

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1970
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Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Bill 2024 in the current form. I have specific concerns with the implications of Cluses 18,64,68 and I am in support of the Free2homeschool movement.

How can a single National Curriculum address the needs of diverse learners and provide equitable access to a rich and rigorous education for all learners?

I am a mum to two children whom I have homeschooled, both have been assessed as Gifted and my youngest is Twice Exceptional (Gifted plus Autistic with ADHD). Across the span of the last 18 years, and in my pursuit of a rich and rigorous mainstream education for my children, I have encountered many people, including numerous mainstream educators, who have little understanding of the educational needs of Gifted children and the associated implications to mental wellbeing if these needs are not met. I am concerned that the proposed changes will impact negatively on Gifted learners who home school out of necessity in pursuit of a rich and rigorous education.

Adhering to a curriculum that is not by their own design can be soul sucking for Gifted learners. Gifted learners are wildly curious, self-driven to seek out knowledge, highly creative and passionate. Imposed curriculum makes no room for these qualities in a learner. What it does do is wrap a boundary around their learning which is extremely limiting and disempowering. My eldest tried mainstream school and the journey this took them on personally was heartbreaking to witness. Since a very little person my child held a belief that teachers were the keepers of all of the knowledge, and they wanted it all! Since birth my child inhaled the world at a rapid pace with an insatiable thirst for learning. We enrolled in mainstream school and after only weeks my child came to me in sobbing tears. I will never forget the words spoken to me through teary eyes, "mummy the teachers don't care what I already know, or what I am capable of, they just care about teaching me the curriculum." This is the educational experience of many of our brightest minds. It is abhorrent that we ignore the needs of Gifted students, as our mainstream educational settings do. The Education Department will say that they provide rich opportunities for Gifted learners, but this is largely just a box ticking exercise that looks good on paper with no valuable substance that supports a rich and rigorous education. The informal Gifted support groups are full of similar stories of disengaged and unsupported Gifted learners who have been forced into a curriculum. What are we disempowering here? It breaks my heart a million times over to think on what this is disempowering for our society. What these bright minds could contribute with the right nurturing. Instead, we shove them all in a curriculum box, which for my child was dumbing them down significantly and putting brakes on learning potential. I have sat in countless meetings with educators at schools seeking out support for my eldest Gifted learner and told repeatedly that my child is receiving a rich education, despite this not at all being their experience of learning. I was told that classrooms need to teach 'to the middle', I was told about the disadvantaged children who struggled to learn, and my child should be appreciative this isn't them, that teachers could not extend my learner due to classroom sizes and an overcrowded curriculum. They had to focus on the children that struggled to learn the curriculum. The list of reasons why my child could not receive a rich and

rigorous education were many and all referred in some way to the curriculum being a reason why. Our educators are not being heard around their concerns about the Australian Curriculum.

Not all parents have the opportunity to homeschool due to financial constraints. I am so grateful we have been able to provide a rich a rigorous education through homeschooling that has met not only the educational needs of my children but with a huge focus on their social and emotional wellbeing. We have made personal and financial sacrifices to ensure this experience for our children.

My youngest is Gifted with a diagnosed disability also. An asynchronous learner like so many children who are homeschooled. We tried Distance Education for nearly two years before a Clinical Psychologist diagnosed her with PTSD from the schooling experience and we were encouraged to return to homeschooling. My daughter still speaks of the trauma of the curriculum for her. In year 4, being a highly sensitive child, the trauma they experienced from being exposed in History to images of aborigines being killed by being hung from trees and being expected to read a book about a convict girl who was to be hung for stealing food was something that broke them. The curriculum holds no regard for the emotional development of all children and whether or not they were ready to be exposed to these kinds of visuals and information. All in the name of 'curriculum'. My child had no skills to process what they were exposed to and was provided no option to withdraw and not option for emotional support to process this experience. To this day my now 15-year-old still becomes very agitated and emotional at the mention of the word 'curriculum'. Again, I met with teachers around my child's needs and was met with the same answers...'we can't provide individualised education due to time constraints and the overcrowded curriculum'. The reality for my child was, they couldn't effectively learn through the Australian Curriculum. We were offered a position in a generic 'support class' which was for struggling learners that did nothing to address the issues for my Gifted learner with curriculum and meeting educational needs. My child wasn't struggling to learn, they were struggling with meeting the needs of the curriculum. Our current mainstream education provides no truly supportive pathway or program for these children who fall through the cracks. There are support programs that tick boxes but off paper they hold very little educational value for these learners. Completely devoid of any supportive impact for many learners. It concerns me that my child was learning enough to pass and that was considered 'at level' but in truth was working so far below their potential and being held back in every way. Gifted learners are well aware of their learning potential and they have an active internal measure of their own success in relation to this. It is intrinsic, not extrinsic. When a significant gap exists between potential and curriculum expectations, this is when mental health issues can arise.

I have so many stories of how being forced into the Australian Curriculum has disadvantaged my children. I share all the same concerns that you will reading in submissions from other homeschooling families. We are a huge community bonded in having learners who require different, who require flexibility, who require learning at their own pace and with a focus on their areas of interest. NOT an imposed curriculum. Homeschooling in its current form provides exactly what all of our children need, which fundamentally is to be inspired to find joy in learning. I am extremely concerned about the educational, social and emotional wellbeing of our children if they are in any way forced back into a curriculum box. Every child has a right to a rich and rigorous education, and they need our support in every way to make this possible for them.

Forcing curriculum WILL have an impact now and in the future. Numbers of children requiring mental health support WILL increase as many of our children have accessed mental health supports prior to leaving mainstream school, due to the impact of imposed curriculum-based learning.

I urge the Queensland Government to engage directly with homeschooling families around any proposed changes. As stakeholders we have the right to be consulted and included. Our voices speak a powerful narrative of how our education system is failing large and increasing numbers of children. Powerful and impactful change would be empowered from listening to our community and our individual journeys of what has led us to homeschooling.

Thank you for taking the time to read a very short excerpt of our families education journey. I hope my submission sheds some light on issues around imposing curriculum that require careful consideration so that our children may continue to thrive in homeschooling and education broadly. This decision will significantly our children and generations going forward. It's up to us to decide if the impact will be positive or will have lasting and challenging consequences. Queensland has an opportunity here to be a change leader. To push aside bureaucracy and focus on wellbeing. Our children deserve the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you for considering my perspective.

Sincerely,

Katrena Dunne

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