

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

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March 23, 2024

Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000

Attn: Committee Secretariat

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Introduction**

I would like to take this opportunity to address the amendments proposed in the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I object to a number of these amendments. I will address each of my specific objections, and the reasons for these objections, to the amendments proposed in turn.

**Part 4, Division 2, Amendment of s7, Clause 18 Section 7(a)**

In s7, the bill proposes a change in wording in Clause 18 Section 7(a). This change will make parents (including home educators) accountable for the choice of a 'suitable' educational environment. The two problems with this change are first, it is unclear how the term 'suitable' will be defined and interpreted. Without a clear definition and interpretation of the word 'suitable', it is impossible for parents (in this case, home educators) to satisfy this condition with an educational plan. Second, the change in wording places the onus on home educating parents to prove 'suitability' of an educational environment. As such an onus is not placed on parents who choose to send their children to school, this represents an accountability for home educating parents which other parents are not subject to. I would therefore request that this proposal be removed from the bill.

**Part 4, Division 2, Amendment of s7, Clause 18 Section 7(d)**

In s7, the bill proposes an additional wording in Clause 18 Section 7(d). This includes a mention of the child's safety, wellbeing, and the ensuring of a 'high-quality education'. Again, similar to the first point above, this places an additional onus on home educating parents to 'prove' the provision of safety, wellbeing, and a 'high-quality education'. This onus is not placed on parents who send their children to school. In addition, the bill does not comprehensively define or interpret the term 'high-quality education'. Without a clear definition and practical interpretation, it is impossible to prove the provision of a 'high quality education'. As such, I request that this additional wording not be included in the bill.

#### **Part 4, Division 3, Amendment of s206, Clause 60, ch 9, pt 5, div 2**

In s206 Clause 60, ch 9, pt 5, div 2 of the bill, it is proposed to remove provisional registration for home educators. I object to this removal. Provisional registration gives families experiencing trauma or difficulties (such as related to the removal of children from a school environment) time to prepare an appropriate educational program for their children. It also gives families newly embarking upon home education the time to do sufficient research, to consult with other families, and to find suitable educational resources, in order to articulate an appropriate educational plan for their children. The removal of provisional registration would add a significant and unnecessary burden to home educating families. In fact, it may even result in a lower standard of educational plan being developed and implemented, due to the shorter timeframe given to home educating parents to articulate such a plan.

#### **Part 4, Division 3, Amendment of Clause 63, s211(1)**

In Clause 63 of s211(1), the bill proposes a reduction in response time for the provision of additional documentation from 28 days to 14 days. Often, families required to show cause are new to home education or are unfamiliar with the reporting and educational planning requirements, or they are experiencing difficulties or trauma in family life. The 28 days gives them sufficient time to seek help to improve their educational plans. A reduction to 14 days would add an additional time pressure to such parents. Ultimately, if the goal is to provide a sound education, surely the provision of an additional 14 days is a short period of additional grace, especially given the duration (eleven to thirteen years) that a child is educated in Queensland.

#### **Part 4, Division 3, Amendment of Clause 68, s217(1)(b)**

In Clause 68 s217(1)(b), the bill proposes significant changes to the educational plan that is submitted and reported upon by home educating parents. In particular, the plan is now required to be 'relevant to age, ability, potential and development'; it is also required to be 'consistent with the Australian national curriculum (ANC)' (including mathematics and English). Further, reports will be required to be on all areas of learning that are articulated in the educational plan. I object to each of these proposed changes, for a number of reasons.

First, many home educating parents (including myself) create educational plans that are relevant to the ability, potential and development of their children. As the parent, I know the ability and development of my child better than any other teacher and one-size does NOT fit all in education. The plans I have created for my child are tailored to him and his unique needs, and often these are inconsistent with the ANC in a number of ways. For example, we may have children who are particularly gifted in certain subject areas, and adherence to the ANC would prevent these children from excelling and advancing to their potential in these subject areas. Further, some children may excel from an early age in subject areas, such as languages other than English (LOTE), or home economics, which are only begun in the ANC at later ages. As home educators, we are

well placed to develop the particular academic gifts of our children. Requiring strict adherence to pre-determined topics set out in the ANC would limit this ability, which, in my opinion, offers the best outcome for a high quality learning experience for our children.

At the other end of the scale, some home educated children struggle to reach the requirements of the ANC in certain subject areas. Requiring home educators to reach these standards then becomes quite burdensome and can result in burnout for the child and the parent, resulting in a disappointing and sub-standard learning experience. In addition, this requirement is not placed upon teachers in the school system, where children are permitted to progress through their schooling years despite not reaching the predetermined level of achievement required for particular subjects in year levels. Allowing children to work on areas of difficulty at their own pace while at the same time devoting time to areas in which they excel offers home educators the balanced ability to provide a positive educational experience in their homes. It also offers children the best opportunity to achieve levels of subject mastery at their own pace, without the pressure of being required to perform to standards which they may well not reach, even if they were within the school system, within the timeframe specified by the ANC. For the example, last year our five month old baby passed away due to a life limiting illness. It was an incredibly traumatic year for us and our children. We spent every single day of our baby's life at the hospital in the NICU with him because we knew that time was incredibly limited with our son. Because of homeschooling, our two boys were able to spend so much time with their baby brother and were able to make beautiful memories that they likely would have missed out on if they attended school. The NICU staff were amazing and allowed the boys to be very hands on while in their baby brother's room. They learned how to observe and record their brother's heart rate and respiratory rate. They learned all about his anatomy- including the hole in his heart and the workings of the cardiovascular system. They learned how to read some of his blood gas that was taken weekly. They learned all about the respiratory machines he was on such as the ventilator and CPAP and then how to titrate his oxygen on his high flow and low flow machines. I could continue on about all they learned in the hospital setting as they visited their brother every single day for five months, but I think the examples above provide enough evidence as to invaluable this time was for them. Imagine if I had to come home from the hospital every day and then teach my children the ANC and do a full day's worth of school. The stress and burn-out from these additional requirements would have made an already hard season that much harder. My oldest son now wants to be a medical engineer because of the time that he spent in his brother's hospital room. The emotional intelligence as well as academic intelligence that he gained last year are things that no national curriculum can teach and I consider the education he received to be superior to anything he could have learned in school.

Second, the proposed change in the bill does not articulate clearly enough the standard that is required to achieve 'consistency with' the ANC. In practice, this means that home educators cannot be certain that their choice of curriculum, resources and materials will satisfy what is required under the bill as being 'consistent with' the ANC. For instance, a non-Australian mathematics curriculum may not cover Australian currency, which is a

requirement of the ANC for years 1-2. Would this preclude home educators from using such a curriculum, or would it be permissible, provided that other opportunities, such as shopping experiences using Australian money, are given to the child? This ambiguity raises the burden for both home educators to demonstrate, as well as for the Home Education Unit (HEU) to be satisfied, that 'consistency' with the ANC is achieved in the curriculum choices made by home educators.

In addition, home educators often embrace family learning, covering topics such as history, geography, science, language or even mathematics as a family. This type of learning allows home educating parents the flexibility to tailor their subject areas to the current interests of their children or current affairs in the world around them, rather than adhering to pre-determined topics within these subject areas. It also enables them to set learning asks according to the abilities and ages of their individual children within that subject area or topic. Under strict adherence to the ANC, that ability would be taken away. This, in my opinion, would be to the detriment of my children's education. Instead, I would be required to cover specific topics within the subject of science according to each child's year level.

topics of importance and relevance are covered during the course of the many years we are educating our children at home. Again, the ambiguity of the term 'consistent with the ANC' makes it impossible to know whether this approach would be permitted under the proposed changes or not.

Moreover, many home educating families choose to source curriculum materials and topics from outside Australian sources, usually because such resources are more comprehensive than their Australian equivalents. This is often done because the parent is seeking a high quality educational experience for their children.

As home educators, spending so much time with our children, we are best placed to understand the educational needs of our children. Forcing home educators to adhere to the ANC removes our ability to tailor our children's education to their particular talents, bents, and development potential. Furthermore, some gifted children may surpass the levels of achievement required by the ANC at a young age. Rather than strictly requiring them to continue studies on topics which they have completed, according to the ANC, we home educators should continue to be permitted to determine the educational plan of our children according to their abilities, potential and development.

In effect, the requirement to create an educational plan that is relevant to 'age, ability, potential and development' for our children may well be inconsistent with the ANC. This change, therefore, should not be pursued and I object to this amendment in the bill.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, these proposed amendments in the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 are problematic in a number of ways.

First, they demonstrate a lack of understanding as to how families educate their children at home, especially those with multiple children or specific challenges or learning requirements. Home education permits parents to tailor the education of their children around specific needs and talents. These changes proposed in the bill would significantly reduce this ability by requiring home educators to 'be consistent with' the ANC for each year level of their children (recognising, however, that the proposed amendments do not specify clearly enough what this 'consistency' looks like to be practicably usable by home educators or the HEU).

Second, these proposed amendments are not articulated in a specific or detailed enough manner as to make it practicable for home educators to satisfy these changes in a clear and demonstrable way. In particular, words such as 'wellbeing', 'satisfactory educational progress', 'high-quality education' and 'consistent with the ANC' are neither defined nor interpreted in a sufficiently concrete manner such that home educators and the HEU can be confident that the requirements the bill amendments propose are met by the educational plans and reports submitted by home educators. Moreover, these proposed changes may well result in an educational plan that is 'consistent' with the ANC, but is not relevant to the 'age, ability, potential and development' of our individual children, which, according to parts of this Education Bill, is ultimately the aim of education.

Third, they lack consideration for the additional administrative burden they will place upon home educators and the HEU alike. Further, this is a considerable increase in burden that is not placed upon parents who choose to have their children educated in a school environment.

Fourth, many of the proposed changes may, in their practical implementation, have the effect of resulting in a lower quality education provided by home educators for their children. Not only does the increased administrative burden take time away from the central task of education, but incentives to engage in non-written, spontaneous and additional learning activities are dulled by the proposed changes in the bill. In addition, the requirement to cover specific subject topics for specific year levels, rather than covering them over the course of the eleven to thirteen years of home education, is more likely to result in a lower depth of study undertaken by home educating families.

Fifth, the proposed changes give little consideration for families who are embarking upon home education due to family or school-related difficulties. In particular, the removal of provisional registration and the reduction in time given to articulate or amend educational plans appear ill placed, especially given the timeframe (of a year) that the plans and reports relate to.

On the basis of these issues, I request that the above-mentioned proposed amendments to the bill are removed.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]