas, e.g. see the collapse in the appendix
- As we moved around due to my jobs, our 4 children were sometimes (approx. 20%) home-schooled, or attended government schools or independent schools. The best school was NSW gov't's St Marys Senior High School, with students in only years 11 and 12, on a competitive entry basis. Our youngest son, the least academic of the four, only just scraped in, but he was transformed by this school, which enabled him to gain a good HSC result.
- Our second youngest son received the greatest amount of home-schooling (about 4 years) and gained his PhD in cancer research in Germany in 2012 'summa cum laude'. He had a Paper published in the world's most prestigious journal "Nature" in 2011, and he attributes his scientific excellence to the methodical diligence that he learned in home schooling.

2 OVERVIEW OF THIS SUBMISSION

1 Home-schooling should be encouraged, and not be made more difficult. It is a valuable alternative, with good benefits for individuals and for society as a whole.

2 Human Rights – who decides what is in the best interests of the child?

Rights of parents need to be affirmed, and not be undermined by teachers & unelected bureaucrats.

3 Governance – the education system in Australia is a mess. Vastly-increased amounts of funding have been put into education systems, but with bad results (see appendix) because funding cannot overcome mismanagement and defective principles. (n.b. principles, not principals).

I strongly support NAPLAN's objective testing of students in years 3,5,7 and 9.

"High-quality education" should be assessed by objective means, not by bureaucrats.

4 The National Curriculum is a disgrace – this is not the subject of this committee's current task, but improvements are desperately needed, inter alia, to ensure that the same topics are being taught at the same term across Australia.

5 I say "Bring back the cane" – it would assist to prevent disruptions in current classrooms.

Obviously it would need to be subject to commonsense procedures to prevent abuses.

6 please do not sidetrack from key basic education into modern trendy things such as 'removing the use of gendered language' and being concerned with "inclusion and diversity" .

Yours faithfully,

Alexander Cornell Stewart, [REDACTED]

3 BACKGROUND

On 6 March 2024 the Hon Di Farmer, Minister for Education etc introduced the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 into the Queensland Parliament. The Bill proposes to amend the *Education (General Provisions Act) 2006* et al to:

- protect students by:
 - sharing of information when a student transfers between schools ...
- contribute to the good order and management of Queensland state schools by:
 - improving procedural fairness ...
- modernise and improve education services by:
 - enhancing the regulation of home education and streamlining the home education registration process
 - removing the use of gendered language
 - acknowledging wellbeing, inclusion and diversity

4 COMMENTS

4.1 Home schooling should be encouraged, not made more difficult. It should be enhanced, and not be thwarted and frustrated by excessive bureaucracy.

It is a valuable alternative, with good benefits for individuals and for society as a whole.

I note that the numbers being home-schooled in Queensland are rising sharply:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Primary	2,085	2,522	2,779	4,859	5,252
Secondary	1,326	1,775	2,229	3,602	4,796
Total	3,411	4,297	5,008	8,461	10,048

As one who worked 23 years in the bureaucracy (which at times included my re-writing of parts of legislation), I am well aware that the practicalities of implementation are often described in the Regulations made under the Act, rather than in the Act itself, and are often determined by the culture of the Education Department bureaucrats, acting under Government policies, that are all too often subjective, vague and poorly-defined by less than competent politicians.

It is not possible for me to ascertain from reading the 173 pages of the Bill and the 52 pages of the Explanatory Notes whether the practical effect of this new legislation will be to make home-school education (a) easier/more effective or (b) more clumsy/difficult due to excessive bureaucratic interference, but I hope that it is not the latter.

Excessive bureaucratic interference could be reduced by requiring far more external exams and far more frequently. I am very much in favour of the NAPLAN testing which I believe applies only for years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It provides objective data on which to judge progress, or lack of it.

Home schooling gave a huge benefit to our children, teaching them to think better for themselves than most students. We did home-schooling approximately 20% of the time, and mainly sent our children to the nearest convenient government or independent school.

We were launched into home-schooling in 1988, when our oldest son was in year 4 at a nearby Christian independent school, run by 'Dutch reformed' Christians, who were lovely people, but a bit too stern for his lively personality, and he was losing his love of learning. (please note that most schools are far too lax in discipline, and this problem would be rare among most schools!). We decided to do home-schooling for his year 5, and we used the ACE system, with its elaborate series of well-structured sequential workbooks, and an exam at the end of each book, i.e. an exam every few weeks, and if the passmark was not attained, then the student would need to go back and do that small module again. My job took a turn that made me away a lot and I was hardly ever available to assist my wife who muddled through and felt at the end of the year that she had failed.

He recovered his love of learning, and when we sent him back to year 6 in that same school, we were pleased that she had not failed, that he was ahead of the other students, and he settled in well.

4.2 As a matter of **Human Rights**, the responsibilities of parents for their children should be enhanced, and should not be arbitrarily interfered with by Education Department bureaucrats and by teachers imposing their own political views on students.

E.g. at a school in Kempsey the Monday after the Voice referendum failed so badly (about 40% yes to 60% no), a teacher said to a class of students that she was ashamed to be an Australian because of our evident racism. One of the students was the son of our local MP, and spoke up to suggest that she keep her political views to herself, and concentrate on doing teaching.

4.3 **Governance** and Systemic issues

In my opinion, it seems that Education Department bureaucrats have had too much power, and school Principals have had their ability to manage limited by red tape.

I strongly support NAPLAN's objective testing of students in years 3,5,7 and 9.

"High-quality education" should be assessed by objective means, and not be assessed by bureaucrats, who have often been influenced by passing leftwing fads.

4.4 **The National Curriculum** is a disgrace – too much emphasis on student rights, and not enough emphasis on "the three R's" (i.e. reading, writing, arithmetic), and on history, heritage, civics, rigorous fact-based learning etc.

It should be the case that common subject materials are taught at the same time, For example, topics such as Captain Cook's landing, adjectives vs adverbs etc should be listed for teaching in (say) term one of year 4 in all schools across Australia, with revision in term 3 of year 6, and term 2 of year 8. This would mean that when a student moves from one school to another, and particularly from one state to another, that the same subject materials are being covered and that the student does not miss out on key topics.

There should be far less homework, far less subjective evaluations in school reports, and far more reliance on external objective exams. I groan at the subjective trendy waffle in the school reports of my grandson; so much waffle that the report is almost meaningless in my view.

In primary schools, reading should be taught by the time-proven Phonics method, rather than the fairly recently-developed 'look-say' method, which has caused bad results for many years.

4.5 **Assisting schoolteachers** to have control of classrooms, less disrupted by a few students.

I have had many friends who have worked as schoolteachers, mainly in the NSW government system, and they have told me of the stress and difficulties in maintaining order and discipline in the classroom, and that far too much of the teachers' time has been spent on unruly children, who disrupt the learning of the majority of children in the class.

I say, "bring back the cane", subject of course to sensible procedural limitations, such as those which I encountered as a student:- I was a lively student, and received the cane at various schools from the School Headmaster after my parents had been informed; by memory I got the cane:

- At boarding school in England 1960-63 – once
- Cronulla High School 1964 & 1965 – about 3 times
- Castle Hill High School 1966 – about 2 times
- The Kings' School, Parramatta 1967 & 1968 - once.

Please note that in all my time at various schools, I never saw any evidence of excessive physical abuses to myself or to other students – this fear is an exaggerated 'beat-up' by leftwingers.

4.6 You will not improve education or its service delivery by 'removing the use of gendered language' and diverting time and resources into "inclusion and diversity". Such things are absurd distractions, and I look forward to the day when politicians will have the courage to say so.

APPENDIX – international objective tests show collapse in Australian education. Here is a scan of a front-page article of the Australian newspaper of 4/12/2019, and an article on the same subject

■ OUR 15-YEAR-OLDS PLUNGE IN GLOBAL RANKINGS ■ STUDENTS 3½ YEARS BEHIND CHINES

Schools fail on

REBECCA URBAN
NATIONAL EDUCATION
CORRESPONDENT

Australia has plunged in global education rankings, with the nation's 15-year-olds performing at a significantly lower standard in reading, mathematics and science than a decade ago, despite government funding for schools rising by more than \$20bn over that period.

The 2018 PISA results comparing the academic performance of 79 countries, released on Tuesday night, reveal Australia's long-term declining academic achievement had continued, with average

scores now at record lows across all three tested domains.

Australia's decline in maths has been equated to the loss of more than a year's worth of schooling since 2003 — the first year in which the subject was the emphasis of PISA testing — pulling the nation back in line with the OECD average for the first time alongside Latvia, Iceland, Portugal, Russia, Italy, New Zealand and the Slovak Republic. Australian students are now more than 3½ years behind their Chinese peers, and three years behind those in Singapore.

Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan labelled the results "disappointing" and worthy of

FALLING GRADES

Australian students' PISA scores



"alarm bells". In a strongly worded statement, he urged states and territories to put political differences

aside and agree to work together in the interests of students.

The PISA results show that the

■ \$20BN EXTRA FUNDING MAKES LITTLE DIFFERENCE

maths, science

proportion of high achievers has slumped.

Australia's poor showing in maths in the major international assessment program is likely to cause considerable concern, adding to pressure on federal, state and territory ministers over the quality and direction of school education.

Australia, once a top-10 nation in maths, dropped from equal 23rd to 29th from 2015 to 2018, falling significantly below Sweden, the UK, the Czech Republic and Austria — countries with which it was previously on par. The only nation to record a more substantial decline in the subject was Finland.

The Chinese provinces of Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang topped the rankings in all three subjects, while the highest-performing OECD countries were Estonia in reading and science and Japan in maths.

A rise in government investment in schools over the past decade and a succession of high-level reviews, including last year's Gonski report into educational excellence and multiple curriculum reviews, has done nothing to arrest Australia's decline.

Mr Tehan called on fellow ministers to back the implementation of reforms, including the Gonski review's learning progressions

that would be designed to ensure every student was able to achieve at least a year's worth of learning for every school year, when the Education Council meets next week.

"They also need to back all the reforms that make up the National School Reform Agreement and embed how to teach phonics as part of teacher training," Mr Tehan said.

"My message to the state and territory education ministers is

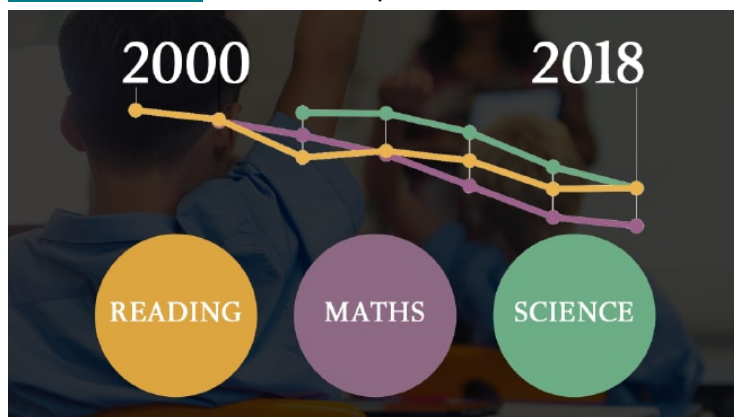
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number of secondary students struggling to demonstrate proficiency has increased, while the

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PISA Global Educational Rankings: Schools Fail on Maths, Science

Rebecca Urban 3 December, 2019



Australian school achievement trends, 2000 to 2018. Picture: The Australian

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Australian achievement trends



Conducted every three years since 2000, the OECD Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, is an international measurement of 15-year-olds' applied knowledge in reading, maths and science.

Last year 600,000 students in 79 countries took part, including more than 14,000 students from 740 Australian schools, with the assessment taking place between July and September.

The Australian Council for Education Research, which manages the assessment in Australia on behalf of the OECD, warned that policymakers "*must take notice of these results*".

ACER deputy chief executive Sue Thomson noted that, for the first time, Australia had failed to perform above average in each of the domains.