

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 SA

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 South Australia Department of Education. Many join local or regional homeschooling groups for support. These offer companionship and support for parents and children, as well as educational opportunities, excursions, activities and camps.

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



© May 2019 Beverley Paine [The Educating Parent](#), April Jerney [Always Learning Books](#)  
Email updates and corrections to [beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com).

Please note: Information provided in this document is of a general nature only:  
please seek legal advice if in any doubt about your legal responsibilities.

Every care is made to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate, however it is the reader's responsibility to check details and information personally before acting on them.

and especially helpful during the early weeks and months of home educating.

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

You can also subscribe to the **free Home Based Learners SA e-Newsletter** by sending an email to the Editor [editor4hblsa@gmail.com](mailto:editor4hblsa@gmail.com).

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.

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 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 South Australia there is no formal legislative provision for home education. The [Education Act](#) requires children of compulsory school age to enroll and attend school: an exemption from attending school (s81A) for the purpose of home education is the process by which families take legal responsibility for educating their children at home.

Exemptions are usually granted for one year and reviewed annually.

The [Home Education Unit](#) of the Department of Education and Child Development (DECD) processes applications for home education in South Australia.

In South Australia compulsory school age is defined as a child of or above the age of 6 years but under the age of 16 years. The SA Education Act requires enrolment (s75) and full time attendance for students aged 6-16; and/or enrolment in an approved course for those aged 16-17 unless they have already achieved the SACE or other approved qualification. It is an offence to not enroll your children.

Enrolment requirements are easy to satisfy: inform the school that you have applied for home education registration and provide it with the name and date of birth of your child, the place of birth of the child, and any other information required by regulations. Private schools are under no obligation to accept an enrolment if the child will be home educated and may will charge school fees, even if the child will not be attending. Home educating students are entered into a separate roll class set, and are not marked absent.

To apply for exemption from attending school children need to be aged between 6 and 17 years; be enrolled in a South Australian school; and parental consent must be provided "both natural parents must pro-



© May 2019 Beverley Paine [The Educating Parent](#), April Jerney [Always Learning Books](#)  
Email updates and corrections to [beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com).

Please note: Information provided in this document is of a general nature only:  
please seek legal advice if in any doubt about your legal responsibilities.

Every care is made to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate, however it is the reader's responsibility to check details and information personally before acting on them.

vide their contact details and signed consent, a copy of the death certificate if a parent is deceased, or a copy of the court order mandating sole parental responsibility for a child.”

Applications for exemptions need to meet the criteria set by Department of Education and Child Development (DECD) in its guidelines. There is a maximum penalty of \$500 for failing to comply with a condition of an exemption granted by the Minister.

Request a link to the online application form by emailing [DECD.HomeEducation@sa.gov.au](mailto:DECD.HomeEducation@sa.gov.au) or write to: Manager, Home Education, Level 6 Education Centre, GPO Box 1152, Adelaide SA 5001.

The application form requires the following information:

- Names and details of parents, parent consent, attach any relevant Court Orders
- Address
- Home education status/history
- Children’s details, attach birth certificate
- School at which you child is (or will be) enrolled
- An overview of your child as a learner, short term learning goals and targets
- Brief overview of teaching approach or methods, and an outline of the proposed education program and resources to be used, for each child, and aligns with the eight [Australian Curriculum](#) areas
- Long term goals, how long you plan to home educate for, and, if the child is over 14, future plans or goals for further education and work
- A description of the learning environment: main and additional supervisors and relationship to children, tutors, teachers or coaches; details of the location and size of the main learning area and facilities, including provision for outdoor physical activities
- Description of opportunities for social interaction: most home educating families find that their children’s social sphere is broadened by removing them from school. Social activities include regular interaction with people from all age groups. List friends, cultural, religious, sport and personal interest social activities, as well as participation in home educating group activities. Definitely mention that you are a member of the any local home educating support groups and are in regular contact with other home educating families for support, advice, educational and social opportunities.
- Description of the assessment and evaluation strategies you will use and how you will show evidence of your children engaging in home education.
- Declarations: acceptance of terms and conditions of the exemption.

Once you have completed and submitted your application a home visit will be organised at which an officer of the Home Education Unit (HEU) will discuss and assess the application. Your child is required to be present during the interview.

The information on the application form is added to a report written by the Home Education Officer after the home interview. Both are used to assess the application and are forwarded to the Director, School and



© May 2019 Beverley Paine [The Educating Parent](#), April Jerney [Always Learning Books](#)  
Email updates and corrections to [beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com).

Please note: Information provided in this document is of a general nature only:  
please seek legal advice if in any doubt about your legal responsibilities.

Every care is made to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate, however it is the reader’s responsibility to check details and information personally before acting on them.



District Operations (to whom the Minister delegates responsibility for granting and revoking exemptions) for approval. Assessment of the application may also include consideration of a report prepared by your child's school principal, if your child is being removed from school. The Education Department may also consult with child protection and other agencies regarding the approval of the application.

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.

The school principal has authority from the Minister to approve applications for temporary exemption from school attendance. You need to apply in writing and Principals are required to provide their responses on the school letterhead. Not all principals are inclined to provide temporary exemptions but most do.

It is important to keep the school principal informed about your child's absence from school with a written explanation. Persistent unexplained cases of non-attendance are referred to Families SA (FSA) (under Section 6(2)(d) of the Children's Protection Act 1993). Under this Act, truancy is defined as an 'at risk' factor for child protection.

Unless exempted, where a child is not attending school, each parent is committing an offence which is punishable by up to \$500 fine (s76(3); unless the failure of the child to attend school did not result from any failure of the parent to exercise proper care and control, S76(4).

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.

Home educating parents need to be aware that Police Officers and Student Attendance Counsellors are empowered to obtain a child's name and address and the reason for non-attendance if the child is observed in a public place during school hours. If the child does not have a proper reason for being absent, only the Police Officer (not the Student Attendance Counsellor) may take the child into his or her custody and return the child to someone in authority at the school, or to a parent or guardian of the child. If the child is accompanied by an adult, the Police Officer or the Student Attendance Counsellor may inquire into the reason for the child's absence. Police Officers and Student Attendance Counsellors have the authority to call at a home at any time, to seek the full names and ages of all children of compulsory



© May 2019 Beverley Paine [The Educating Parent](#), April Jerney [Always Learning Books](#)  
Email updates and corrections to [beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com).

Please note: Information provided in this document is of a general nature only:  
please seek legal advice if in any doubt about your legal responsibilities.

Every care is made to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate, however it is the reader's responsibility to check details and information personally before acting on them.

school age living in the home and the schools at which the children are enrolled. However, this does not give them powers to enter and inspect the premises or children.

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 join a local online support group: there are plenty of people who can give you a hand.

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 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.



© May 2019 Beverley Paine [The Educating Parent](#), April Jerney [Always Learning Books](#)  
Email updates and corrections to [beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com).

Please note: Information provided in this document is of a general nature only:  
please seek legal advice if in any doubt about your legal responsibilities.

Every care is made to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate, however it is the reader's responsibility to check details and information personally before acting on them.

# The Home Interview

DECD guidelines for assessing applications for exemption from attending school include an interview. By law, an authorised person may at any time attend (but not enter unless invited) the residential home and request the full names and ages of all children of compulsory school age and compulsory education age (effectively 6-17 years) living at the house, as well as the schools in which they are respectively enrolled.

DECD will request that the first interview to be held in the place where the learning will be occurring. Some families choose to have their subsequent interviews in a neutral location such as the local library or at the Education Centre building in Flinders Street, Adelaide.

Most home educators feel okay about a home interview. Some find it reassuring to meet with the Home Education Officer and discuss their learning program, whereas others find it intrusive and unnecessary. Talking to other home educating families about their experiences will help you make up your mind about the position you need to take for your family.

Several years ago a South Australian home educating family experiencing protracted difficulty in obtaining exemption from attending school for their child with special needs offered the following advice regarding the interview process based on information from their lawyer:

"Our legal advice has been that if they have seen your home once they have no need to do it again and that all future interviews should be done at a convenient place outside the home and a third person should be present because if you invite someone into your home a lot of your legal protection disappears because of the "consent" implied in saying "come in..." You need to ensure that the third person is someone who is not affected by any decision making on either side and who can take notes to support memory at a later date. You will need to inform the authorities a third person is present to take notes and help you remember the important points of the meeting."

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

The application process requires your child to be present during the interview. 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 interviewing officer's, responsibility to monitor the progress of your child. Most families, however, are happy to have the children greet the Home Education Officer, talk for a few minutes and perhaps show a sample or two of completed or ongoing work.

Home Education Officers 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.

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

As the Home Education Officer is in your home at your invitation, you have the right to instruct the Officer



© May 2019 Beverley Paine [The Educating Parent](#), April Jerney [Always Learning Books](#)  
Email updates and corrections to [beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com).

Please note: Information provided in this document is of a general nature only:  
please seek legal advice if in any doubt about your legal responsibilities.

Every care is made to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate, however it is the reader's responsibility to check details and information personally before acting on them.



to leave at any time during the meeting and to request that a different Officer 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. Officers are generally very familiar with the practice of home education and 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 Officers 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.



Shortly after the interview you should receive a letter advising the outcome of your application. The normal outcome is to be granted a 12 month exemption from attendance at school, however sometimes it may only be granted for 6 months (this is uncommon). Exemptions are available for up to 18 months but this is rarely given. If you are only granted a 6 month exemption, or your application is denied, then you are within your rights to be given clear and detailed reasons why, and you would have the right to re-apply.

## Review

You won't hear from the DECD again until about 10-11 months later when they will phone or write to you to organise your annual review.

The review includes preparation of a renewed plan for the year ahead and another interview. They will send the review paperwork (at this stage, not online).

You are able to negotiate the date of the interview: families in the middle of moving house or on holiday or experiencing health issues, for example, usually request a date once they are settled back into their home education routine.

Sometimes DECD finds it convenient to interview families in the same locality on the same day and may want to review you before or after the 12 months registration is complete. They are usually fairly flexible in arranging a date.

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



© May 2019 Beverley Paine [The Educating Parent](#), April Jerney [Always Learning Books](#)  
Email updates and corrections to [beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com).

Please note: Information provided in this document is of a general nature only:  
please seek legal advice if in any doubt about your legal responsibilities.

Every care is made to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate, however it is the reader's responsibility to check details and information personally before acting on them.

your learning plan.

Never give away original documents or children's work.

One family in SA reported on advice given to them by their lawyer which urged them to keep an attendance record of their children's homeschooling:

"The attendance diary should just be a very small week-at-a-glance diary (my children's is about 10cm by 4 cm). Sign it each morning or at the end of the homeschool day. It is a legal record that on that day you did school work. If there are doctor's appointments for the individual child include a note about that, or if they were ill and didn't work say why. It's also a good idea to note when the children participate in social activities. This is the only record you need to show that the children have worked for a minimum of 200 days per year. It's good because if you need to present that diary to the department or a court you are only providing information relevant to the home education program and not your personal or family life."

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

## Part Time School / Home Education

The South Australian DECD does not formally recognise or encourage part-time home education where the child attends school for part of the week and the parent home educates the child for the rest of the week.

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.

Even though it is formally discouraged by the Department, some families have been able to negotiate with the teacher and principal for their child to attend some lessons at school. You can only ask. Private schools seem more open to the idea. For some schools it can be an advantage for the school, particularly if the child is talented or gifted in a particular subject, such as dance, music or sport and participates in interschool



© May 2019 Beverley Paine [The Educating Parent](#), April Jermy [Always Learning Books](#)  
Email updates and corrections to [beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com).

Please note: Information provided in this document is of a general nature only:  
please seek legal advice if in any doubt about your legal responsibilities.

Every care is made to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate, however it is the reader's responsibility to check details and information personally before acting on them.



competitions.

Negotiated attendance plans for children attending school are possible under certain circumstances. Discuss this with your school. Exemptions from attending full-time can be granted for up to 12 months at a time. There has to be a plan in place to re-integrate into full-time schooling in the future. Note, this is not considered home educating, but a negotiated part-time attendance plan. The responsibility for delivering the learning program remains with the school: you don't fill out an application to home educate.

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 and is supportive of what you desire educationally for your child.

If you hear or know about any other permanent part-time arrangements for home educating students in South Australian schools that can be added to this page please email [beverley-paine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverley-paine@theeducatingparent.com).

## Ongoing Issues

- Consumer Complaints Management and Resolution policy (which some staff know little about). It includes time frames for dealing with complaints.  
<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/.../consumer-complaints-manag...>
- DECD staff are bound by the Public Sector (Honesty and Accountability) Act 1995  
[https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/.../Public%20Sector%20\(Hone...](https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/.../Public%20Sector%20(Hone...)
- DECD staff are also bound by the Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector  
<https://publicsector.sa.gov.au/policies-sta.../code-of-ethics/>
- The email address for many members of DECD senior management is firstname.surname@sa.gov.au
- You can lodge an online request for information from DECD using the Freedom of Information Act...  
<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/.../freedom-information-foi-r...>
- The Ombudsman SA will investigate serious complaints of maladministration, for example, when DECD staff do not follow their own policies or legislation.  
<http://www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au/>

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>
---	--	--	---	---

[www.theeducatingparent.com](http://www.theeducatingparent.com)



© May 2019 Beverley Paine [The Educating Parent](http://The Educating Parent), April Jerney [Always Learning Books](http://Always Learning Books)  
Email updates and corrections to [beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com](mailto:beverleypaine@theeducatingparent.com).

Please note: Information provided in this document is of a general nature only:  
please seek legal advice if in any doubt about your legal responsibilities.

Every care is made to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate, however it is the reader's responsibility to check details and information personally before acting on them.