

Regulation of Home Education

INSIGHTS PAPER



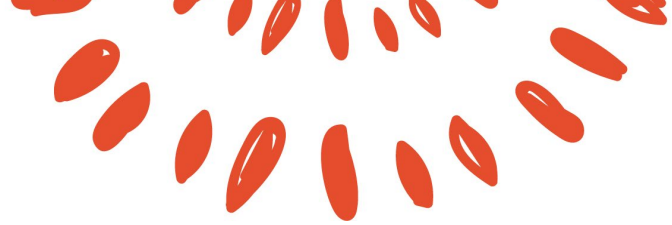
DECEMBER 2024



Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

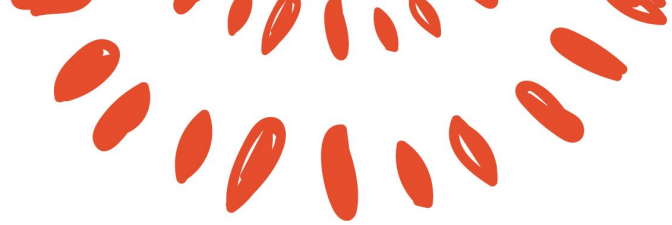


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Key findings and recommendations

This review affirms a parents' right to choose the most suitable learning environment for their child to help a young person continue their education in a range of circumstances.

In a random sample of 500 children registered for home education this review found that 35 children (representing 7% of the sample) were identified as living in a high-risk home environment between August 2021 and August 2023. The definition of a high-risk home environment was "families where there had been a domestic and family violence occurrence, a suspected child harm report, and/or a child protection substantiation".

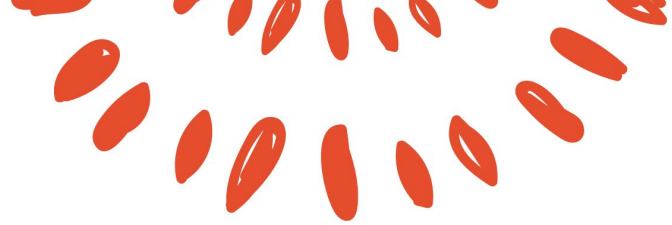
This review also found:

- there is very limited published data on children registered for home education, and low visibility and oversight of their wellbeing;
- there are few opportunities for children to participate in decisions regarding their learning or home education arrangements;
- a lack of systems to support information sharing between the Home Education Unit (HEU), the Department of Education (DoE), the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (DCSSDS), the Queensland Police Service (QPS) and the child's parents about the child's needs and wellbeing when educated at home;
- there are limited informal and formal oversight mechanisms for home education in Queensland. Attributes of robust home education regulation in other jurisdictions include:
 - sighting the child as part of the registration process (NSW, SA, Tas, WA);
 - home visits as part of registration process (NSW, SA, WA);
 - home visit within three months of registration and annually thereafter (WA);
 - annual review and evaluation of education program and progress (WA); and

- legislative arrangements that enable information sharing across agencies about the suitability of home education for a particular child (SA, ACT).
- enhanced safeguards and reporting are needed to ensure the wellbeing and safety of children registered for home education in Queensland. The low visibility of this cohort may increase the likelihood that educational engagement or family support needs are not identified or are identified later than their peers; and
- registration is a legal requirement of home education in Queensland, however little documentation was available on oversight of this requirement and implications of non-compliance. As a result, the extent of unregistered home education, and any potential risks associated with this cohort are unknown.

While the finding that 35 out of 500 children did experience a safety event is concerning, it must be interpreted with caution, as it is based on a sample and comparison with the broader population of school children is difficult. This finding should not be used to imply that children registered for home education are at higher risk of harm than their peers, however, it does confirm that there are negative safety events occurring for home schooled children where there is less professional scrutiny of their situation.

This review complements the findings outlined in 'Assessing the safety of children who are registered for home education' chapter of the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-23* report.¹ The recently released findings of the Independent Reviewer's final report *Queensland home education unit review: A stakeholder-informed review of Queensland's approach to regulating home education*² also supplement this review. It is noted, however, that the legislative regulatory framework, and a response to recommendations of the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-23*, were out of scope of the review of the HEU. These are



important areas that still require urgent attention and action.

The findings of this review highlight that the recommendation about home education made by the Child Death Review Board is still relevant and should be implemented to ensure the safety of

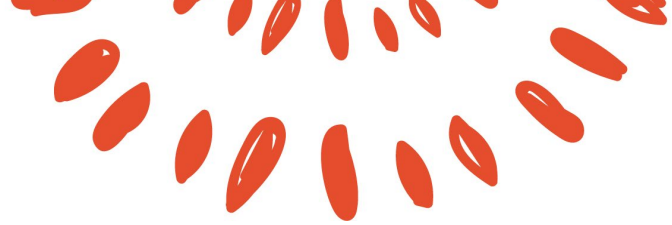
children from vulnerable families that engage in alternative education processes.

The findings and process of this review also show the ease of data linkage to identify children who may have safety concerns. Removing the legal barriers to this data linkage would enable more proactive outreach and support to homeschooled children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The QFCC recommends that:

- 1. The Department of Education take immediate action to implement Recommendation 1 of the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-23* report to:**
 - Initiate a regular process of data sharing with QPS and DCSSDS to identify home-schooling students who may benefit from in-school support services.
 - Pursues legislative changes to strengthen oversight of children registered for home education in Queensland, with a focus on upholding the child's rights, best interests, safety and wellbeing at all stages of a child's home education.
- 2. The Home Education Unit explores ways for children registered for home education to participate in decisions about their learning needs and have their views and wishes documented.** The HEU could consider options such as those proposed by young people at the QFCC Youth Summit 2024 including online forums to hear from all students and meet their needs.



Introduction

Children and young people across Queensland have a universal right to access a high-quality State education that is appropriate to the child's needs and encourages a parent's involvement in the child's education.³

Having positive learning experiences can provide many social, wellbeing, educational and employment benefits for children and young people. It can also assist them to become an effective and informed member of their community.

Learning experiences can occur in a school, home or community setting.

This paper focuses on children and young people who are educated at home and specifically explores:

- home education as an alternative to a school enrolment;
- the regulation requirements of home education in Queensland and other jurisdictions across Australia;
- the number of children in home education living in high-risk home environments (including those concerning child protection and domestic and family violence histories);
- home education reform and advocacy; and
- the potential benefits of including additional safeguards in the regulation requirements to mitigate risk in high-risk home environments.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) established a Working Group involving representatives from the Department of Education (DoE), Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (DCSSDS) and Queensland Police Service (QPS) to undertake a data matching to support the review.

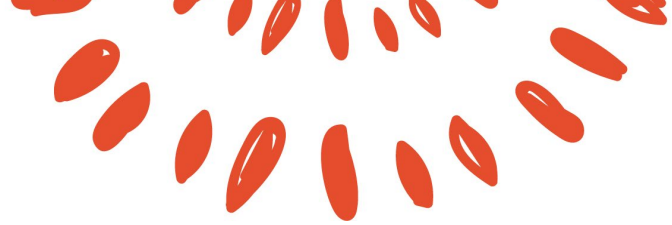
Background

The experiences of a young person who was home schooled gave rise to the Child Death Review Board (the Board) considering the regulatory oversight of, and support for, children registered for home education in Queensland. The Board's review into home education is outlined in 'Assessing the safety of children who are registered for home education', a dedicated chapter in the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-23*.⁴

The Board recommended that DoE:

- Initiate a regular process of data sharing with QPS and DCSSDS to identify home-schooling students who may benefit from in-school support services.
- Pursues legislative changes to strengthen oversight of children registered for home education in Queensland, with a focus on upholding the child's rights, best interests, safety and wellbeing at all stages of a child's home education.⁵

The Board requested the QFCC explore the prevalence of child protection concerns in home education households.



Home education

Home education is a type of education where a child learns outside of attending a school setting. Learning is usually under the supervision of a parent or caregiver and primarily occurs in the child's usual place of residence. A parent or caregiver can choose to engage a Queensland registered teacher to provide home education for their child.

Home education is a legally recognised alternative to school enrolment in all Australian states and territories. While each jurisdiction requires parents to register their child for home education, the registration process, review of learning, and regulatory frameworks differ.

Reasons for choosing home education

Registering a child for home education is becoming increasingly popular and accepted. A parent's right to choose the most suitable learning environment for their child is important and helps children to continue education in a range of circumstances.

Research indicates that many families believe that home education provides a better learning environment for their child.⁶ The main reasons a parent may choose to home educate a child fall into two overarching categories, although there can be overlaps:

- Child-led reasons beyond the family's control – this may be due to a disability, health or special needs that have unique requirements or to address specific learning challenges, or because of concern about negative influences on their child or to avoid bullying and racism. These child-led reasons tend to outweigh other perceived benefits such as the learning environment.
- Family-led reasons within the family's control – this may be due to the family's education philosophy or faith, to help strengthen family relationships, to support shared experiences, for travel commitments, or due to lifestyle choices.⁷

The rise of support groups for families who home educate, the availability of online education resources and information, and increased social opportunities outside of school environments helps to make the decision to commence home education easier. In addition, factors such as school-related expenses, regional considerations, health factors related to parents or other siblings, and changing schools can also play a role in the decision.⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic is seen as an initial catalyst in demonstrating the benefits of home education rather than the main reason a family may choose to educate their child at home.⁹

Child wellbeing

Children are reliant on their parents or caregivers to meet their ongoing needs and ensure their growth and wellbeing. Contact with people and groups external to the family unit, such as educators and school communities, can play a significant role in helping to promote and strengthen a child's overall wellbeing.¹⁰ Nevertheless, despite inclusive policies and practices in the education system, physical school settings are not viewed as the preferred learning environment for all children.

Many of the child-led reasons for choosing home education are also key factors that can act as barriers for a child's inclusion in their community. When opportunities for regular social and emotional learning and relationship building outside the family unit are not easily accessible, a child's ability to participate in and be recognised by the community can be at risk. Children at risk of social exclusion may not feel connected to and supported by their community, especially when they face obstacles and challenges. They may also lack a sense of



belonging within a community or feel as if their voice is not heard. This can have adverse impacts for their wellbeing.¹¹

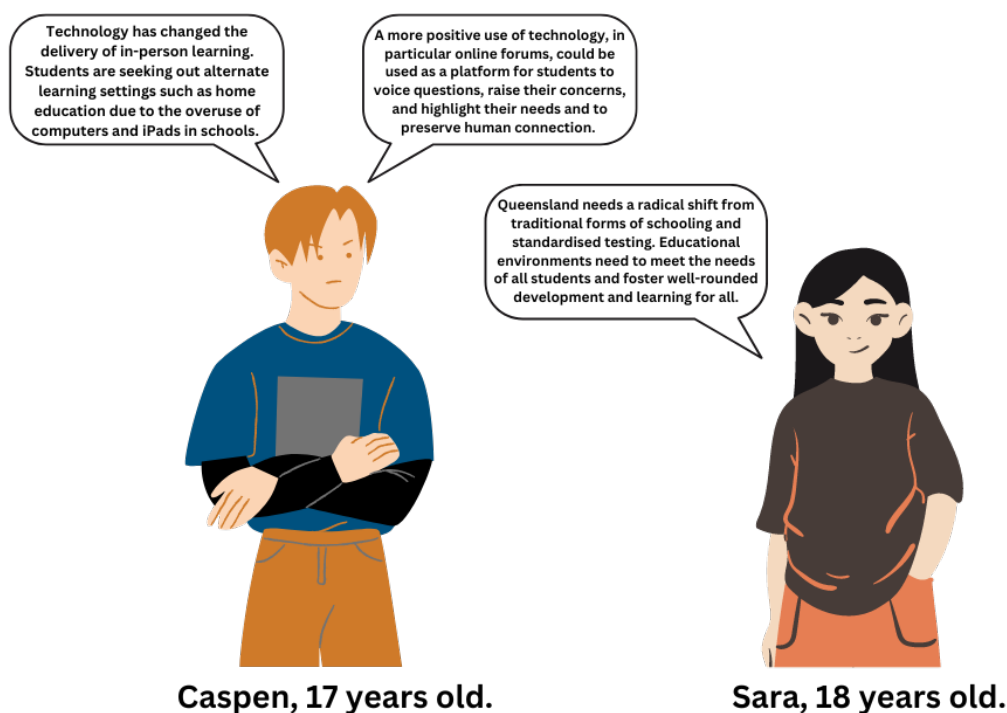
Attendance at a physical school also provides an opportunity for the observation of a child's wellbeing over a long period. This type of informal monitoring can act as an additional safeguard for children. It can also result in educators referring children to school-based specialist support officers such as guidance officers, or families to community services and supports.¹² This type of regular, ongoing informal monitoring by people outside the family unit is not universally provided to those children who are educated at home.

Low visibility of children who are educated at home could, for some children, increase the possibility that they are not identified as a child at risk of having their needs go unmet by their parents or caregiver. Subsequently, early engagement of supports and services for the child and their family could be at risk of delay or only engaged following a report to DCSSDS of suspected harm to the child.

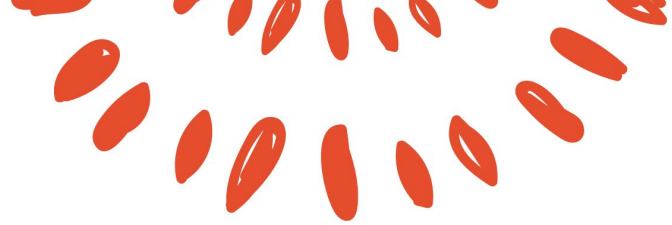
What young people have told us

Young people at the QFCC Youth Summit 2024 expressed that the current education system is not fit for purpose. New ideas were presented about how the education system could be improved to better meet the needs of students. Caspen and Sara's full Youth Summit speeches are available on the QFCC website ([Caspen | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au), [Sara | Queensland Family and Child Commission \(qfcc.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au)).

Figure 1: Caspen and Sara's thoughts on learning from the QFCC Youth Summit



Source: Queensland Family and Child Commission, 2024¹³



Home education requirements in Queensland

The responsibilities of DoE and parents in relation to the education of children in Queensland is outlined in the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* (Qld) (the Act). The guiding principles of the Act that help to maximise a child's educational potential and achieve the best outcomes for children include:

- (a) parents have the responsibility of choosing a suitable education environment for their children;
- (b) education should be provided to a child or young person in a way that—
 - i. provides positive learning experiences; and
 - ii. promotes a safe and supportive learning environment; and
 - iii. recognises his or her educational needs;
- (c) children and young people should be actively involved in decisions affecting them to the extent that is appropriate having regard to their age and ability to understand; and
- (d) the State, parents, teachers, school communities and non-government entities should work collaboratively to foster a commitment to achieving the best educational outcomes for children and young people.¹⁴

It is the obligation of each parent to ensure their child (who is of compulsory school age) is enrolled at, and attends, a State school or a non-State school unless the parent has a reasonable excuse. While penalties can apply for non-compliance, there are very limited systems in place that proactively monitor student enrolments or registrations.¹⁵

A child in Queensland cannot be lawfully educated at home unless they are registered.¹⁶ The Home Education Unit (HEU) in DoE can conduct searches to confirm a child's registration for home education if requested in relation to enforcement of attendance process.¹⁷

While registration is mandatory for home education students, oversight to ensure registration occurs and penalties for infringement appear to be limited. As a result, the extent of unregistered home education in Queensland is unknown, as are any risks associated with this cohort.



Regulation of home education in other jurisdictions

A desktop review of published data was completed to identify and map the registration, review, reporting and renewal processes of home education in Queensland. **Appendix A** compares the home education processes in Queensland with other jurisdictions across Australia to help identify similarities and differences in how and when jurisdictions engage with families and children when a child is registered for home education.

The desktop review found several differences in regulatory requirements pertaining to home education in Queensland compared with other Australian jurisdictions. The approach of each state and territory reflects its priorities which balance flexibility and accountability to ensure children who are educated at home receive a suitable education while respecting the diverse needs of families who choose home education.

Attributes of robust home education regulation in other jurisdictions include:

- sighting the child as part of the registration process (New South Wales (NSW), South Australia (SA), Tasmania, Western Australia (WA));
- home visits as part of registration process (NSW, SA, WA);
- home visit within three months of registration and annually thereafter (WA);
- annual review and evaluation of education program and progress (WA);
- annual review of up to 10% of registrations (Victoria); and
- legislative arrangements that enable information sharing across agencies about the suitability of home education for a particular child (SA, Australian Capital Territory (ACT)).

Two key areas of concern for home education in Queensland include limited requirements for participation of the child and systems to support families.

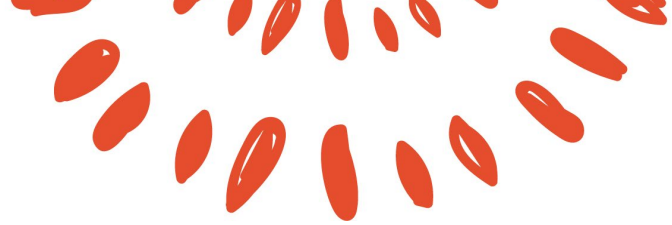
In Queensland, home education registration only requires a review of application documentation and, unlike some other jurisdictions, does not involve face-to-face or virtual interviews with the parent or the registering child.

Legislation in SA and the ACT have provisions for information sharing with child protection and other agencies about the suitability of home education for a particular child. Similar provisions are not present in Queensland.

NSW and Victoria have rigorous regulations with an emphasis on curriculum alignment and regular assessments. Queensland, WA and other states and territories offer more flexibility, although they require registration and periodic reviews or reports to ensure the child's progress in their education. In Queensland, it is a mandatory requirement to provide an annual report (every 12 months from registration) outlining evidence of the child's learning.

Participation of children

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to participate and have their opinions seriously considered in matters affecting them. There is no minimum age for participation; younger children should receive appropriate support based on their evolving capacities. The principle of participation recognises that children are active participants in their own lives.¹⁸ Inclusive and meaningful participation by children results in decisions that are more likely to help to achieve personal safety and wellbeing and be relevant, effective and sustainable.¹⁹



In Queensland a child can be registered for, undertake a period of, and have their progress reported on, for home education without the HEU initiating communication with the child, visiting the child, or making further enquiries about the ongoing wellbeing of the child. In addition, the reason/s for deciding to home educate a child are not explored by the HEU to see if the child and/or family are engaged with appropriate supports in line with the child's learning needs. An absence of documented participation by the child in the application and reporting processes for home education could increase the risk that decisions are made that may not align with or consider the child's needs and wishes.

Systems to support families

National and Queensland Government initiatives for student wellbeing operate in schools across Queensland and are based on evidence that recognises the strong links between student safety, wellbeing and learning outcomes.²⁰ Although information is required from families about a child's education program and progress, the HEU does not seek information about a child's safety and wellbeing. There are currently no systems in place to support information sharing between the HEU, DoE, DCSSDS, QPS and the child's parents about the child's needs and wellbeing to help early identification of the need for family supports, although it is acknowledged that implementing these mechanisms would represent a considerable change in the way the HEU operates.

DCSSDS has advised the QFCC that once its digital client management system Unify is in place it will have additional functionality to capture data and report information relating to children registered for home education.²¹

The combined concerns of not engaging with the child and parent in the learning environment, an absence of child participation, and a lack of systems to support families could increase the possibility of a child who is educated at home not being identified early as a child at risk of not having their needs met by their parents or caregivers. Furthermore, early engagement of support services for the child and their family could be at risk of delay, or only engaged following a report to DCSSDS of suspected harm to the child. There are no effective systems in place to help mitigate these risks.



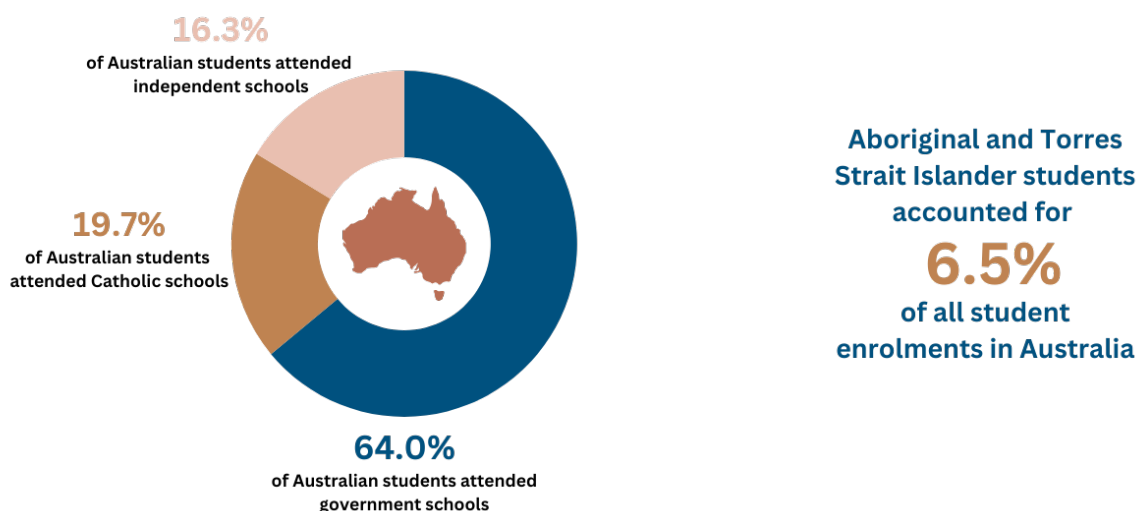
Trends in home education

Registrations for home education in Queensland have seen significant growth in recent years. The upward trend in home education levels, which began in 2019, has continued post the global pandemic. This rise in registrations has occurred alongside increasing student enrolments in schools.

Increasing student enrolments in schools

Across Australia, 4,086,998 students were enrolled in schools in 2023, an increase of 44,486 students (or 1.1%) compared with 2022.

Figure 2: Information about Australian students in 2023

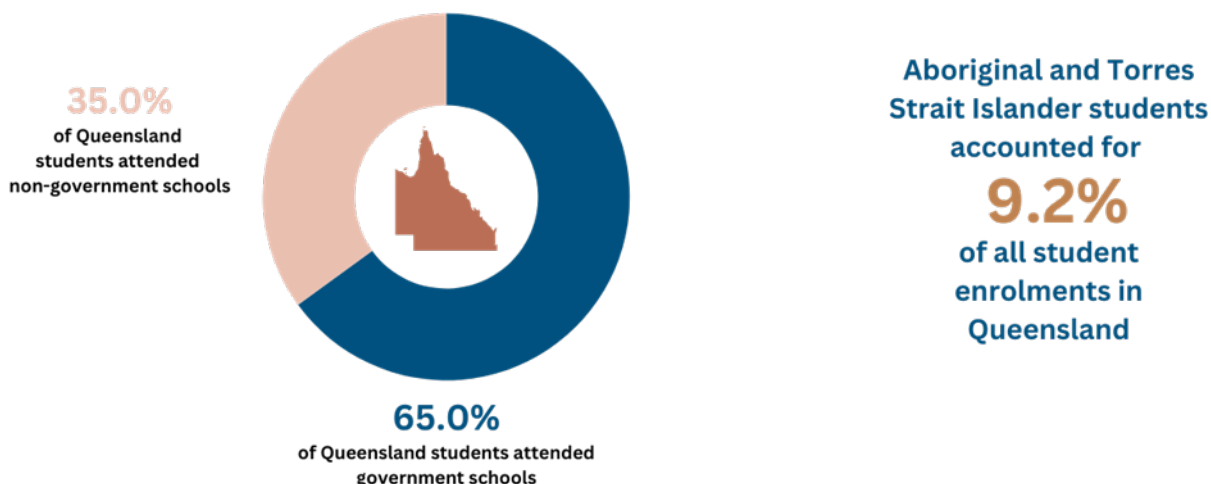


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024²²

In Queensland, 570,259 students were enrolled in government schools and 307,399 students were enrolled in non-government schools in 2023. This is a 0.8 per cent growth rate of student enrolments compared with 2022. This coincided with a 1.9 per cent population growth rate in Queensland for 5- to 19-year-olds.²³



Figure 3: Information about Queensland students in 2023



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024²⁴

Registrations for home education are not individually reported in data on government and non-government student enrolments and schools by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Each Australian jurisdiction can choose to publish their own data for home education. In Queensland the HEU reports on data trends in home education via the DoE website.

Home education data

On 4 August 2023, 10,048 students were registered for home education in Queensland. This is a significant increase of 194.6 per cent or 6,637 children from 2019 when 3,411 students were registered for home education.²⁵ NSW published data reports an increase of 105.1 per cent of children registered for home education in 2023 (12,114 children in 2023 from 5,906 children in 2019).²⁶

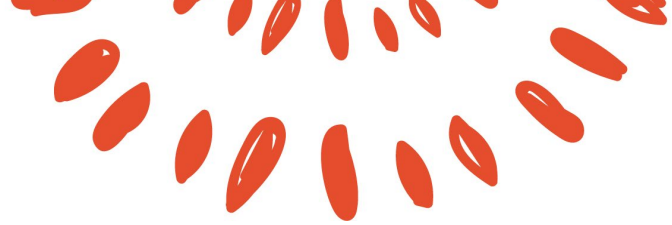
From 2019 to 2023, home education registrations in primary year levels grew by 3,167 or 151.9 per cent (2,085 in 2019 to 5,252 in 2023) and in secondary year levels by 3,470 or 261.7 per cent (1,326 in 2019 to 4,796 in 2023) in Queensland.²⁷

Demographics for year level of schooling and geographical distribution by education region of children registered for home education in Queensland sit separately to HEU annual reported data.²⁸ Combining this data, along with reporting on additional demographic information, including gender and First Nation status and other characteristics of children registered for home education in Queensland would be beneficial.

If more information was available about children registered for home education in Queensland, it would help agencies to better understand this group of children, undertake informed policy planning and potentially enable more accurate modelling of future trends, as well as to better ensure their safety and wellbeing.

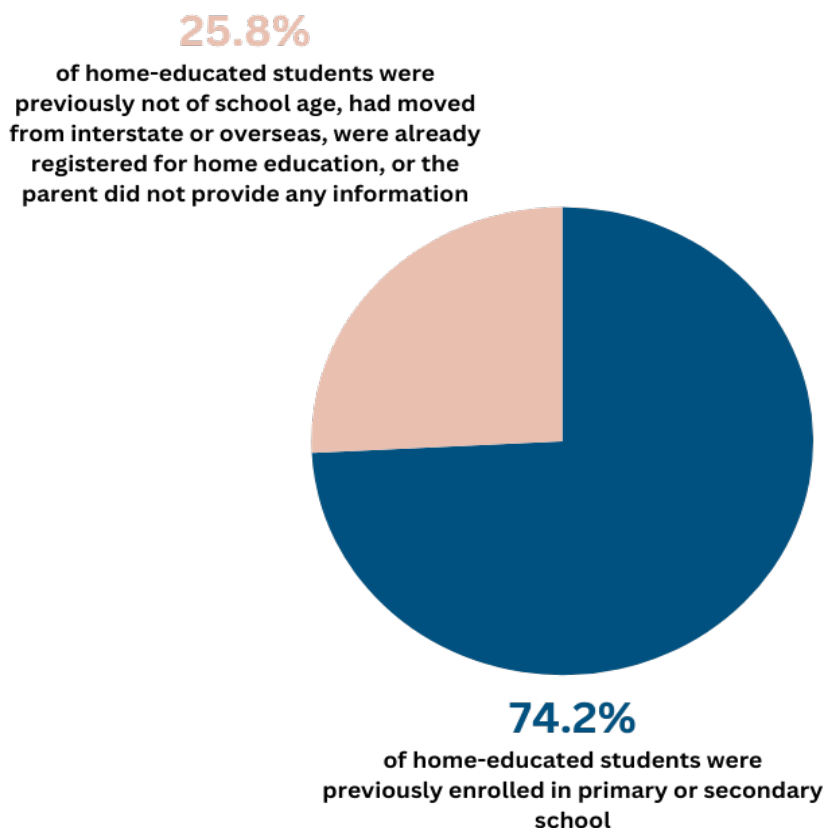
The QFCC is also aware that some children are being educated at home but are not registered in line with legislative requirements. Minimum documentation is available on oversight of this requirement and implications of non-compliance. Further exploration of this group was outside the scope of this review, but more research is required about the extent of unregistered home education and any potential risks associated with this cohort.

The following data is published by the HEU with the notation that it is indicative data collected for administrative purposes only and has not been validated. Data for 2023 was collected between 6 August 2022 to 4 August 2023.²⁹



In 2023, prior to registering for home education, 4,519 children were reported by their parent as previously enrolled in a primary or secondary school. Parents reported the other 1,571 children previously had not been of school age, had moved with their family from interstate or overseas, were previously registered for home education, or the parent did not provide any information.

Figure 4: Circumstances of children prior to registering for home education, 2023



Source: Education Queensland, 2024³⁰

On ceasing their registration for home education, 2,161 children were reported by their parent to be enrolled at a primary or secondary school in 2023. The other 2,336 children were reported by their parent to no longer be age-eligible for home education, had moved interstate or overseas with their family, were re-registered for home education, or the parent did not provide a reason for ceasing home education registration.

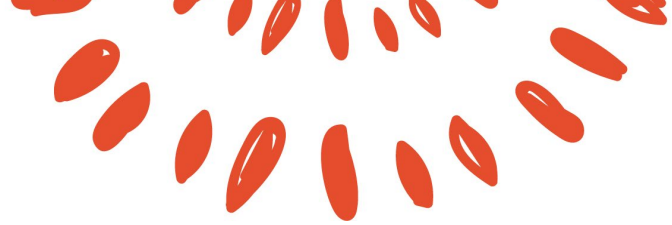
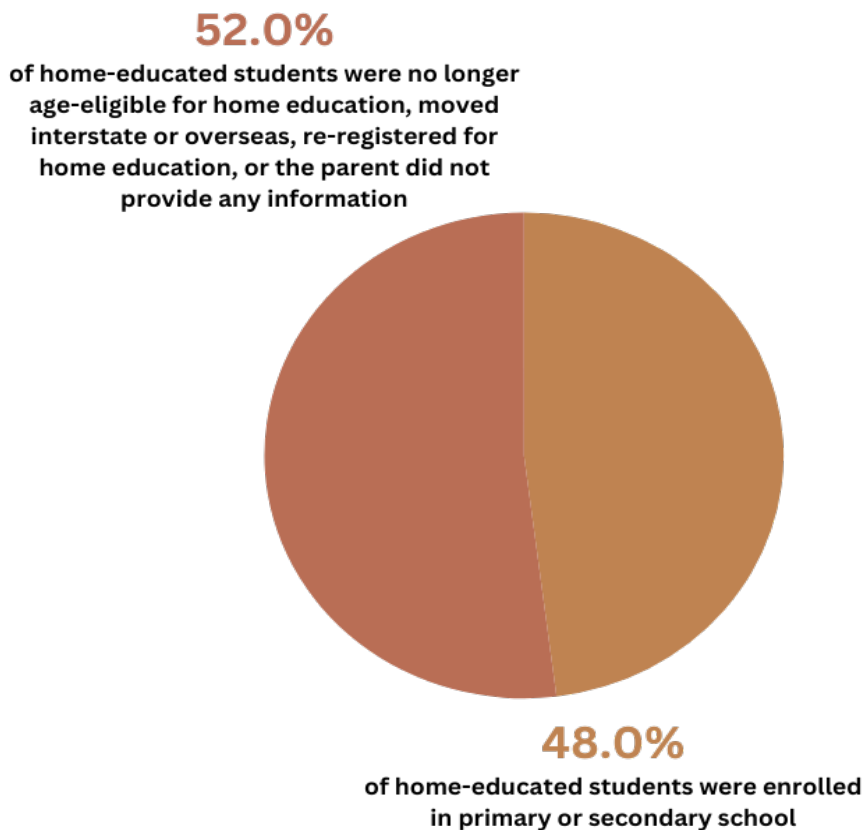


Figure 5: Reasons for ceasing home education, 2023



Source: Education Queensland, 2024³¹

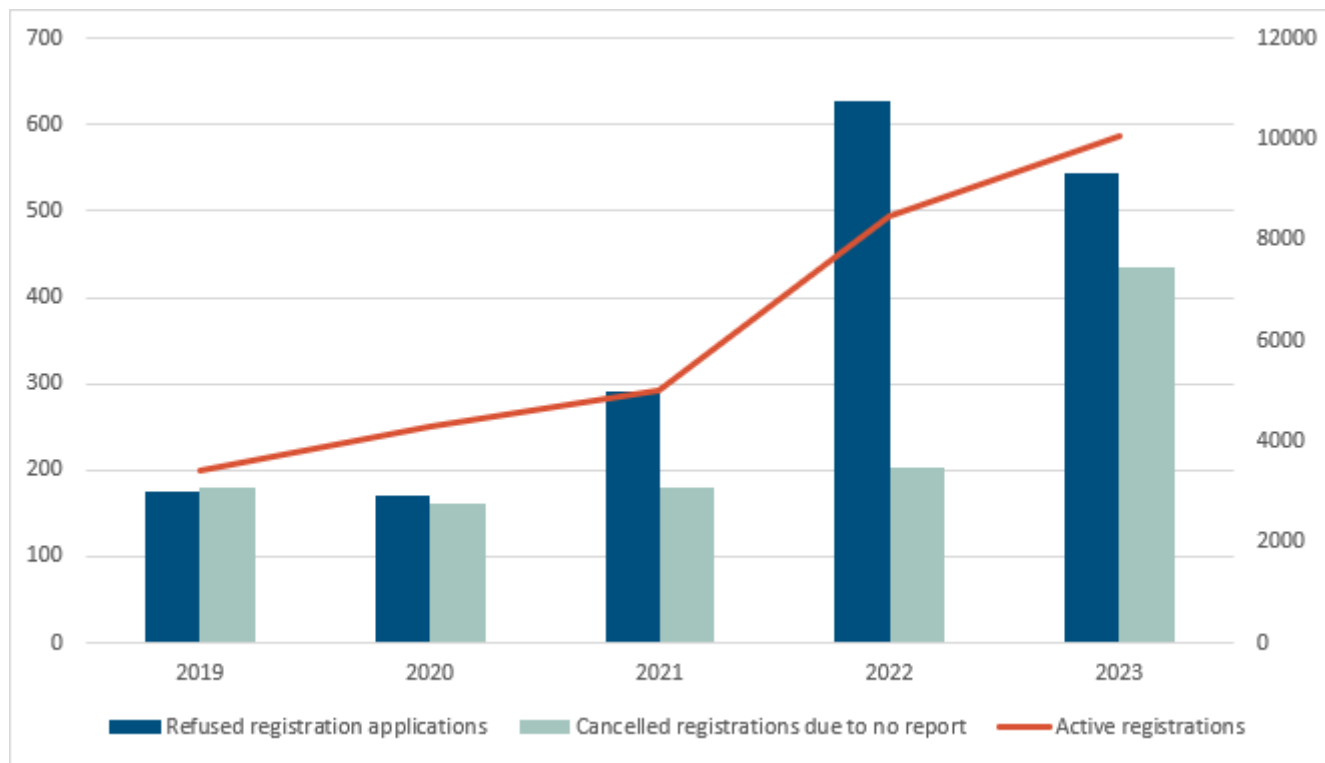
The proportion of refused applications and cancelled registrations to active registrations in home education has remained relatively steady over the past 5 years, as seen in Figure 6. The proportion of applications refused ranged between 7 and 10 per cent with the proportion of cancelled registrations ranging between 2 and 5 per cent.³²

Registration applications for home education were refused in 543 cases in 2023 due to the requirements of registration not being met, even after a further information notice had been issued. Registrations for home education were cancelled in 435 cases in 2023 due to the parent not providing the required report.¹ The report is reviewed by the HEU to determine compliance with the standard conditions of registration.³³ Another 30 registrations were cancelled due to other reasons.

¹ Following the requirements of registration not being met, after the show cause notice, and after a registration cancelled notice was issued.



Figure 6: Number of home education registrations, refused and cancelled applications, 2019-23

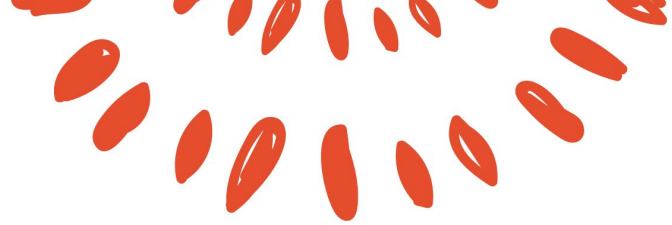


³⁴Includes a secondary axis for active registrations due to higher numbers.

Source: Education Queensland, 2024³⁴

In his 2021 analysis of home schooling in Australia, Stuart Chapman estimated the average length of home education throughout Australia was about four years in 2019. He found the average length of home education to be declining, with many parents choosing to home educate their children for the first time in secondary school for a year or two to help with confidence or in response to bullying. This compares to 20 years prior when home education first began for a child during early primary years and continued throughout secondary school.³⁵

The HEU in Queensland identifies that families with multiple school aged children, who are supporting a child with a health issue or disability are more likely to adopt a mixed approach between home education and traditional school to respond what suits each child best.³⁶



Identifying high-risk home environments for home schooled children

Methodology

The Working Group established to oversee this project defined a ‘high-risk home environment’ as follows:

- For DCSSDS – children registered for home education and who, following an investigation and assessment by DCSSDS, had an outcome of:
 - Substantiated – child in need of protection; or
 - Substantiated – child not in need of protection.³⁷
- For QPS – children registered for home education who were with the subject of:
 - a report of Suspected Harm to a Child and/or Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN); or
 - a domestic and family violence (DFV) incident.³⁸

The data matching³⁹ exercise at the heart of this project began with DoE generating a random sample of 500 children who had been registered for home education between August 2021 and August 2023. This sample size equates to approximately 5 per cent of the total number of children registered for home education in Queensland in 2023 (10,048 at the census date of 4 August 2023) and is therefore indicative only.

The names, dates of birth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and address of each of these 500 children were provided to DCSSDS and QPS to identify the number of these children who were living in a high-risk home environment. It is important to note that this data matching is not a routine approach between these agencies but was undertaken for this specific purpose. The number of matched individuals was provided by each agency without identifying the individuals involved.

Findings

The matched data identified that 35 children (or 7% of the sample of 500 children) registered for home education were living in high-risk home environments over the two-year period. Given that comparative data on the number of children in other educational settings who live in high-risk home environments could not be identified, we are not able to comment about how this figure compares. Consequently, the data presented here should be interpreted with caution as it is indicative only and should not be used to imply that children registered for home education are at higher risk of harm than their peers.

DCSSDS matching identified four unique children with substantiated child protection outcomes. Of these four matters, two concluded there was a child in need of protection.

The QPS matching identified 33 unique children with involvement in 103 total suspected harm to a child/SCAN and/or DFV occurrences. Of these 33 children, four children had multiple reports for both suspected harm to a child/SCAN and DFV.

It is important to note the different thresholds for ‘high-risk’ applied by the two agencies. The criteria for a QPS match only required the child to be involved in the event occurrence, whereas a DCSSDS match required a substantiation outcome where DCSSDS assessed there is an unacceptable risk of significant harm to a child or the child has experienced significant harm. As a result of these various risk thresholds, significantly more matches were returned for QPS criteria than for DCSSDS.

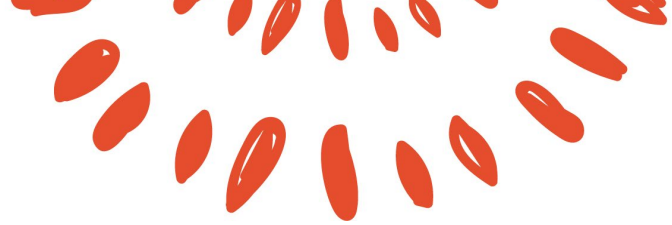


Table 3: Summary of matched data outcomes, DCSSDS and QPS, August 2021 to August 2023

DCSSDS substantiated outcome	QPS suspected harm to a child/SCAN	QPS DFV	QPS suspected harm to a child/SCAN and DFV
4 unique children	18 unique children	26 unique children	11 unique children
Of the 4 children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 child matched to multiple QPS reports for both suspected harm to a child/SCAN and DFV • 1 child matched to multiple QPS DFV reports • 2 children without a QPS match 	Of the 18 children, 7 children were involved with multiple reports	Of the 26 children, 13 children were involved with multiple reports	Of the 11 children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 children were involved with multiple reports across both suspected harm to a child/SCAN and DFV • 5 children were involved with multiple reports for either suspected harm to a child/SCAN or DFV • 2 children without multiple reports

Source: Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services and Queensland Police Service, 2024



Reform and advocacy

In early 2024 changes to home education regulation were proposed under the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendments Bill 2024 (the Bill). This followed DoE leading a process of community engagement and submissions to help inform a review of the Act.²

Following extensive feedback from stakeholder groups and a change of ministers, provisions relating to home education were removed from the Bill and a stakeholder-informed review of home education in Queensland was announced.

Legislation

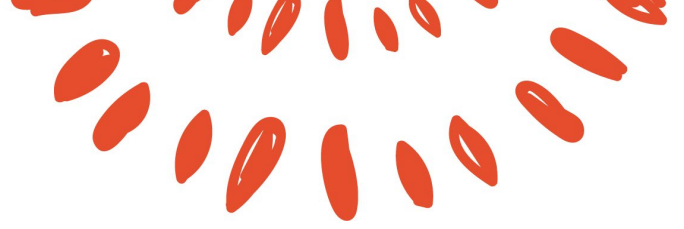
The Bill included specific amendments for home education. The amendments to the guiding principles set out that:

...home education should be provided in a way that is in the best interests of the child or young person, taking into account the child's safety, wellbeing and access to a high-quality education.⁴⁰

The amendments sought to enhance the regulation of home education and streamline aspects of the home education registration process by:

- prescribing the requirements for the educational program for a child registered for home education, including that it be consistent with an approved education and training program, and requiring a summary of the educational program to be provided at the time of application for registration, to ensure the child or young person has immediate access to a high-quality program of education;
- strengthening parent reporting requirements by clarifying the annual report must provide evidence of the educational progress of the registered child, and requiring that where an application for registration is made within 12 months of the child's previous registration ceasing for any reason – the application must be accompanied by a written report evidencing the educational progress of the child during the previous registration;
- removing the separate time-limited provisional registration application, to provide for a single and simplified home education registration process with the appropriate oversight;
- removing the certificate of registration and associated obligations to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden for parents, while ensuring parents continue to have a written notice to evidence registration and conditions on registration;
- extending the age eligibility to enable a child to be registered for home education until 31 December in the year the child turns 18, consistent with the schooling sector; and
- prescribing timeframes for internal review processes related to home education decisions by removing the reference to “school” days, in order to avoid unnecessary delays on decisions, given the home education sector is not restricted to school terms.⁴¹

² The QFCC made a submission to the *Review of the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* in May 2022. A copy of the submission can be found on the QFCC website, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sector/policy-submissions>.



The explanatory notes for the Bill state that many of the amendments in the Bill for Home Education would bring Queensland in line with the regulatory approach in most other states and territories. These amendments included:

- requiring the educational program for a child registered for home education to be consistent with the Australian Curriculum or Queensland syllabus for senior subjects. Home education programs are required to meet their relevant jurisdiction's approved curriculum requirements, apart from the ACT (which refers to a 'high-quality education') and Tasmania (which refers to 'prescribed standards'). Meeting their approved curriculum requirements or learning area or alignment with their own curriculum either is, or based on, the Australian Curriculum.
- removing the separate time-limited provisional registration application, removing the certificate of registration, and providing for time periods to be expressed in days rather than "school" days. Provisional registration for home education – all states have one application process and, apart from Tasmania, do not provide for any provisional registration. No certificate of registration is issued in Victoria, SA, Tasmania or the Northern Territory.⁴²

In April 2024, the Minister for Education announced:

- removal of provisions relating to home education from the Bill;
- that a review would commence into the role of the HEU and how it can help to improve regulation and provide important support to families who choose to home educate; and
- that additional consultation would take place with home educating parents to inform the review, including through establishment of a Home Education Expert Group (HEEG).⁴³

Queensland Home Education Unit review

DoE engaged an independent reviewer to conduct a stakeholder-informed review of Queensland's approach to regulating home education through the HEU. The review was to:

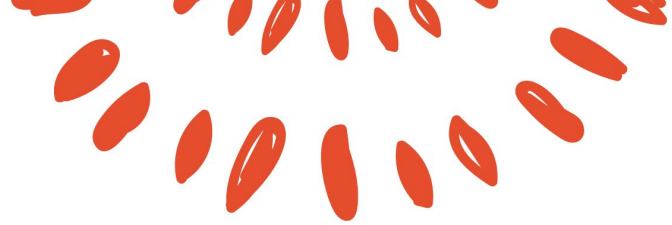
- consider the diverse experience and needs of home educating parents;
- identify any gaps and areas for improvement in the approach to regulation, education and support of home educators; and
- provide recommendations, where appropriate, to enhance the effectiveness of regulation, including supports for home education parents, options to engage more broadly with home educators in the absence of a peak body and other supportive activities within the existing legislative framework of the Act [*Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*].⁴⁴

The HEEG was established to inform the review and included 12 parent members to represent home educating parents in Queensland.

The Independent Reviewer released the final report, *Queensland Home education Unit Review: A stakeholder-informed review of Queensland's approach to regulating home education* in September 2024, the same time this paper was being finalised. The aim of the recommendations in the paper are to enhance the availability of supports for home educating parents and the effectiveness of regulation.

The review made eight broad recommendations with sub-recommendations under each.

Repositioning and enhancing home education governance in Queensland



- Recommendation 1: Reposition the HEU for support and regulation
- Recommendation 2: Enhance communication and collaboration

Regulation of home education

- Recommendation 3: Enhance and expand resources that support parents to meet regulatory requirements
- Recommendation 4: Consider trialling a new reporting option
- Recommendation 5: Leverage technology for better support and streamlined processes
- Recommendation 6: Review and revise all formal communications from HEU to ensure they are clear, supportive, and family-centred

Support and advisory services for families

- Recommendation 7: Establish a home education support and advisory response for families
- Recommendation 8: Broker and expand access to educational resources.⁴⁵

The report also notes that the regulatory framework from a legislative perspective and a response to the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-23*, which recommended legislative change to strengthen oversight of children who are registered for home education in Queensland, with a focus on upholding the child's rights, best interests, safety and wellbeing at all stages of a child's home education registration were out of scope of the review.⁴⁶ These are important areas that still require urgent attention and action.



Conclusion and recommendations

This review has found continuation of a parent's right to choose the most suitable learning environment for their child is important and helps children to continue education in a range of circumstances.

The review has also found there:

- is low visibility of children registered for home education
- is an absence of opportunities and documented participation for children registered for home education;
- are limited informal and formal oversight mechanisms for home education in Queensland. Attributes of robust home education regulation in other jurisdictions include:
 - sighting the child as part of the registration process (NSW, SA, Tas, WA);
 - home visits as part of registration process (NSW, SA, WA);
 - home visit within three months of registration and annually thereafter (WA);
 - annual review and evaluation of education program and progress (WA); and
 - legislative arrangements that enable information sharing across agencies about the suitability of home education for a particular child (SA, ACT);
- are a lack of systems to support information sharing between HEU, DoE, DCSSDS, QPS and the child's parents about the child's needs and wellbeing when educated at home; and
- were 35 children registered for home education matched in DCSSDS and QPS data against an agreed criteria for high-risk home environments between August 2021 and August 2023, representing seven per cent of the random sample of home educated children we matched.³ These individuals were found to have reported occurrences for domestic and family violence, suspected child harm, and/or child protection substantiations.

These combined concerns increase the likelihood that educational and family support needs are not identified or are identified later for children registered for home education than their peers in other educational settings. In addition, there is a lack of children registered for home education being involved in decisions related to their learning.

Registrations for home education in Queensland have seen significant growth in recent years, yet published data for this group is limited. If more information were available about the reasons behind increases in home education registration in Queensland as well as the demographics and characteristics of children registered for home education, it would help agencies to better understand this group of children, undertake informed policy planning and potentially enable more accurate modelling of future trends, as well as to better ensure their safety and wellbeing. The QFCC is aware that some children are being educated at home but are not registered. More research is required about this group of children, including the extent of unregistered home education and any potential risks associated with this cohort are unknown.

³ Data should be interpreted with caution as it is indicative only and should not be used to imply that children registered for home education are at higher risk of harm than their peers.



The findings of the review demonstrate the need for enhanced safeguards and reporting to ensure the wellbeing and safety of children registered for home education in Queensland due to the limitations of current systems.

The findings of the review complement the findings outlined in Chapter 2 of the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-23* report that states:

- The number and rate of children registered for home education in Queensland continues to rise.
- Children registered for home education require oversight mechanisms to ensure their safety, including social development and overall wellbeing, are protected.
- The existing regulatory system for home education in Queensland lacks necessary rigour, powers, and accountability in relation to registration processes to ensure that a child's educative, social, health and wellbeing needs are considered, monitored and upheld throughout the course of their home education.
- There is currently an absence of the child's views and wishes captured and considered throughout a child's home education registration.
- There is a lack of visibility of children registered for home education. For example, there is no legislative requirement to conduct regular home visits or hold discussions with children or parents/educators.⁴⁷

The findings of the review also supplement the findings and recommendations in the recently released independent review of the HEU, although the regulatory framework from a legislative perspective and a response to recommendations of the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-23* were out of scope of that review. These are important areas that still require urgent attention and action.

The combined findings of all these reviews highlight that DoE should immediately implement the recommendation for home education made by the Child Death Review Board. Implementing the recommendation provides the opportunity for DoE to confirm its commitment to children from vulnerable families that require alternative education processes.

Government departments consulted by the Board on its recommendations advised that the issues for home schooled children are also relevant to children who are enrolled full-time in schools of distance education. The Board noted in its report:

- enrolments in distance education are also increasing at a significant rate;
- children who participate in distance education are also isolated from protective factors that attendance at a physical school can provide; and
- while these students do have periodic access to a teacher virtually, there is a potential for these students to be exposed to similar risks as their peers in home education.⁴⁸

The DoE advised QFCC that it has commenced work to strengthen support for full-time distance education students for example, the Queensland Schools of Distance Education has collaboratively developed a draft Multi-Tiered Student Support document for the distance and virtual education context.⁴⁹



RECOMMENDATIONS

The QFCC recommends that:

- 1. The Department of Education take immediate action to implement Recommendation 1 of the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022-23* report to:**
 - **Initiate a regular process of data sharing with QPS and DCSSDS to identify home-schooling students who may benefit from in-school support services.**
 - **Pursues legislative changes to strengthen oversight of children registered for home education in Queensland, with a focus on upholding the child’s rights, best interests, safety and wellbeing at all stages of a child’s home education.**
- 2. The Home Education Unit explores ways for children registered for home education to participate in decisions about their learning needs and have their views and wishes documented.** The HEU could consider options such as those proposed by young people at the QFCC Youth Summit 2024 including online forums to hear from all students and meet their needs.

Consultations on the findings of the review

In October 2024 the QFCC Principal Commissioner wrote to the Directors-General of DoE and DCSSDS and the Commissioner of QPS to provide an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the review. The QFCC also met with staff of the DoE to discuss the Insights Report on 11 November 2024. In addition, QFCC presented findings of the review to members of its Government Reference Panel on 23 October 2024.

Education

In response, DoE advised that the Insights Paper is welcomed by the agency in providing new information that supplements the Board’s Annual Report 2022-23. DoE stated that the findings are concerning and reiterate the importance of implementing the Board’s Report recommendations.⁵⁰ Comments from DoE have been considered by the QFCC and incorporated in the Insights Paper where relevant.

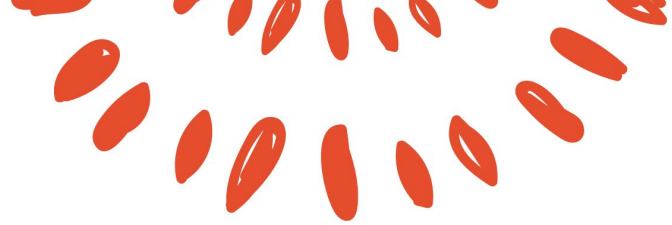
DoE advised QFCC it will continue to work collaboratively with DCSSDS and QPS to identify options for ongoing data sharing and supports in-principle changes to home education regulation in subsequent revisions of legislation.

While DoE is committed to immediate action, the timing of implementation will be subject to Government consideration of legislative amendments. Current legislation does not allow for DoE data sharing of home education registrations, or regulatory changes to home education registration and oversight.

Recommendations in the HEU Review Report also seek to increase the availability of protective factors for children in potentially high-risk environments, through improved connection with families.⁵¹

Child Safety

In response to Recommendation 1, DCSSDS advised QFCC that ongoing data sharing arrangements would benefit from agreement on definitions of a high-risk home environment between respective departments, as well privacy and data storage requirements. DCSSDS advised that it will continue to work with relevant departments on the requirements.⁵²



The response from Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (renamed from DCSSDS) has been considered by the QFCC and incorporated into the Insights Paper where relevant.

Police

In response, QPS supports the recommendation that DoE has better oversight of children registered for home education. QPS advised that it is committed to engaging with the QFCC and other government agencies to assist in promoting the safety of children registered for home education in Queensland.

Next steps




















The QFCC will continue to advocate for children and young people registered for home education participation in decisions impacting them and to make sure sufficient safeguards are in place for their ongoing safety and wellbeing.

The actions taken by DoE to respond to the recommendations in the September 2024 review of the HEU will continue to be monitored by the QFCC. DoE has invited the QFCC to meet with the independent reviewer and members of the review's expert group to present findings of the Insight Paper.

The QFCC will write to the Board, DoE, DCSSDS and QPS to inform them of the findings and recommendations of this review.

Appendix A

A comparison of home education processes in Queensland with other jurisdictions across Australia.

State/Territory	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
Registration process	 	  	 		  	  	 	  
Annual reporting	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Registration period	Up to 2 years	Up to 2 years	12 months	Ongoing Reviewed at 12 months to ensure conditions continue to be met	12 months	12 months	12 months	12 months
Review and renewal	Renewal may be approved without a meeting with an ACT Education Directorate Authorised person.	Renewal as specified on approved registration	Must reapply for home education registration every 12 months.	Must Comply with standard conditions + annual report	Annual review. After submitting your review form, a home review meeting at your home or, in some cases, a virtual meeting will be arranged. Your child must be present and available for discussion during the review.	Applications for renewal must be made at least 12 weeks but no more than 15 weeks before the current registration expires.	Up to 10% of families will be randomly selected each year for a review of their home schooling registration. Parents must notify the VRQA in writing by 30 November each year about whether the student will continue home schooling the following year.	Renewal the applicants must complete and submit a form to the regional office in person. Home visit within the first 3 months of registration and annually thereafter. Registration requires annual review and evaluation of the educational program and progress.



Documentation review



Child sighted



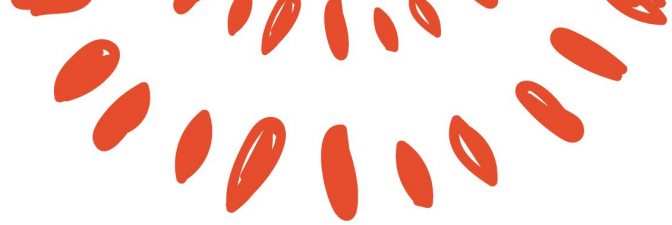
Video conference



Possible home visit

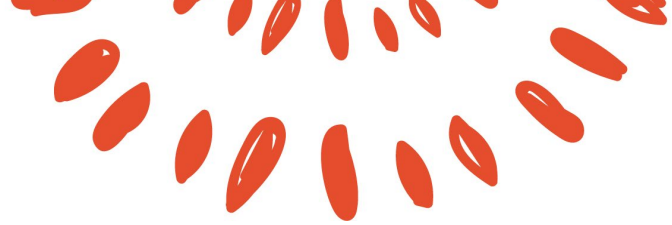


Home visit



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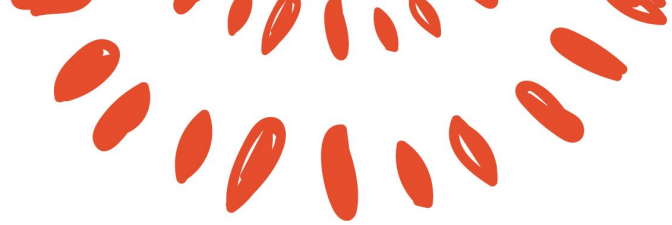
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