

Are National Curriculum Guideline Subjects Required?

An incident which could happen to any home educator applying for an exemption is being given the impression that specific subjects are “required” or “must be included” in their stated curriculum vision.

An incident of this nature arose recently, so the Editor of *TEACH Bulletin* took the occasion to formally ask the MoE the following:

“Are any of the National Curriculum objectives required for home educators in order to get their exemptions? My understanding is that none of them are.”

Derek Miller and Dennis Hughes of the MoE provided the following answer on 15 June:

You are correct. There is no requirement that homeschoolers follow the National Curriculum. The only requirement is that homeschooling students are taught “at least as regularly and well as in a registered school.”

The Ministry’s interpretation of this phrase is contained in the statement which forms part of the information pack that accompanies the homeschooling application form. Among other things, this says that “Ministry officers will look for some evidence of planning and balance that we would expect would be a feature of curriculum organisation in any registered school.”

The National Curriculum is useful to the Ministry as a standard reference when determining whether a homeschooler’s

programme is a balanced one. Homeschooling offers an opportunity for greater organisational flexibility than is possible in many schools, and Ministry staff would normally be understanding if a homeschooler adopts a holistic approach to curriculum management. But if, for example, a homeschooling programme gives free reign to a student’s interest in computer-related studies but appears to give limited time to the development of communications skills and physical skills, then a Ministry official would be right to ask for a more balanced programme.

The letter from the MoE went on to advise:

If you encounter a situation where you consider a Ministry official has insisted too rigidly that a homeschooling programme replicates the essential learning areas and essential skills of the National Curriculum, it would be appropriate for you to contact the manager of the relevant Ministry management centre to discuss the matter.

This should always be the second strategy of a home educator having difficulty getting their exemption. In the first place, make a journal of all communications thus far: note date and time, the mode of communication (phone, fax, letter), the words that were

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Homeschoolers Are Low Risk: ERO

In a Departmental Forecast Report for the year ending 30 June 2001, recently presented to the New Zealand House of Representatives, the Education Review Office said the following regarding their forecasted role in providing accountability reviews for exempted students:

In 1997 the Government committed funds to enable ERO to resume the general reviewing of the quality of education being provided to students granted an exemption from schooling in terms of S. 21 of the Education Act.

Although it must be noted that homeschooling parents do not have to use the New Zealand Curriculum, ERO reviews for exempted students indicate this is a relatively low risk sector as far

as educational failure in terms of programmes approved is concerned.

In 2000/01 ERO will undertake approximately 620 reviews. This represents about 12 percent of homeschooled students.

We would highlight three things:

1. Home educators do not have to use the NZ Curriculum.
2. The ERO considers home educated children to be a “relatively low risk sector” because they rarely fail their own curriculum. Critics would say, “Who would ever fail a DIY curriculum?” But these curriculum are also approved by the MoE in the exemption procedure, and fortified by six-monthly statutory declarations.
3. Only 12% of home educators, less than 1 in 8 families, will be reviewed over the next 12 months.

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exchanged or copies of the letters in and out. Next, marshal your facts and arguments, write down all the questions you want to ask the manager of the MoE management centre and all the issues you want to cover. At this point it may be a good idea to consult with an experienced home educator, such as your support group leader or the Home Education Foundation. Remember, that for anyone to give you useful counsel, they must be made aware of ALL the relevant facts and details: not just the immediate situation, but the context as well. You wouldn't ask anyone to go to bat for you without telling them the current state of the game.

And when communicating with the MoE (as you do with anyone else) use your best respect, courtesy, friendliness and helpfulness, which are all so much easier when you have taken the time to prepare. Preparation also enables one to stay focussed and on the track, calm and yet firmly resolved.

Generally speaking the exemption

process is very straightforward and exemptions are issued with a minimum of fuss in the vast majority of cases. Below are the MoE Management Centre Offices which deal with Certificates of Exemption:

Auckland

39-45 College Hill
Private Bag 47-911
Ponsonby, Auckland
Ph.: (09) 377 7655
Fax: (09) 309 3590

Hamilton

Cnr Grey & Bridge Sts.
Private Bag 3011
Hamilton
Ph.: (07) 838 3705
Fax: (07) 838 3710

Lower Hutt

65 Waterloo Rd.
Lower Hutt
Ph.: (04) 566 1219
Fax: (04) 566 1503

Christchurch

123 Victoria St.
Private Box 2522
Christchurch
Ph.: (03) 365 7386
Fax: (03) 364 1631

Dunedin

John Wickcliffe House
Princes House
P.O. Box 1225
Dunedin
Ph.: (03) 474 0152
Fax: (03) 479 0250

It's a Jungle Out There

An Auckland University survey of over 4,000 students throughout the country shows school bullying to be firmly ingrained in the school culture. Every second student in your typical co-ed school is a victim (it's actually worse, as the figure is 58%). Who are the hoodlums? The other half of the students, 44% of them! And single-sex schools are

worse, if you can believe it, with fully half the kids (50%) dishing it out and two out of every three kids being victimised. Girls go in for emotional abuse (being excluded from friendships, for example), while boys are still into old fashioned physical bashing.

Life is tough out West, even when you're only trying to have fun. The Waitakere Youth Council in West Auckland wrangled a \$30,000 grant from the Health Funding Authority for purse-size "survival packs" for the 2000 students expected to attend end-of-year balls there this season.

This Youth Council did not get to stock these survival packs with the essentials they originally intended -- condoms and breathtesters -- due to the strong opposition from some West Auckland principals. So now our adventurous Western youth will have to settle for simple food and taxi vouchers. Yep, schools sure are something out West: just reading about their dance parties has been a real education for this old-timer.

Peter Calvert of Christchurch-based lobby group Concerned Teachers tells us that few parents know about the finer points of a particular optional health achievement standard (part of the qualification set to replace school certificate next year) which will grade fifth formers in NZ schools on how much they know about sex and drugs, awarding them passes of credit, merit or excellence. It raises some interesting scenarios: sons or daughters coming home with their reports saying, "Well, I failed maths and English, but I did get an excellent for sex and drugs." Teachers' jobs could become... well, what happens when they need to assess a student's ability to demonstrate his or her knowledge of safer sex practices?

One of the country's leading drug educators, Jeff McIntyre, gave delegates at the recent New Zealand School Trustees

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instruction, and reject not your

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Ph: (09) 837-0959

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Susan
Ph. (06) 344-3349
Wanganui

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Association annual conference in Wellington a pat on the back for starting to recognise the scope of the drug problem. "I've seen schools that have previously been in denial. Now the trustees and the principal have come to realise that the drug problem is a lot more serious than they ever thought."

In spite of all Christchurch schools having some form of drug education as part of the health curriculum, which can include police and celebrity visits along with health information, and in spite of all these schools also having a zero tolerance policy, suspensions due to drug-related offences from 1998 to 1999 reached 104 (a 27% increase) while total suspensions increased by "only" 21% to 1482 over the previous 12 months. Schools have recommended an inter-agency approach to combating drug use with a co-ordinated response from law enforcement agencies,

community groups, schools, and families. (The problem of drugs in schools is clearly bigger than any one of these groups can handle.... except that families don't have to send their children into these drug-soaked institutions in the first place. — Ed.)

A news item dated 22 June 2000 from www.TheSchoolDaily.com says the NZ Ministry of Education's latest guidelines to schools include the pointers that:

* *Occasional cannabis use by students does not equal a serious drug problem.* Research suggests that most students who try cannabis do not become regular users.

* Schools need to make a strenuous effort to *retain* students who use cannabis or are found in possession of cannabis at school.

* Schools have a responsibility to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for all students, *including those who are using or selling drugs* as well as those who are not. (Emphases added -- Ed.)

The violence, sex and drugs of the previous articles seem to be winning formulas for blockbuster movies, but why does the law in New Zealand compel *children* to be immersed in that culture six hours a day? The Sydney *Telegraph* of 23 June 2000 reports that the NSW Minister for Education, John Acqulina, suggests parents who don't like a state school's values should take their children elsewhere. (Apparently there was a *student strike* at Rutherford Technology High because the school's "very strict" discipline code prohibited kissing! But that's another story.)

The Editor fully endorses Mr Acqulina's sentiments and respectfully suggests that our own Minister of Education, the Hon Trevor Mallard, adopt the implications of this sentiment: that students and parents be free to choose whether they attend schools or not, rather than be compelled to do so by a clause written into our Education Act by antiquarian 19th century social engineers 123 years ago!

NZ HOME EDUCATION WEBSITES

(One group has requested that they not appear in our listings)

General:

www.home.school.nz

Trade & Exchange:

www.voyager.co.nz/~asmith/homeedu.htm

Support Groups:

Hamilton

www.geocities.com/heartland/vista/2702/

Taupo

www.taupo-a-z.co.nz/edutrain/homeschtpo

Canterbury

www.mysite.xtra.co.nz/~homeeducation/

NZ EMAIL DISCUSSION GROUPS

Christian Classical home Education NETwork

www.egroups.com/group/ccednet

Christian Home Educators NETwork

www.egroups.com/group/chednetnz

Christian Unschoolers of NZ

www.egroups.com/group/taughtofthelord

Curriculum Swaps

www.egroups.com/group/harvest-curric-swap-nz

Diana Waring History Alive

www.egroups.com/group/dwha

Home Education Foundation NETwork

www.egroups.com/group/hefnetnz

LDS Home Educators

www.egroups.com/group/ldshomeedinnz

NZ Unschoolers

www.egroups.com/group/nzunschoolers

Radical Unschoolers of Aotearoa

www.egroups.com/group/R_U_A



Home Schoolers Clean-Sweep U.S.A. National Spelling Bee

George Abraham Thampy, 12, from Missouri took first; Sean Conley, 12, from California took second; and Alison Miller, 14, from New York took third in the 2000 Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee Championships final held in Washington, D.C., 1 June. Thampy's prize was US\$10,000, an encyclopedia set and a US \$1,000 savings bond.

"This is outstanding confirmation of the academic excellence of home schooling," said Michael Farris, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association, a nonprofit advocacy group in Purcellville, Virginia.

Thampy missed becoming the national spelling champion in 1998 when he tied for fourth. In 1999 Thampy tied for third while another home schooler, David Beihl, then a 13-year-old from South Carolina, was the champion. (David also won the National Geography Bee that year, the first home schooler to do so and to take both titles in the one year.) And in 1997 Rebecca Sealton from Brooklyn, New York, became the first home schooler to win the Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee.

Just the previous week Thampy won second place—a US\$15,000 scholarship—in the National Geography Bee sponsored by National Geographic. Another home schooler, Jonathan Janus from South Carolina, won third place and two others were finalists.

Although home schoolers account for about two percent of the school age population, 27 out of the 248 spelling bee contestants were home schoolers, which is 11 percent.

The students' increasing success at such well-known academic competitions is building a powerful case that students who are taught by their parents are thriving academically.

"Home-school students tend to be disproportionately represented in national contests where academic skills are being tested," said Mr Farris. So it is among those who take their lessons at home, where subjects like Latin, grammar and theology fill the time most kids squander in school-yard "socialising".

A 1998-99 study by the National Center for Home Education found that more and more [universities] are accepting home-schooled students who are more likely than public school or private Christian school graduates to hold positions of campus leadership.

(Parts extracted from article in *The Washington Times*, 31 May, by Andrea Billups.)

Home Schoolers High in Academics

As the movement grows larger and more diverse, evidence is mounting that home-schooling, once confined to the political and religious fringe, has achieved results not only on par with public education, but in some ways surpassing it. Though home-schooling may never be feasible for most families, the data offer little comfort to those who advocate a standardized curriculum as the best hope for improving American education. Self-identified home-schoolers have bettered the national averages on the ACT for the past three years running, scoring an average 22.7 last year, compared with 21 for their more traditional peers, on a scale of one to 36. Home-schoolers scored 23.4 in English, well above the 20.5 national average; and 24.4 in reading, compared with a mean of 21.4. The gap was closer in science (21.9 vs. 21.0), and home-schoolers scored below the national average in math, 20.4 to 20.7.

On the SAT, which began its tracking last year, home-schoolers scored an average 1,083 (verbal 548, math 535), 67 points above the national average of 1,016. Similarly, on the 10 SAT2

achievement tests most frequently taken by home-schoolers, they surpassed the national average on nine, including writing, physics and French.

Maralee Mayberry, chairwoman of the sociology department at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas and author of a book on home-schooling, says research has shown that the key elements in effective education are small class size, individualized instruction, and a disciplined, nurturing environment -- all characteristics of home-schooling.

Once in college, home-schoolers appear to be living up to their test scores. Those enrolled at Boston University in the past four years have a 3.3 grade-point average, out of a perfect four. Similarly, Georgia's Kennesaw State University found that its home-schooled students had higher-than-average GPAs as college freshmen.

That enterprise has impressed many secular colleges, and most have modified their admissions policies to accommodate home-schoolers. A recent survey by the National Center for Home Education, a Virginia-based advocacy group, found that 68% of colleges now accept parent-prepared transcripts or portfolios in place of an accredited diploma. That includes Stanford University, which last fall accepted 27% of home-schooled applicants -- nearly double its overall acceptance rate.

"Home-schoolers bring certain skills -- motivation, curiosity, the capacity to be responsible for their education -- that high schools don't induce very well," says Jon Reider, Stanford's senior associate director of admissions.

(Extracts from "Home-Schooled Kids Defy Stereotypes, Ace SAT Test" By Daniel Golden, Staff Reporter of *The Wall Street Journal*.)



Shucks, this old timer is a-scratching his head over this next story. I grew up in the real West — Californy — with Winchester rifles, rattle snakes, tumble weeds and Indians. But I never heard the like o’this.