

children learning and living naturally at home and in the community

# The Educating Parent

HOMESCHOOLING and UNSCHOOLING in AUSTRALIA

## Registering as a Home Educator in NSW

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Congratulations on your decision to educate your children at home and within the community instead of at school!

Home educators seek the best education possible for their children and make use of the whole community, learning from many sources and in many different environments, as well as the home. Home educators often refer to themselves as homeschoolers or unschoolers.

This information will give you some clues as to what to do next... There is a great deal of useful information available on the internet and hopefully this brief guide will help you get started.

Our family began home educating in South Australia in 1985 and Robin and I now help our children provide opportunities to learn at home and in the community, which we find immensely rewarding and pleasurable.

If you have any questions please join my online [The Educating Parent Facebook](#) or [Yahoo](#) support groups. Or tap into 30+ years of accumulated experience and information by reading any of the hundreds of articles on [The Educating Parent](#).

## Support Groups

First of all, remember you aren't alone in your decision to home educate. There are hundreds of families registered with the NSW Education Standards Authority. Many join local or regional homeschooling groups for support. These offer companionship and support for parents and children, as well as educational



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opportunities, excursions, activities and camps.

[Home Education NSW](#) is the main online support group for information about getting started, applying for home education registration, and resources in NSW.

Chat to local home educating families and, if you can, attend one or two group gatherings. This will help you get a feel for what home education is and what it can be, and how different families teach their children at home. You can also ask any questions you may have about how to register, saving you time and worry.

Online support groups are very popular, especially those that connect local home educating families together for the purposes of organising excursions, play-dates, picnics, camps and other social and educational events. The sharing of information, advice and tips that occurs through online support groups is invaluable and especially helpful during the early weeks and months of home educating.

[The Educating Parent Support Groups Resource Directory](#) includes a list of New South Wales support groups.

There is a growing body of reassuring academic literature available in home education in Australia: see [Summary of Australian Research on Home Education](#).

## How to apply

You are able to develop your own education programs to suit your family and your individual children.

The Educating Parent is developing [comprehensive year level learning plans](#) you can use as a guide.

As requirements differ around the country we encourage you to read through the relevant legislation and become familiar with the regulations in your state or territory.

Home education is protected under the [United Nations Declaration of Human Rights](#). Centrelink legislation regarding the 'return to work' requirement of parents with school-aged children includes an [exemption to the activity test](#) for home educating parents.

From birth to the age of 6 years there is no legal requirement for a child to attend a child care centre, kindergarten or pre-school.

In New South Wales the process to register to home educate is straightforward and relatively simple. The initial form is only two pages and can be found [here](#). If you are applying for more than one child you'll need to fill in a form for each child. There is no need to provide your learning plan at the application stage. You will just need to provide contact information, court orders if applicable, whether the child is primary,



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secondary, senior secondary level, has any educational issues or special needs, and complete a check list that you will be ready for a home visit from an authorized person (AP) from the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

Once the form is received by NESA you will receive a phone call to organize a home visit, this will be held within the next week to three weeks from receipt of your application, so it's best to be prepared prior to sending your application.

At the home visit you will be required to provide the following for the AP to view:

- records of the child's previous educational history and attainment
- an educational program based on the relevant NESA syllabuses
- a method for recording learning activities
- a method for recording student achievement and progress
- sufficient resources and a suitable learning environment



Addressing each point by point:

- These may not be attainable, depending on the relationship with the leaving school if applicable, or if you are home educating from the outset. Do not be concerned if you cannot provide these, but if you are requested to do so have an explanation ready for why you cannot present them.
- You will need to familiarize yourself with the NESA syllabuses relevant for the stages that your children are at. You can find these [here](#). You will need to make sure that you cover each area of the syllabus. There is no requirement for your child to be achieving any particular stage. You can register for the stage according to age, or you can simply register for primary, secondary, or senior secondary. This allows you to mix and match from the stages to provide your child with a tailor made learning plan.
- There are many methods to record that will be considered acceptable by NESA, you can keep a weekly diary, or take lots of photographs with some written notes, or keep work samples that demonstrate progress. You can do a combination of these things. Some home educators have an Instagram account or a private Facebook group specifically for their records. There is no set standard for recording, simply a requirement that you do so, so pick something that will work for your family that isn't onerous or time consuming.
- In NSW one of the easiest ways to record student achievement and progress is to assess against the Outcomes listed in the NESA syllabuses. You don't have to do it this way, but it's easy to use the Outcomes as a checklist and simply date when each Outcome is achieved.
- There is a wealth of resources available to home educators, making it easy to cover all of the syllabuses. The AP will want to see what resources you'll be using to cover the syllabuses, and this



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can be achieved with short lists for each subject area. Resources can be written work but can also include activities. For example extracurricular activities such as dance, sport, gymnastics, parkour, circus, etc will achieve PDHPE outcomes, an excursion to an historical site can cover history outcomes, a bushwalk referencing a map can cover geography and science outcomes, writing letters to a pen friend can cover English outcomes, baking a cake can cover math outcomes, and attending a meet up with fellow home educators can achieve outcomes from across the syllabuses, but most importantly will demonstrate that you are meeting the social needs of your children and are tapping into your local community that will provide you with further opportunities and connections.

At your home visit the AP will advise if you have been successful and of any areas in which you may need to improve your plan or recording methods. You will be registered for a period of time determined by the AP, with a maximum of 12 months for an initial plan, and a maximum of 24 months for continuing registration. Do not be discouraged if you are registered for a shorter period, but take on board the advice of the AP on the areas that they need to see improvement when they return for their next home visit.

It can take up to four weeks and during peak times even longer for the initial application to be processed. Children who are currently attending school are required to remain at school until registration is granted. In practice this often doesn't happen – some children are removed immediately for practical, health or safety reasons. Many families obtain health certificates from their family doctor if necessary to cover this period of absence from school.

Principals in NSW have the authority to:

- grant sick leave to students whose absences are satisfactorily explained as being due to illness
- accept other explanations for absence and record the absence as "L"
- decline to accept an explanation for absence and record the absence as unjustified
- grant an exemption from school attendance for periods totalling up to 100 days in a 12 month period for any one student provided certain conditions are met
- grant part-day exemptions from school for periods totaling up to 100 days in a twelve month period
- grant exemption from enrolment for students who have completed year 9 and have the required approval to complete their education in special circumstances through an apprenticeship or traineeship

It is important to inform the school principal about your child's absence from school with a written explanation, in NSW this is required within 7 days of the first absence. Unexplained cases of non-attendance may result in the Principal referring the matter to the Home School Liaison Officer. Persistent unexplained absences can even be taken as far as the Children's Court



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in NSW, so it is best to be upfront and get your application underway immediately if the child is not able to return to school.

While awaiting for approval of your application it is prudent for you to keep home education attendance records and a diary of education activities in key learning areas, etc., to demonstrate (if necessary) that 'proper care and control' has been exercised.

If your children are already at school, organise your application, learning program and resources before withdrawing them. Arrange to collect all of their belongings on their last day and inform the teachers that the Principal has been notified of your intention to home educate. Record in your home educating diary that you have done this: this is your official home education starting date!

A copy of the letter approving home education (registration certificate) can be carried and will suffice to prove that the children are not truants if you or they are challenged when out and about in the community during school hours.



## Completing the Paperwork

It is advisable to ask for confirmation in writing (email) for any dates and times of meetings made by phone. In addition, ask for an agenda or outline of what will be discussed or information required for any meetings. This will ensure that you will be adequately prepared, which may help to save application processing time.

Within reason, you are able to negotiate a different date for the meeting that suits you if the one offered is inconvenient.

Keep a dated log of any phone conversations together with brief comments about what was discussed or resolved. Although in most cases this isn't necessary it has proven to be helpful in cases where home education isn't granted.

Keep copies of any correspondence.

If you find the application process daunting and overwhelming we can help: [April](#), who was home educated herself and is now home educating her children, is available for consults to assist you complete your application and build your confidence. Alternatively we can connect you with experienced home educators in your region. See the list of support groups for region in [The Educating Parent Support Groups Resource Directory](#).

If you are required to give a reason for home educating your children, simply state that after considering all other options you believe home education to be the best educational choice to meet the individual learning needs of your child/ren. There is no requirement for you to give personal or detailed reasons. Outlining how the school system has failed your child may be cathartic, but remember, the person assessing your



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application is probably someone who has worked as a teacher in the school system and may be biased.

See [The Educating Parent](#) for examples of approved registration applications and reviews.

## The Home Visit

An Authorised Person (AP) will attend the home to conduct an interview to address the points previously mentioned. They are also required to physically sight the children. Due to mandatory reporting laws, this is a welfare check by NESAs and nothing to be concerned about.

If you are feeling uncomfortable or overwhelmed about the home visit, AP's are used to finding a support person in attendance. If you've been able to make contact with local home educators, there may be someone near you that would be happy to go through your plan with you and possibly sit in for your home visit. Most home educators are nervous at first, but soon discover that provided they have completed the checklist of what the AP will be looking for, that all will go well.

Understand that the requirement of 'sighting the child' is nothing more than that. The AP does not need to have a conversation with your child, unless your child wants to be involved in the interview process, many are keen to demonstrate what they've been up to!

Be firm and assert that it is the learning program that is under consideration – not the children's current educational abilities and understandings. As the approved home educator it is your, not the AP's, responsibility to monitor the progress of your child. Most families, however, are happy to have the children greet the AP, talk for a few minutes and perhaps show a sample or two of completed or ongoing work.



AP's should always be polite and professional. It is our understanding that they are not authorised to inspect any of the rooms or areas in your home without your permission. They will be reassured if you show them the places where learning generally takes place and a selection of the resources you are using.

If you have any doubt at all about your legal rights and responsibilities seek legal advice from a qualified legal

practitioner.

In most instances meetings are usually quite relaxed with the AP running through and discussing points on the application. Many families appreciate the interest taken in their children's education by the AP.

As the AP is in your home at your invitation, you have the right to instruct the AP to leave at any time during the meeting and to request that a different AP be appointed to complete the interview on a different date, either in your home or elsewhere. It is, however, very rare that intractable problems arise and result in this happening.

Most families find that if they are prepared and know what to expect, the application process is not as daunting as it first appears. APs are generally very familiar with the practice of home education and



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understand that it takes a while for families to settle into a definite routine or find the best learning resources and methods to suit each child. From time to time APs who are less familiar with home education are temporarily employed and may demand to see a school-like approach or require particular resources to be used: if you find yourself in this situation please get in touch with other home educators as soon as possible for reassurance and help.

During the home visit you will be advised as to the outcome of your application. The normal outcome is to be granted a 12 month registration to home educate, however sometimes it may only be granted for 6 months. Recurring registrations are available for up to 24 months, but this is not available for a first time registration.



## Review

Leading up to the expiration of your registration you will need to submit a new form(s) to continue registration. You can find this form [here](#). It is essentially very similar to the initial application form, and the process is almost exactly the same excepting that you need to provide documentation from the previous period of registration, and may be granted up to 24 months registration.

At the home visit you will be required to provide:

- an educational program based on the relevant NESAsyllabuses
- an overview of the curriculum planned for the next period of registration
- records of learning activities
- records of student achievement and progress
- records of the time allocated to student learning
- sufficient resources and a suitable learning environment

Many home educators prepare a 'report' gleaned from their home educating records to show what the children have been doing and learning. This can be a helpful and confidence-building prop when talking about your learning plan.

Never give away original documents or children's work.

Keep records, such as diaries and home educating reports, until the child is past compulsory schooling age.



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## Part Time School / Home education

Part time public schooling is not available in NSW for the purposes of part time home education.

Negotiated attendance plans for children attending school are possible under certain circumstances. Discuss this with your school. You may find that a private school would be more open to negotiating a part time attendance, however any negotiation of fees are entirely at the school's discretion.

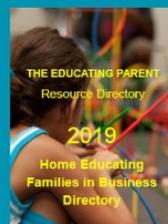
There are many reasons why families consider part-time schooling. Some just starting out on their home education journey feel apprehensive about how successful they will be at teaching their children at home and aren't ready to leave the security of the classroom. It can take a year or so to 'find your feet' with home education and even longer to identify your child's preferred learning style and the approach to learning that works best for him or her. Getting to know other home educating families usually alleviates this concern.

Other families find that they need respite from home education for a variety of reasons: financial considerations may mean that full time homeschooling is no longer possible; or the child wants to 'try' school; if the family lives in a socially isolated location school may offer the contact with others the child needs; the school may offer specialist instruction in subjects or areas of interest to the child unable to be found elsewhere in the community; parent ill-health or disability; and so on. Returning to school should never be considered as 'failing' at home educating or that 'homeschooling didn't work out'. In fact, families continue to contribute to their children's education in a very hands-on way when their children are attending school.

Parents needing occasional or regular respite have been able to access Family Day Care. Family Day Care can care for children up to 12 years of age and need to provide age appropriate activities in the course of the day. The challenge is to find a family that is happy to take on school age children. Family Day Care providers are not responsible for delivering the NESA syllabuses, the responsibility to do so remains with the parent. If the child is in the care of a Family Day Care provider during school hours, the parent will be required by NESA to demonstrate the hours they will be putting in to educate their child at other times through the week. There is no requirement for learning hours to be Monday to Friday, but home educating is a time commitment made by the parent and NESA require evidence that the child will have adequate time to learn. There have been instances where working home educating parents have had to demonstrate that they can schedule 25 hours per week where they will be educating their child. This is not an unreasonable demand by NESA, but understand that it does not have to be during regular school hours.

## Ongoing Issues

Download our FREE The Educating Parent Resource Directories today!

 <p>Introduction to Home Education</p>	 <p>BIG List of Books about Home Ed</p>	 <p>National and State Support Groups</p>	 <p>Home Educating Families in Business</p>	 <p>Aussie Homeschool and Unschool Blogs</p>
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