

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

**Submission No:** 2059  
**Submitted by:** [REDACTED]  
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**Submitter Comments:**

Dear Committee Members

I am writing regarding the proposed changes to the Education Act and the implications this has for home education.

Firstly, I am most disappointed in the lack of consultation with home educators up until this point.

1. **Communication:** I am very concerned that I have still had no official notification of these proposed changes. I am aware that some home educators registered with the Home Education Unit (HEU) received an email approximately 2 weeks ago. I am yet to receive any contact whatsoever from HEU despite all three of my children being registered home school students with them and my contact details being correct; all communication has been via my homeschooling community. How many home educators remain in ignorance of these changes and have had no opportunity to have their voice heard?
2. **Representative Body:** Queensland currently has no official state homeschooling association. It is my understanding that in the last inquiry (20 years ago!), it was recommended that such a body be developed by the State Government to liaise between the homeschool community, HEU and the Government. This is yet to occur. And yet the Government, with minimal consultation, is looking at making sweeping changes to both *when* and *how* home education can occur. This is completely unacceptable. No changes should be made to the legislation in regard to home education until a representative body has been established.
3. **Timeframe:** It is ironic that in 20 years, the Government has not been able to set up a consultative body and many home educators remain in ignorance of the changes due to no communication from HEU and yet from the tabling of the Bill to the closing of submissions is a mere two weeks. This is an altogether insufficient time to expect home educators to become aware of, research the changes and respond to the proposed laws. This timeframe does not allow home educators who want to be heard the opportunity to adequately voice their concerns.
4. **Representative Consultation:** There has been insufficient consultation to get to this point. There were no home educators included in the steering committee, only 300 respondents in the first round of consultation and no opportunity for home educators to elect someone to represent us in the second round of consultation. It is insufficient that in the absence of a representative association, neither Amanda Bartle and Patricia Fitzgerald, who had been considered significant stakeholders up until this point, nor a round table of home educators were included in the second round of consultation.

Secondly, I have significant concerns about the proposed changes and how they will affect home education in Queensland.

For background, I am a Queensland-registered teacher with approximately 7 years' experience teaching high school Japanese and English. I loved my job and working with students; I loved seeing their world expand as we explored new language and culture either in the Japanese classroom (or Japan) or via the study and discussion of various texts in the English classroom. At the same time, it was heart-rending to see the students who had fallen through the cracks or who had disengaged from education, who felt little to no ownership over their life or direction. So many of the issues we dealt with in troubled high school students came from a place of students feeling powerless or 'dumb'.

Fast forward and I have 3 primary-aged children of my own. I know that my desire as a high school teacher – to see my students grow in knowledge of themselves as people and as learners and to become active citizens who think critically, engage kindly and communicate clearly – was the same desire I have as a parent. So when it became obvious that the school system was not working for my two eldest children (each for different reasons), we turned to home education.

I am deeply concerned with the proposed changes for three key reasons:

1. Removal of provisional registration and a tightened timeframe for submitting a plan
2. Requirement to follow the Australian Curriculum
3. Terminology in the Guiding Principles

### **Removal of Provisional Registration**

When we left the school system, I had two traumatized children and, as a teacher myself, I was also trying to navigate a wide range of feelings and thoughts – this is not what I had expected, planned or wanted. The removal of provisional registration concerns me because this gives parents who are trying to navigate entirely new territory a very tight timeline to make significant life changes and provide documentation without due consideration. The decision to home educate, particularly due to needing to leave mainstream education, is often unexpected and needs to be made while also juggling many other changes:

- work commitments: many parents have to navigate changing their work context in order to home educate
- financial concerns: home education comes at significant financial cost, especially when one parent needs to leave their job or reduce their hours
- mental or physical wellbeing of their child/ren

- family pressures: home education, whilst growing, is still not well understood by older generations and can cause questions or tensions particularly initially
- building community: in stepping out of the school system, many families find themselves initially isolated and need time to build a support network.

It is important, for the best interests of the child, the parent/s and the family unit, that Government oversight does not cause unnecessary burden for families navigating so much change. It is also important that children who have experienced trauma have time to heal and the situation settle before parents are required to devise and submit a plan for home education. Provisional registration, allowing the parent to legally remove their child from school and start the healing process as well as organize all the necessary logistics before submitting a plan, needs to be retained.

### **Requirement to follow the Australian Curriculum**

My eldest child left school with significant trauma. Prior to starting formal education at school, she would wake us up in the morning to show us what she had written or ask us how to spell things or tell us something new she had discovered. When we left 6 months later, she refused to pick up a pencil, would not read out loud, or to do any form of worksheets. The mere mention of the word 'school' would evoke a trauma response from her.

While she was healing, I needed to be very creative and lowkey in how I approached teaching and learning. Thankfully, as a teacher, I could see that what she was learning organically was transferable and would still assist her if or when she was ready to again face 'bookwork'. And I learnt that the beauty of home education is that you can cover content that is unavailable in most mainstream contexts and that content can be covered in different ways. Whereas at school, students needed to learn to read and write to access the curriculum, homeschool students are able to access a myriad of curriculums and resources and have multiple access points: we can go to places of interest, speak to people, discuss, ponder, make videos, listen to audiobooks just to name a few. We are not confined to a classroom and do not need to follow an adult-led curriculum as my children have one facilitator who will stay with them for their education journey. That facilitator has the opportunity to know that child, their strengths and weaknesses, their prior experience, their zone of proximal development, their interests and passions and spend time with them to grow them in ways that a teacher of a school student never could.

Following a child-led path, my children are intrinsically motivated. When the need arises, they gain, master and retain a skill with aptitude. Although they do not follow an ACARA, VET or QCAA approved curriculums, their education is not wanting. Importantly, I am concerned that there is no allowance made for neurodivergence,

disability, health issues or giftedness. Will home educators still be able to access university courses as part of their high school education as they currently do?

Along with the requirement to follow an approved curriculum, I am concerned about the added burden of additional reporting – and the additional burden this will place on HEU. It can be months from submitting a plan or report to when I receive a response from HEU either approving the submission or to request further information. It is very rare that a response (at least I am yet to receive one) has any suggestions for the furthering of the child's education either in regard to resources, implementation or reporting.

Reporting does not add anything to my child's education and placing additional requirements on reporting will only take more time from my real job as my children's educator and have added ramifications in terms of cost and resources on HEU. In the consultation period, HEU floated the idea of only checking 10% of the annual reports. That could mean that in my child's compulsory education phase, their annual report is only read ONCE. Although not part of the legislation, I am strongly opposed to this proposal. If reporting requirements are to increase as currently proposed, how will HEU manage the additional workload? Will additional funding become available to them for additional staff? Will they reduce the time spent on each report? Will the turnaround further blowout? (In my opinion, three months to respond to a child's report is already less than optimal.)

### **Guiding Principles**

Section 7 of the Guiding Principles mentions that home education should be provided in a way that is in the "best interests" of the child and ensures the child receives a "high quality education".

Whilst I hope that I am acting in the best interests of my child – and medical professionals have supported this decision in our case – how does one exactly evaluate if something is in someone's best interest? Whose values will be used when weighing this up? What will be taken into account? Whose onus is it to prove 'best interests' in one direction or another? What supporting documents would be required?

We had need for a pediatric psychologist and were on the waitlist for approximately 6 months before we were able to access one. How will the availability of such professionals affect the pragmatics of this 'guiding principle'? How will this piece of legislation affect the availability of these professionals? With approximately 80% of home educators coming from mainstream schooling, imagine the additional workload this could needlessly place on our already burdened healthcare system!

I also feel this is discriminatory: no other choice of education requires the "best interests" of the child to be demonstrated.

Similarly, how will a “high quality education” be defined? I believe the use of such a term in legislation is unhelpful as it is nebulous.

In summary, I feel that the proposed legislation requires significantly more consideration and consultation in regard to home education. I beseech you to carefully consider the ramifications of this legislation particularly on children who do not fit the mold and have needed to exit the existing education system. Often these families are already experiencing significant distress and I believe the proposed legislation puts these children in danger of being marginalized. In general, I do not believe these changes as they relate to home education will bring about positive change. Please, please, please set up a representative body (or at the least, a round table) so that you can hear from lived experience: together, we can do better for our children and their education.

Thank you for taking time to read my letter and for considering my concerns. I look forward to your response.

Kind regards

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